

Vladimir Belayev

THE OLD FORTRESS

PART THREE

THE TOWN BY THE SEA

FOREIGN LANGUAGES

PUBLISHING HOUSE

MOSCOW

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN

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This Book is dedicated to the memory of the Bolshevik writer Yevgeny Petrovich Petrov, who was killed in action...

A CALL FROM HEADQUARTERS

There was no home-work that evening and we had come out for a walk round town. Petka Maremukha was bouncing along in his short leather jerkin that smelt of sheep. Sasha Bobir had put on a pair of shiny new galoshes over his battered boots and fastened all the buttons on his long brownish-yellow "raglan," which someone had made for him out of a British army great-coat. I had struggled into my grey chumarka. It was tight across the shoulders and short in the sleeves and the hooks would not fasten properly. Aunt had made it for me out of my father's old coat the year before last, but I

was still very proud of it because all the active Komsomol members went about in chumarkas like mine.

It was Saturday and there were a lot of people about in town. Not all the shops in Post Street were open, but the brightly lit windows splashed long shafts of light on the narrow pavements.

We could have joined the noisy stream moving along those narrow pavements, of course, but we didn't want to. As usual on Saturday evenings, besides girls and chaps from all districts of the town, there were a lot of young profiteers about on Post Street. Komsomol members and young workers had another haunt—the avenue near the Komsomol club.

We kept to the middle of the road. It had thawed during the day and the sun had shone just like in spring, but towards evening the frost had set in again. The puddles were coated with ice and long gleaming icicles hung from the rusty drain-pipes.

"Fancy, putting galoshes on, Bobir! See how dry it is!" I said to Sasha and dug my heel into a frozen puddle.

"Don't mess about!" Sasha squealed, jumping away. "Call that dry!"

A stream of mud had spurted over his shiny galoshes. Sasha stared down at them bitterly. He looked so dismal standing in the middle of the road that Petka and I couldn't help laughing.

"Is that your idea of a joke!" Sasha snorted, looking even more annoyed. "And you're a member of the committee! . . . Setting an example, I suppose!" And taking an old scrap of newspaper out of his pocket, he started wiping off the mud.

As we walked on, Sasha kept glancing down and grunting with annoyance. I knew he was touchy and often lost his temper for nothing, so I did not tease him.

"Don't get sore, Sasha," I said soothingly, "I didn't do it on purpose. I didn't think there was any mud there."

"Huh—didn't think!" Sasha grunted.

But we were interrupted by a shout from Petka:

"Quiet, chaps! . . . Hear that?"

Not far away, on the other side of the boulevard, a machine-gun had opened up. One burst was followed by another, then one more, then after a short silence we heard five rifle shots fired in quick succession.

It was the alarm signal. Every Communist and Komsomol member knew that signal. In those years all the Communists and older lads among the Komsomol members belonged to the Special Detachments, and five quick rifle shots was the signal for them to report at once to headquarters. Wherever we happened to be—in the hostel, in the foundry at the factory-training school, at a Komsomol meeting, or simply out for a stroll—as soon as we heard it, we had to rush off to the well-known house in Kishinev Street, where Special Detachment Headquarters was situated.

We knew well enough that we lived only fifteen versts from the frontiers of capitalist Poland and Rumania, and that such an alarm might be followed by real invasion. Then all of us "specials," together with the frontier guards, would have to hold our little town against the first onslaught until the regulars arrived.

Sasha was the first to break the silence. "It's the alarm... Isn't it, Vasil?"

"It is," I said. "Come on, chaps! Let's run!"

... At the door of headquarters we were met by Polagutin, the Special Detachment Chief. The long holster of his Mauser was unfastened and we could tell from the anxiety in his face that the situation was serious.

"What group?" Polagutin asked.

"Factory-training school!" Sasha gasped out.

Polagutin checked our cards and said: "Get your guns."

We ran down the long corridor to the armoury. There we received rifles that had been issued to us some time ago and several rounds of ammunition.

"Shall we load here or outside?" Petka asked, shoving the cartridges into his trousers' pocket. He was rather pale. "Better wait for the order," I advised. "I've loaded mine already," said Sasha, tossing an empty clip on the floor.

"Put the safety catch on!" Petka whispered anxiously. Sasha pointed his rifle in the air and started pulling the safety catch back. But the safety catch was oily and Sasha's fingers were numb with cold. The rifle wobbled in his hands. Any moment, it seemed, one of Sasha's fingers would catch on the trigger and a bullet would shatter the dim lamp hanging from the ceiling.

"Give it here, you cripple!" Petka shouted and grabbed Sasha's rifle. "Watch me."

But the spring in Sasha's rifle was new and stiff and Petka had a hard job with the safety catch too...

The big room where every group came on Sundays to clean their rifles was crowded with specials.

"How did you get here so quick?" Polevoi asked us. He had no rifle, but a revolver hung at his side, over his wadded jacket.

"We were out for a walk," Petka began, "and suddenly we heard. . ."

"The other chaps must be still running!" Sasha chimed in complacently.

Komsomol members from our school—the "Polevoi Guard," as the chaps in other groups called us—began to appear in the room. They were all hot and red in the face and their coats and jackets were undone. Beads of sweat gleamed on their foreheads.

"Well done!" said Polevoi, glancing over the new-arrivals. "A quick turn-out... But where's Tiktov?" Everyone looked round for Tiktov. "Tiktov's been seen drinking, Comrade Polevoi," a factory school trainee called Furman began.

But just at that moment Polagutin appeared in the doorway and called sharply for attention.

The room grew quiet at once.

"This is the situation," said Polagutin. "The Petlura gangs that Pilsudski and the Rumanian boyars have been sheltering across the border are getting active again. They were seen in daylight today approaching our frontier. . . It is quite likely, comrades, that those gangs will be sent over our side tonight. It is your job and that of the frontier guards to give them a proper reception..." And raising his voice to a sharp tone of command, Polagutin said: "All except those from the factory-training school, fall in! Commander of the factory school group, report to me!"

We crowded back from the door. Holding their rifles high, the chaps from the town groups filed past us. As the room emptied, my heart sank. "What about us? What are we going to do? They'll go out of town to patrol the forests on the border, but just because we're a bit younger we'll be kept behind as usual to guard hay at the food stores, or else we'll have to stay right in town to guard the fortress bridge, in case some spy or other tries to blow it up. What fun was there in guarding a lot of wooden barns full of hay or lying in ambush where everyone could see you, on the busy brightly-lit fortress bridge!

An elderly special in a railwayman's cap ran into the room and shouted: "All present and correct, Comrade Commander! The district secretary's arrived."

"Kartamyshev here already?" Polagutin exclaimed joyfully. He turned to Polevoi and shook his hand

firmly: "Good luck! Keep a sharp look-out, you've got a big responsibility. . . Good-bye, comrades!" And he walked out of the room.

"We're staying here. It will be our job to guard the headquarters and stores of the Special Detachment," Polevoi announced solemnly. "Fall in!"

A DANGEROUS POST

In front of me stands a line of posts with barbed wire stretched tight between them. Beyond the barbed wire are allotments—a big stretch of lumpy frozen ground, most of it hidden in darkness. Some distance away, near the road, there is another line of barbed wire, but you can't see it from here. All the time I keep thinking that distant barbed-wire fence has been cut and bandits are creeping towards me across the black, frozen earth. My ears are cold, very cold, but so as to hear better I purposely keep my collar down, and my fingers gripping the rifle are stiff and frozen.

So this is post No. 3 that I've heard so much about from chaps who have stood guard here before!

Behind me rises the cold brick wall of the shed that stands between me and the inner yard. The projecting edge of the roof sticks out just above my head. The narrow passage for the sentry with barbed wire on one side runs along the shed wall for about thirty paces. It comes to a dead-end at the high brick wall of the next house, which joins that of the shed at right angles.

"The chicken run"—that's what the Special Detachment men call post No. 3. A sentry on duty here feels cut off from his comrades, cut off from the whole world...

Ever since H had been on duty I had been unable to take my eyes off a black hump that was sticking up on the allotment about ten paces away. It was like the head of a man crouching on the ground. I was very sorry I hadn't asked the previous guard, a student from the farming institute, whether he had noticed that hump. Suddenly the hump seemed to move and creep nearer. Shivering, I poked the barrel of my rifle through the barbed wire and was just about to fire, when I stopped myself. Suppose it was not a man at all! It might be a ball of weed blown about by the wind? Or a heap of potato-tops? Or simply a pile of earth that someone had left after digging up their potatoes?

What then?... Then I should look a fool. The chaps would never let me forget it. My first dangerous post and I made a boob! They'd say I'd lost my nerve. . .

The wind blew and the iron roof above me made a harsh whistling sound. That wasn't someone walking over the roof, was it?... Craning my neck, I peered up under the eaves of the shed expecting to see the black head of a bandit pop out at any moment. He could easily have jumped from the roof of the house on to the barn.

Suspicious thumping noises sounded overhead. Surely they weren't footsteps?... I stood on tip-toe. Faint sounds reached my ears—a knocking in Kishinev Street, a rustling on the allotment, the creak of weathercock on the roof. My head swam from looking up at the mass of stars glittering above me in the cold frosty air.

The thumping noises on the roof grew louder. I took a firm grip on my rifle and pointed it in the direction of the noise. A distant star glinted at me from behind a tall chimney-pot.

"Ears like axes!" Polevoi had said as he marched us to our posts. "You are guarding the arms store for the Communists and Komsomol members of the whole district!"

Special Detachment stores are a very tempting target for capitalist spies."

And even if he hadn't said that, we all knew what a responsible job it was to be guarding Special Detachment Headquarters. In the cellars there was a lot of dynamite, TNT, and ammunition. And we were guarding it all for the first time.

"Ears like axes! Ears like axes!" I repeated Polevoi's favourite saying to myself and my frozen ears began to feel as if they were growing longer and longer and getting as thin and sharp as axe-blades.

The roof was quiet again.

That noise must have been the wind romping with a loose sheet of iron. But wait! Where was that black hump?

I had forgotten about it... I searched for the black shape that had made me so uneasy. It was still there on the allotment and hadn't moved an inch.

... I paced slowly to and fro along the shed, trying to laugh at my fears. It reflected that dawn was near and soon I should have nothing to worry about. Why should anything special happen during my watch? Plenty of watches passed without anything happening at all. It would be the same with mine. But no one would be able to make fun of me for being the youngest in the group. And they didn't even know I had put an extra year on my age just to get accepted for the Special Detachment! Now I would come back off my watch a real fighting man, and for long afterwards I should be proud of having stood guard at post No. 3. They wouldn't have put a slacker here, however much he asked!

When he brought me to the post, Polevoi had said briefly and simply: "If you see anyone on the allotment, just let him have it! There's no chance of a passer-by or a drunk wandering in here..."

"Just let him have it!" There was something grim and terrible in that order.

...Again the wind began to howl in the bare, icy branches of the trees; last year's weeds and potato-tops rustled against the barbed wire; the iron rumbled on the roof; the weathercock creaked behind the wall of the house.

And suddenly, in a fresh gust of wind, I caught the sound of Sasha's voice:

"What do you want?... Halt!... Halt! ... Hands... Hey, this way, chaps!"

For a moment everything was quiet, then I heard a piercing whistle. Doors banged in the guard-room. On the other side of the shed, men were running about the yard... Then I heard Sasha shouting again:

"There!... Over there!... Catch him.. ."

"Get a ladder! Quick!" came Polevoi's voice.

How I longed to run and help the other chaps and see what was going on! But I could not leave my post. Even if the whole place was on fire, I had no right to move from here.

Still listening to what was happening in the yard, I stared hard into the surrounding darkness. And so that nobody could make a grab at me from behind, I stood with my back to the wall of the shed.

My heart thumped, the rifle trembled in my hands. I was expecting something terrific to happen...

A shot thundered just above me, in the attic of the shed. Then another. I heard a faint groan some distance away. Then everything was quiet again.

About five minutes passed. Quick footsteps crunched in the narrow passage that led from the yard to my post. I jumped back into the corner and prepared to shoot...

"Halt!" I shouted wildly as a shadow appeared round the corner of the wall.

"You all right, Mandzhura?" Polevoi asked with anxiety in his voice. "Everything all right here?"

"Everything's all right," I answered and at once realized that I had made a mistake in not asking

Polevoi for the password.

Polevoi walked up to me. He was out of breath and bare-headed.

"No one ran through here?"

"No one. Someone groaned on the other side of the shed, and there were shots in the attic..."

"I know that myself. But out here," Polevoi pointed with his revolver towards the allotment, "you haven't noticed anything?"

"No, nothing."

"Very strange! How did he get through?"

"Who was that shooting?" I asked.

"Keep a very sharp look-out, Mandzhura. Now particularly. If you see anyone, let him have it straightaway! Understand? It won't be long now before it gets light. I'll be round again soon." And Polevoi strode away quickly, back to the yard.

Two hours later, when I came off duty, I learnt from the chaps in the warm guard-room what had happened during that anxious night.

While the sentries at the outer posts were freezing in the icy wind, Sasha had been having a much nicer time. Shielded from the wind by the sheds and the main building, he swaggered about the yard in his shiny galoshes. The smooth dry paving stones were well lighted by electric lamps hanging at the corners of the main building.

But soon Sasha's feet began to ache. He climbed the wooden steps of the shed, that lay in the shadow of a little balcony above. Sasha swore to Polevoi that he did not sit there for more than five minutes. But no one believed him, of course. Sasha must have dozed off on the steps.

As he walked down into the yard again, Sasha heard a faint sound behind him. He turned round — and froze to the spot.

A stranger was climbing over the balcony rail, apparently with the intention of sliding down the post into the yard. How he came to be up there was a mystery.

Sasha should have fired at once. He should have got the intruder while he was still on the balcony. But Sasha lost his nerve.

"What do you want? . . . Halt! . . . Halt! . . ." he shouted in a quavering voice.

The stranger immediately darted back through the narrow door leading into the attic. He was still in range of a bullet. Sasha suddenly remembered his rifle. He hugged the butt to his shoulder and pulled the trigger, but nothing happened. When he took up his post, Sasha had forgotten to release the safety catch. Hearing Sasha's shout, Petka who was guarding the ammunition cellar thumped on the guard-room door with his rifle, and Nikita standing guard in Kishinev Street blew his whistle.

"There... there... There's a bandit up there!" Sasha bumbled at Polevoi as he rushed out into the yard.

In a second the guards had a ladder against the wall. Polevoi was the first to climb on to the roof. Anxious to catch the bandit but wary of being ambushed, Polevoi darted across the roof and climbed in the last attic window.

When he got inside the attic, Polevoi noticed a faint gleam of light far away in the darkness. It was a gap in the wall and a man was struggling to get through it. Polevoi fired twice. The unknown man groaned, but struggled through the gap and crashed over the roof of the next-door house.

Polevoi ordered the two guards who had followed him to chase the stranger over the roofs. He himself jumped down into the yard, checked my post and sent another three guards to inspect all the

yards round headquarters, and the side-road that ran into Kishinev Street. But the bandit managed to slip away before our patrol reached the side-road. After squeezing through the gap on to the roof of the house next door, which was a hostel for chemistry students, the stranger leapt unhesitatingly into a big heap of dung in the hostel garden and slipped out through a hole in the fence into the side-road. Here the trail broke off.

He must have cut across the side-road and made his way through the yards to the Market Square. It was a difficult route, specially for a wounded man; he would have had to climb several fences and get through the barbed wire between the yards, and, after all that, run out on to the well-lighted Market Square. There was a watchman on the square. He sat by the co-operative grocer's wrapped in a sheepskin, with a shot-gun in his hands. Perhaps the watchman had been asleep? Not very likely. At any rate he swore he hadn't slept a wink. Only ten minutes before the incident his wife had brought him a bowl of meat and buckwheat porridge for supper. The meal was still warm when the guards ran up and asked him if he had seen anything. It was hard to imagine how the wounded man could have slipped across the Market Square without the watchman—an old, experienced soldier—noticing him. Nevertheless the trail did lead to Market Square. The barbed wire round the red-brick house on the other side of the street had been pulled apart. On one of its spikes there was a scrap of cloth that must have been torn from the clothing of a man crawling through in a hurry. Apart from the scrap of cloth on the barbed wire there were no other traces of the stranger.

Farther away, on the steps of the large building where the staff of the district education department lived, a drop of dried blood was discovered.

One of the few lucky ones who were allowed to leave the guard-room and take part in the pursuit of the bandit was Furman, once a juvenile delinquent and now a pupil at the factory-training school. At the sight of the blood on the steps Furman was overjoyed. He thought it was the bandit's blood. But the wife of the director of district education who lived in the house said it came from a chicken she had killed the previous Friday. Bitterly disappointed, the unlucky sleuth wandered away.

It could only be supposed that the bandit had got out on to the lighted square, slipped past under the very nose of the sleepy watchman and crossed the bridge into the old part of the town. From there he could make either for the Polish or the Rumanian frontier.

In the attic of the shed at headquarters, the bandit had dropped a bundle of fuse wire and a detonator. Apparently he had intended first to do away with the sentry, then make his way to the ammunition cellar and blow it up, headquarters and all. When he came out on the balcony and saw no one in the yard, he must have concluded that the sentry was asleep. Sasha would have had a bad time if he hadn't come out of his nook and looked round. As it turned out, Sasha had been quite unarmed while he was on guard.

PEELING THE SPUDS

Relieved from his post, Sasha lay down on the couch in the guard-room and pretended to be asleep. No one in the guard-room was sleeping after the excitement of the night. We kept telling each other over and over again what had happened and making all kinds of wild guesses. Furman, a little, thin fellow, insisted that the bandit had dressed himself up as a woman while he was in the garden, and slipped across the Market Square in disguise. Only Sasha took no part in the discussion.

The chaps said that when Nikita ran into the yard he had started to put Sasha through it. Sasha had tried to make excuses, but Nikita had cut him short:

"You're just a funk, that's what you are! Taken unawares, were you? Weren't expecting it, were you?... I suppose if they start dropping bombs on you from an aeroplane, you'll be taken unawares again and start shouting, 'I say, gentlemen, what do you want? Halt! Halt!...' Call yourself a member of the Komsomol."

Nikita's words must have had a very strong effect. Sasha could think of nothing better than to pretend he was ill. He lay on the couch muffled up in his "raglan" coat. Fie was very ashamed of himself for his part in the night's happenings. And who wouldn't have been in his place!... Sasha's "illness" started like this. When he came into the guard-room, he complained that his legs felt weak and he had a terrible headache. Then yellow circles started floating before his eyes...

And now, as he listened to our excited talk, Sasha tried to pretend he was in a fever. He made his teeth chatter, kicked his legs about and moaned pitifully. Actually his moans were more like the whining of a puppy that had been outside on a cold night. Anybody could see he was longing to get properly ill. Sasha would have given a lot at that moment for a dose of scarlet fever, say, or "flu." Instead of laughing at him, everybody would have been sorry and said it was because he had been ill. But Sasha was fit as a fiddle. We knew that, and we knew quite well what was the matter with him.

Nikita came in from the yard. He was carrying a smoky iron pot.

"Well, young people," he began solemnly, "in spite of the serious happenings of last night the demands of Nature must be satisfied. I am not mistaken, I trust, in saying that we are all hungry. To put things in a nutshell, there are spuds behind the stove. We'll peel as many as we can in this pot, then we'll imagine the aroma of sizzling fat, and soon we shall have a modest but satisfying meal. Who's against?"

No one was against Nikita's suggestion. "Who's for?" Nikita asked. Everyone except Sasha raised their hands. "Majority in favour! The debate is over!" Nikita exclaimed cheerfully, and going over to Sasha, he ripped off his overcoat: "Wake up, Sasha, old man, the dicky-birds are singing. Come on, spuds need peeling!" "I can't.. I feel awful," Sasha moaned. "Sasha, our dearly beloved Comrade Bobir!" Nikita said very tenderly, winking at us. "We all know you are ill, very seriously ill, we all know very well what has caused your illness, nevertheless we all beg you not to act as if the end of the world had come, and wish you a rapid recovery. You mustn't let yourself be captured by that alien spirit Melancholy... Dearly beloved Sasha," Nikita went on, posing like an orator, "we beg you in all sincerity to overcome your sadness and peel the potatoes, for sooner or later you will get hungry yourself, and, as 'tis said, he who does not work, neither shall he eat... As for the real cause of your malady, Sasha, old man, you mustn't be too angry with me for those harsh words that were hurled at you on the threshold of this mansion. Even Homer sometimes nods, you know. We're all young still, we all make mistakes, and everyone except a hardened nitwit learns something from his mistakes, Why be sad and spoil your own valuable nerves with grieving?"

Rocking with suppressed laughter, we listened to Nikita's speech, trying to understand how much he meant jokingly, and how much was serious.

Sasha tried to keep it up; he clutched his head and rubbed his red freckled face, but at last he got up and with a shiver took his seat on the bench.

Nikita pulled a sack of potatoes out from behind the stove and, dumping it down in the middle of the guardroom, said: "The host requests his honoured guests to present themselves at dinner!"

We set to work on the muddy potatoes.

Penknives and cobblers' knives with corded handles gleamed in our hands. Furman produced a real Finnish dagger with an antler haft, which he had kept since the days when he had been a juvenile delinquent. At ordinary times Furman kept his treasure in a green box under his bed, only taking it out with him when he was on guard. It was his boast that when he had this knife with him there wasn't a bandit in the country he was afraid of!

Nikita spread out an old newspaper on the floor near the stove. Soon curly potato peelings were reeling off our knives and falling with a rustling sound on the sheet of newspaper.

"But who was it?" Petka muttered, still shaken by the events of the night.

"Now, that is a question!" Nikita exclaimed grinning. "Anybody would think you came from the convent we used to have in this ancient town. It's clear enough who it was... Don't you remember what the papers said last autumn about the frontier guards nabbing a spy? We're on the frontier too, and you've got to be on the look-out.. ."

"But what do these spies want here?" Petka asked again. "What have they left behind?"

"Oh, they've left a great deal behind, old chap," Nikita replied, seriously now. "In the time of the tsar, nearly the whole Donbas was in their hands. Think of Krivorozhye, and the iron ore! May be when you've finished training you'll find yourself in those parts. Notice the old names of the factories there—Providence, Dumot, Balfour... The foreign capitalists lost millions of rubles in those factories. Soviet power has trodden on their corns good and proper! Did you think they supplied Denikin and Wrangel and Petlura for nothing? They thought those bandits would get them back all they had lost. They didn't spare the cash either. And it all went down the drain..."

The door opened and Polevoi entered the guard-room.

"What's the news?" Nikita asked, glancing at him inquiringly.

"None so far. Seems to have vanished into thin air..." Polevoi glanced at the sack of potatoes: "Going to do some cooking? Do me a favour, chaps, will you?" he went on, pulling off his wadded jacket. "When the spuds are ready, leave a few for me. In the meantime I'll have forty winks...'. You take over as guard commander, Kolomeyets."

"Yes, Comrade Polevoi!" Nikita answered smartly, jumping to his feet.

Our director nodded and lay down on the couch. But before he had time to stretch himself out, there was a whistle from the yard summoning the guard commander. Polevoi jumped up, but Nikita grabbed his rifle and said: "No, have a rest. The new guard commander is already on the job!" And so saying, he ran out into the yard.

We stopped peeling the potatoes and listened to the voices outside the door.

Polevoi listened too. His lean sunburnt face with its sparse young stubble was serious and strained.

Only a few minutes ago Polevoi had seen off Vukovich the OGPU representative from the frontier guard detachment. From the Komsomol members at the district OGPU we had heard that Vukovich was always entrusted with the most difficult cases. Polevoi had shown Vukovich where Sasha had first spotted the bandit and how the bandit had got into headquarters. From the attentive manner in which this tall fair-haired security man in the green-topped cap of a frontier guard listened to our director, we realized that Vukovich attached great importance to Polevoi's opinion. He questioned Polevoi in a quiet, calm voice. Any of us who watched him from afar would have given a lot to know what was in Vukovich's mind at that moment.

He and Polevoi sat together for a long time in the attic. They must have examined every inch of that dusty attic floor. Then, following the path of the fugitive, they squeezed through the gap and, using a ladder brought by Fur-man, climbed down from the roof of the hostel into the little garden, and thus worked their way, step by step, right as far as the Market Square. Vukovich questioned the grocery store watchman at great length, then returned to headquarters, where he left Polevoi.

"He'll have to use his noddle this time!" Nikita had said when Vukovich left. "This business will come before the District Party Committee. Kartamyshev himself will go into everything..."

Now, as we listened to the voices in the yard, we con- « eluded it was Vukovich, who had come

back. The thought was too much for Polevoi, who threw his jacket round his shoulders and strode to the door. But he was just reaching for the handle when the door opened and Nikita came in.

He was ruffled, and from the way he thrust his rifle into the rack, we realized that the conversation he had just had at the gate, had annoyed him.

"What was it?" Polevoi asked.

Sitting down and starting to peel a potato, Nikita answered unwillingly:

"Appearance of a mangy sheep not even concerned with guard duty!"

"What else? Make yourself clear!" Polevoi said more severely.

"Tiktor turned up. He wants to guard headquarters with the rest of the Komsomol members, you know. Says he only just found out that our group was on duty. Pretending to be innocent as a lamb, and reeks like a vodka still!" Nikita snapped angrily, carving a thick slice of peel off a large potato.

"What then?" Polevoi insisted.

"Then I told Tiktor we could do without him and his conduct would come up for discussion later."

"How did he have the cheek to look you in the lace!" Polevoi said, lying down again. "You'll be a weak-minded lot, lads, if you forgive Tiktor for the way he acted last night."

But even without Polevoi's saying it, we all realized that Nikita would not forget how Yasha Tiktor had not answered the call from headquarters because he was drunk.

AN UNWELCOME VISITOR

How many times at Komsomol meetings, in the hostel, in the school workshops had Nikita said to us:

"Behave yourselves well, chaps. The whole town has its eyes on you, remember. You are workers-to-be, the best chaps in town, future Party men."

Nikita had a good reason for saying that. In those days, young workers were few in our little town—some apprentices in the local print-shop, two pupils at the power station, five young railwaymen, and eight apprentices at the Motor Factory, which, although considered the biggest in the district, had little more than a hundred workers altogether. Young workers who were Komsomol members often had no Komsomol group at their place of work and belonged to groups in other organizations. But we factory-school trainees worked together, in one body, and our group was considered a strong one. We set an example to every boy and girl in town. At all youth conferences our delegates sat on the platform, and took part in the debates, and their opinion—the opinion of a big body of young workers always carried a lot of weight.

The chaps who belonged to our group had fire and courage. They read a lot and thought about the future; they put loyalty to their work, and to their mates at work above everything.

We had Nikita Kolomeyets to thank for much of this. Besides being our group Secretary and political instructor, he was a good friend. He wasn't above singing a song with us, but when it came to work, he was strict and exacting, and never let things slide.

At that time, factories were springing up all over the country. Factory schools were being opened to train the new generation that was to take the place of the old workers. Thousands of young fellows from working families joined these schools, anxious to become turners, mechanics, foundry men, smiths, milling-machine operators.

It was all right for the youths who lived in the big industrial centres. But in the little towns it was more difficult. Take us, for example. We had heard about these factory schools as far back as 1923, and, of course, the boys and girls who had lost their parents during the Civil War and had been brought up at the children's home were keen as mustard on the idea. But for a long time 'not a single factory school was opened anywhere in the whole district, not to mention our little border town. Many of the chaps even thought of moving to other towns.

What hope was there that a training school would ever be founded at the Motor Factory, which only made straw-cutters for the countryfolk and showed no signs of expanding! New workers were not needed there—it had quite enough already.

But Nikita Kolomeyets, Dmitry Panchenko and other members of the District Komsomol Committee made up their minds to get a factory-training school started in our town.

Their proposal was supported by the District Party Committee. Nikita and the other activists were able to prove that a school-come-workshop of this kind would quickly repay the cost of organizing it. On Hospital Square, next to the Motor Factory, stood a big, half-ruined house which before the Revolution had been a Jewish religious school for students of the Talmud. The house and its empty out-buildings were given over to the factory school. All ownerless machinery was put at its disposal. In an old distillery Nikita discovered more than ten turner's lathes. You can imagine how glad the chaps were when they found out they could become skilled workmen without leaving their home town!

Now, under Zhora Kozakevich's instruction, I was becoming quite an expert at moulding axle-boxes for carts, gears for separators, and once even, just for practice, I cast a bust of the Austrian Emperor Francis Joseph, using as a model an old bust of the emperor that I had found washed up on the river-bank after a flood. True, the emperor's moustache and side-whiskers did not come out properly, and the bronze didn't get as far as the tip of his nose, but even so that bust landed me in hot water! Yasha Tiktov seized his chance and started calling me a "monarchist," because, as he put it, I was "fabricating images of tyrants." The accusation was so stupid that Nikita did not agree to have it brought up at the group meeting, but all the same, to have done with the affair, I cast the snub-nosed monarch to another shape.

My friends in the other shops were getting on well too. Petka was turning out handles for straw-cutters and sickles. He had also learnt how to make good draughtsmen on his little turner's lathe—he just used to reel them off ready to play with. Sasha tinkered about all day with motors and only ran over to us when we were casting, to watch the pigs for piston rings taking shape.

And so we went on learning and hoping that when we finished our training in six months time we should go and work at factories in the big industrial towns.

Everything would have been fine if Pecheritsa, the new district education chief, had not appeared on the scene.

Within a month of his arrival, a new saying was all over the school: "Nothing was wrong till Pecheritsa came along."

Ours was one of the town's schools that Pecheritsa decided to inspect.

The day before he came, we had been casting. We were unloading the full moulds, knocking the dry sand out of them and sifting it, tapping the cinders off the still warm fly-wheels with chisels and hammers. The foundry was hot and dusty.

We were making such a din and clatter that we did not notice a little man with a moustache, in riding-breeches, tall yellow boots and a richly embroidered shirt, enter the foundry. The little fellow had

an amazing moustache—a great drooping ginger thing.

Throwing us a careless glance, but without saying hullo, the man with the moustache went into the next room and started fingering the gleaming, freshly painted model of an axle-box. He glanced frowningly at a gap in the roof made by a shell and, walking past a cast-iron fly-wheel, kicked it as if to test how strong it was. The burnished fly-wheel let out a clang and swayed dangerously. The man with the moustache steadied it with his hand, then, without saying a word to anyone, clasping a bright yellow brief case under his arm and looking as if he owned the place, walked out of the foundry on the Hospital Square.

"Next time don't let anyone in without my permission. We get all sorts of outsiders strolling in here, and then we find the models are missing," said Zhora when he heard about this visit.

Zhora was afraid somebody might walk off with the gear-wheel models made of ash that was a hundred years old. He had borrowed them from the Motor Factory, where he used to work.

.. . Two hours later we were attending a social studies class. Nikita was telling us about the country's social system and, as part of the lesson, was reading out an article from the newspaper Molodoi Leninet.

The door opened and in walked the man in the embroidered shirt who had been round the foundry that morning. Thinking the stranger was merely passing through the class-room to get to the school office, Nikita paid no attention to him and went on reading the article.

Then the man with the moustache went up to the blackboard and, planting himself in front of Nikita, said to him loudly in Ukrainian:

"When the person in charge of you comes into the room, it is your duty to report to him what you are doing."

But that was not enough to put Nikita off. He merely went a shade paler and snapped back: "People in charge usually say good morning when they come into a classroom. . . . As for your coming in here, I simply don't know you."

The stranger tried a new line of attack.

"Why are you teaching in Russian?"

"I am not teaching in Russian, I am reading an article from a Russian newspaper and everyone understands perfectly well what I am saying."

"Are you not aware that all teaching in the Ukraine must be given exclusively in the Ukrainian language?"

"I repeat: I am not teaching, I am reading an article."

"This isn't Moscow! The people who live in the Ukraine are Ukrainians..."

"Comrade Stalin says there are more Russians than Ukrainians in the towns of the Ukraine. In time, of course, they will acquire Ukrainian culture, but I don't see what harm it will do if I read now in Russian—everyone understands me. Come here tomorrow and you will hear us reading an article from the newspaper Visit, in Ukrainian. You are quite welcome."

"Enough of that waffle! You're too young for that! Before you start teaching, you had better learn the state language."

"Before you start making your remarks and interrupting our studies, you had better say who you are!" Nikita retorted in purest Ukrainian, to prove that he knew it perfectly.

"Perhaps you will ask me to leave the room, young man?" the stranger inquired, grinning slyly.

"Yes, I will!" Nikita shouted unexpectedly. "Listen to me! Either you tell me who you are, or the whole class will show you the quickest way out of here!" And red in the face, Nikita nodded at the window.

"I am afraid you will soon have to apologize to me for that!" the man with the moustache said ominously, and with a proud toss of his ginger mane, he walked out of the room.

"Yes, that's the best way!" Nikita shouted after him, and lowering his voice at once to a normal tone, went on reading the paper.

It turned out that this was the notorious Pecheritsa.

A few days before his visit, Kartamyshev had come to the school. The Secretary of the District Party Committee had gone round all the workshops examining everything with genuine care. He talked for a long time with the trainees, told the foreman off because there was no drinking water in the hot shop and the chaps' gauntlets were torn, then he came down to the foundry himself. It was he who insisted the shell hole in the ceiling should be patched up before the autumn rains began, and a ventilator installed.

That day one of the chaps was ill and had stayed in the hostel. He told us how, after looking round the school, Kartamyshev had visited the hostel as well. It was plain that Kartamyshev wanted to know what our living conditions were like as well as how much we were learning. He made the cook show him exactly how much food we were given and hauled the hostel warden over the coals because our blankets were rather thin and threadbare and we had no sheets. Kartamyshev was a real father to us.

We respected him and there was genuine affection in our voices when we mentioned his name. But Pecheritsa had succeeded in rubbing us up the wrong way right from the start...

The next day, Polevoi was summoned urgently to the Department of Education.

Pecheritsa flatly demanded that Polevoi should dismiss Mikita from school. He said Nikita had "undermined his authority." Just exactly what passed between them we never knew, but Furman came back from the District Komsomol Committee with a story that in reply to Pecheritsa's complaint Polevoi had sapped out: "The authority of a real Bolshevik can never be undermined. A Bolshevik wins his authority by his conduct." I don't know whether that was exactly how Polevoi put it, but one thing was clear—he had stood up for Nikita. But although the battle was won, everyone realized that Pecheritsa would bear the factory-school trainees a grudge for some time to come.

Pecheritsa soon made his presence felt in our sleepy little town. On his way out to the country districts he often drove through the steep streets of the town in his tall yellow cabriolet drawn by two glossy black horses. Muffled in a grey tarpaulin coat with the hood thrown back, Pecheritsa looked down on the passers-by, carelessly acknowledging the bows of teachers who knew him.

Soon the town learnt that the new director of education was a great lover of singing. For several evenings running, Pecheritsa gathered all the school and student choirs in the big drill hall and taught them a lot of songs. After a while he arranged for the choir to perform publicly in the town theatre, at a ceremonial evening. The lads stood in a semi-circle in astrakhan hats, embroidered shirts and blue sharovary tucked into high top-boots. The girls tied ribbons of different colours in their plaits. Their blouses were also embroidered and gay sashes hung down their skirts. In a glare of flood-lights the choristers filling the whole stage of the theatre made a very pretty picture.

We, trainees, sat in the gallery. The curtain went up after the interval and in the expectant hush we gazed at the dazzling display of singers. No one thought that Pecheritsa would dare conduct such a huge choir. It didn't seem to fit in with his way of carrying on.

But after keeping the singers standing motionless on the stage for a few seconds, he strode up to the footlights and with a shake of his flowing ginger mane announced:

"Revolutionary for Ever, a song by Ivan Franko!"

Someone in the audience gave a last cough so as not to interrupt later on, then there was silence.

Pecheritsa turned his back on the audience, poised himself on tip-toe and, whipping a little stick out of his boot, swept it high above his head. The silence seemed to break in half. The young ringing voices burst forth so confidently that we listened spell-bound. Now, at a sign from the stick, the choir would die away and the soloist would continue the song; now the basses—a picked group of tall, strapping fellows standing separately—would come in, and a thunderous but pleasant roar would fill the hall; now the descants would ring out, as a hundred girls' voices took up the melody. The theatre seemed to grow lighter; you felt like jumping up and singing too.

And in front of the singers, on a sort of box, now rising on tip-toe, now crouching, now swaying in time with the melody, stood the imposing figure of Pecheritsa, whom Nikita had so boldly turned out of our class-room.

Pecheritsa was a fine conductor. He had the whole choir, so recently assembled, under perfect control. And as I listened to the singers and watched how cleverly the ginger-moustached Pecheritsa conducted them, I began to take a liking to him.

Then the choir sang O, the poor lasses of Galicia. The melody went rollicking along. Pecheritsa conducted with special gusto, whirling his baton like a cavalryman cutting down practice twigs. The audience listened to the quick marching song about the lasses of Galicia who were sorry because their "gunner-boys" had marched away to the Ukraine and because there would be no one to kiss them "on their scarlet lips, hazel eyes, and black brows," and I tried desperately to remember where I had heard those words before.

The song sounded strange and out of place in our Soviet times. In those days the young people used to sing the Carmagnole, Racing on Ahead, We've Dug our Graves Ourselves, The Reapers Reap upon the Hill, Rumbling Guns, The Mist is Creeping o'er the Field, and now, all of a sudden, Pecheritsa had dug up this ditty about the scarlet lips of the sorrowful lasses of Galicia. Only as the choir sang the last couplet, did I remember that it was this song that the Galician "gunner-boys" had sung in 1918 when they marched across our fortress bridge. Their grey uniforms were the same as those of their Austrian officers and they burnt and pillaged as ruthlessly as their masters. They smashed up Orlovsky's mill under the cliff, stole the peasants' grain and carted it off to Austria while the people of our town were starving. I listened to the song and just could not understand why the choir should be singing it in our Soviet times.

But, as though sensing my doubts and desiring to banish them, Pecheritsa's choir struck up with Taras Shevchenko's Commandment, then the Internationale that we all knew and loved so well. In those days all our meetings ended with our standing up and singing the Internationale and the Young Guard. But it was one thing for us to sing the hymn of the workers of the world in our little group, or at the Komsomol club, in thin untrained voices, and something quite different to hear the Internationale ring forth from the lips of this enormous choir. That evening I began to feel that Nikita had done wrong to turn Pecheritsa out of the room. The new director of education may have acted arrogantly. But what a conductor!

The next day, however, I was again disappointed in Pecheritsa.

We had a drawing master called Maxim Yakovlevich Nazarov. This little grey-haired old man, an engineer by profession, came from the town of Sormovo, on the Volga. Maxim Yakovlevich used to tell us much that was new and interesting about the Red Sormovo Plant, where he had worked nearly all his life. The old man had seen a lot, working in shops where there were more people than in forty factories like our Motor. Our school badly needed men like Maxim Yakovlevich with long experience of industry.

The day after the concert Pecheritsa summoned all the teachers and instructors from our school to test their knowledge of the Ukrainian language. Obviously our drawing master, who had only recently come from Russia to live with his daughter—the wife of a frontier guard—could neither write nor read Ukrainian.

In front of everyone, Pecheritsa told Polevoi to dismiss the old man from school. Our director did all he could to defend Maxim Yakovlevich, but it was no good.

Later, when he was telling us about his interview with Pecheritsa, Polevoi said: "I told Pecheritsa, 'You want to force a Russian to give up his native language and go over to Ukrainian straightaway. Why, he hasn't been living in the Ukraine five minutes. Give him time, don't force him to distort his own language and talk God knows how just for your sake. Compelling him like that will only make him hate the Ukraine...' "

But Pecheritsa could not be persuaded. He sent round a circular flatly stating that all school-teachers in the Ukraine must teach children only in Ukrainian.

"But look here, what children have we got at this school?" Polevoi argued heatedly. "Our youngsters are quite grown-up. And besides, ours is a technical school. We study trades."

"That has nothing to do with me," Pecheritsa answered coldly. "You live in the Ukraine, here are the instructions, please obey them. As for the type of school you are running, that is quite absurd. What on earth is the use of a factory-training school when there isn't a factory within a hundred miles of you!"

"The time will come when factories will spring up here too, as they have in the Donbas, and people will thank us for being first to train the workers that will be needed to run them!" Polevoi replied.

"Rubbish!" Pecheritsa snapped back. "No one will let you soil the blue sky of Podolia with factory smoke."

"We shall see!" Polevoi said stubbornly and, as Nikita told us later, even gritted his teeth to stop himself cursing.

"Others will see, not you!" the ginger-moustached Pecheritsa flung at our director. "Your job is to be a disciplined worker in my system of education, and to obey my instructions without wrangling."

Polevoi was obliged to ask Maxim Yakovlevich to leave the school. We collected all the money we had left from our small grants and presented the old man with a good set of drawing instruments as a memento. Furman fixed a brass disc on the case and neatly scratched an inscription: "To our well-loved teacher Maxim Yakovlevich, in parting, but not in farewell. From his pupils."

As a matter of fact, Nazarov did not lose much by Pecheritsa's order. There were very few good engineers in the town and he was snapped up by the transport office at once. He started drawing plans of new roads leading to the border.

The steam-rollers for these roads were repaired at our school, and so Maxim Yakovlevich sometimes came to see us.

"A-a-ah! Maxim Yakovlevich, victim of the Pecheritsa regime!" Zhora greeted him one day. "Well, hasn't he got as far as your office yet?"

"That road's barred to him," Nazarov replied. "We're on military work now. Mikhail Vasilyevich Frunze of Moscow is interested in what we are doing. He doesn't care what language a man speaks, as long as he's Soviet at heart!..."

As Petka and I walked back to the hostel after our guard duty, Petka said to me: "What a pity we didn't catch that bandit, Vasil! Just let him slip through our fingers! I'm afraid Pecheritsa may get to know about it. If he does, he'll use it against Polevoi. 'Look at the blunderers he's trained,' he'll say. Then he'll start slinging mud at Polevoi."

"Don't worry, Petka. Kartamyshev won't let anything happen to Polevoi. He's known Polevoi since the time when they were at the Party School. Polevoi used to be the Secretary of the Party group there. He's an old Bolshevik, and a worker... But Sasha's a sap, that's a fact. Think how smashing it would have been if Sasha had nabbed that bandit!"

"Not half!" Petka said despondently.

TIKTOR GETS TOUGH

After the night of our vigil at headquarters, the weather had changed. For three days it had been snowing heavily. The drifts were up to the windows, and every morning, before starting to cast, we had to clear the path leading from the road to the foundry with wooden shovels.

One morning Zhora told me to prepare the mould cores for the next day's casting.

I was starting on my second lot, when Tiktorkame up to me. I glanced up and saw his blonde forelock dangling right in front of my nose. Tiktorksquatted on his heels and lit a cigarette, blowing a cloud of blue smoke into the grate of the stove. I watched him silently out of the corner of my eye, knowing that he wanted to talk to me. Since the evening when Tiktorkhad not turned up at headquarters, he had kept away from us, speaking to no one and going straight home after school. He lived with his father in Tsiganovka, a remote suburb not far from the station.

Taking a last pull at his cigarette, Tiktorktossed the stub on the blazing slabs of coke and, walking past me, said offhandedly:

"Well, member of the committee, when are you going to try me?"

"You want to know when the committee will go into your affair?"

"Isn't that the same thing!" Tiktorkgrunted, dragging over a tin of graphite and sitting on it.

"If you want to know when the committee will meet, I can tell you—on Thursday."

"Of course, it's better for you to keep the Komsomol full of twerps like Bobir who can't even hold a rifle, just because they're friends of certain committee members, and chuck out young workers who happen to make a slip..."

I guessed whose window Tiktorkwas throwing stones at.

"What you did wasn't a slip."

"But that's just what it was. I just had a drink... then gave a profiteer a slap on the jaw, and you make all this fuss. . ."

"Not just a profiteer. He was your client Bortanovsky."

Tiktorkmade a puzzled face. "My client? That's a funny thing to say!"

"Whose client is he then—mine? Don't make yourself out a fool. The committee knows all about it."

"What do you mean? I don't get you. . . Someone's been making things up to spite me, and you. . ."

This was too much. Not content with refusing to admit his mistake frankly, as a Komsomol member should, Tiktorkwas trying to come the innocent!

I said grimly: "The committee knows, Tiktork, that you cast machine parts for Bortanovsky's private business in working hours, you sold them to him, you..."

"Well, what about it?" Tiktorkbroke in. "I did it all with my own hands, out of my own aluminium, and it wasn't in working hours at all."

"That's not true, it was! Why tell lies about it?"

"You're lying yourself! I stayed behind after work, when you'd gone home, and did the casting then."

"Did you? What about the sand, and the tools, and the models, whose were they? Don't they belong to the state? Just you tell me what you were doing that day when Kozakevich took the fly-wheel model to the locksmiths to have it changed. If I remember, you were casting a gearwheel for a motor-bike."

Tiktor was cornered.

"I had nothing else to do then," he mumbled. "That's different. I wanted a job, so I started on that gear-wheel. You could cast that blood-sucker of an emperor, couldn't you? Well, I was practising, too, on a gear-wheel."

"Practising to get money from a profiteer afterwards and buy vodka with it..."

"Look here you," Tiktor shouted threateningly, "don't try and scare me with your talk of profiteers! I hate profiteers more than you do. Besides, you can't prove Bortanovsky is a profiteer. He's a private craftsman, true, but he's a craftsman and he works himself. And in Odessa he used to work at the October Revolution Factory. You don't find craftsmen like him all over the place. Who overhauled Pecheritsa's motor-bike? Bortanovsky! And you call him a profiteer!"

"Hold on, Tiktor," I said very calmly, "only a minute ago you yourself called Bortanovsky a profiteer."

"I did?... Nothing of the kind!" Tiktor exclaimed indignantly.

"Yes, you did! You said yourself you gave 'a profiteer a slap on the jaw.' I've got a good memory. You've told one too many..."

"Drop that, Mandzhura, don't try scaring me!" Tiktor bawled, growing furious in his confusion. "You're a bit too green to talk to me like that, kid! I'm a worker born and bred. I know why you're all against me—because I earn more than you! You'd take on jobs from Bortanovsky yourself, but he wouldn't give 'em to you, even if you did them free. Your handiwork wouldn't suit him! They make do on their mingy grants, and if I don't want to live like a beggar—they start persecuting me. Chuck me out of the Komsomol! You can go and stuff yourselves! I'm not a climber, I'm a working chap!"

"Now I see that you must be expelled from the Komsomol!" I told Tiktor, looking him straight in the eye. "If you can say things like that..."

"Now, you young people, what's all the jawing about in working hours?" Zhora asked sternly coming into the room. "Finished cleaning the cores, Mandzhura?... Are these them? That'll be about enough for today. Now listen, get dressed and fly over to the school. In the forge they'll give you some rams for us."

Worked up after my quarrel with Tiktor, I flung out into the yard without even buttoning my chumarka.

It was wonderfully quiet and snowy all round. My eyes pricked as I looked at the deep drifts on the allotment and in the foundry yard. The trees were fluffy with snow. A tomtit with a black comb fluttered past me knocking a twig with its wing and a great pile of snow showered silently off the tree.

A narrow path had been trodden across Hospital Square. I walked slowly. It was like going down a crowded corridor and the hem of my chumarka brushed the snowdrifts. The roofs of the little houses round the square were piled high with snow; lilac and jasmine bushes in their gardens poked out of the snow like birch-brooms; even the tall, narrow chimney on the Motor Factory was caked with snow-flakes on one side.

"We don't need a hooligan like you!" That had been a good reply to Tiktor. He had gone a bit too far with his rotten conduct and all the dirty things he had said about the Komsomol, and now he would complain that it was all our fault. If he had been a decent, honest chap, who would say anything against him! I hadn't told him off for personal reasons—I was thinking of our organization. Why couldn't he understand that! If he started swindling and robbing the state, working against the people when he was young, what would become of him later? We had advised him last year to stop going with 'Kotka

Grigorenko. "Mind you don't slip up," Petka and I had told him. "We've known that Kotka ever since he was a kid. His father was all for Petlura, he betrayed our friends, and his son's got a bad streak in him too. Surely he's not the kind of fellow for you to go with, is he?" But did Tiktora listen to us? What a hope! "You can't teach me anything, I'm not green like you!" He and Kotka used to go staggering down Post Street arm in arm, and to parties and weddings with kulak lads in the neighbouring village, and then Kotka ran away to Poland. He must have done something pretty bad, if he had to resort to a thing like that. And then Tiktora was in a mess; twice he, a Komsomol member, was summoned by the security men and given a serious talking-to because he had been a close friend of Kotka's. After that he had moped about looking sorry for himself, and now it was starting all over again. . .

Turning these thoughts over in my mind I crossed the snowy expanse of the yard and entered the forge.

The rams were not ready, and while I was waiting for them to be forged, I went up into the locksmiths' shop, it was dinner-time and everyone had gone out. The workshop was amazingly quiet. No one stood at the benches sprinkled with filings. I went to the club and found our chaps crowding round the glass-fronted case on the wall reading the latest newspaper. Our Red Cordon was attracting particular attention today, I squeezed closer.

"An Absurd School," it read in big letters across the top of the page and knew in a flash what it was about. The article, signed "Dr. Zenon Pecheritsa," said that the director of the factory-training school, Polevoi, was sabotaging the spread of Ukrainian culture, that for a long time he had kept at his school a teacher who could not speak Ukrainian; when the teacher was eventually dismissed, Polevoi had organized a collection to buy him a costly present. Pecheritsa concluded his article by remarking that the very existence of a factory-training school in our little town where there was no industry was absurd...

Footsteps echoed down the corridor. It was Polevoi coming from his office. He was wearing his khaki jacket. His cap was tilted on the back of his head, exposing his high sunburnt forehead. We made way for Polevoi to go up to the newspaper, but he smiled and said, "Read it yourselves. I know everything that's written there."

Sasha Bobir darted up to Polevoi.

"Nestor Varnayevich, what does 'Dr.' mean?" he asked unexpectedly.

A laugh went up and even Polevoi hid a smile.

" 'Dr.' Well, I suppose it means 'Doctor.' "

"But how can Pecheritsa be a doctor?" Sasha insisted. "Doctors go round hospitals curing people, but he conducts a choir and orders teachers about. Are there doctors like that?"

"There are all kinds of doctors," Polevoi replied. "They're not all doctors of medicine. Pecheritsa is a Galician. I ought to tell you that in Galicia they're very fond of showing off a bit by putting 'Doctor' in front of their names. Nearly every officer in that legion of Galician riflemen who fought with the Austrians against the Russian army called himself a doctor. There were all kinds: doctors of law, philosophy, philology, veterinary science... Perhaps Pecheritsa is a doctor of music."

"If the Galicians fought against us with the Austrians, why do we let them come here? Haven't we got enough Petlura hangers-on, as it is!" Sasha insisted.

"Never speak like that again, Bobir!" Polevoi exclaimed. "You must never judge a whole people by its renegades... The Galicians are a good, hard-working, honest people, they're our blood brothers. They speak the same language as we do, their country's been Ukrainian for centuries."

And Polevoi reminded us how not long ago, at the Fourteenth Party Congress, Comrade Stalin had said it was only because the Treaty of Versailles had carved up many states that our Ukraine had lost Galicia and Western Volyn.

"If anybody knows the Galicians, I should," Polevoi went on. "When Peremyshl was captured, I was badly wounded out there, in Galicia... The army retreated and I was left lying on the ground, unconscious. Well, do you think those people gave me away to the Austrians? Nothing of the kind! I lay for over a year in a peasant's cottage, in the village of Kopysno. They brought a doctor to me secretly from Peremyshl. He operated on me twice. I might have been a Galician myself the way those Galicians looked after me... Yes, it would be good to meet some of those people again. Just think, the little Zbruch is all that divides us! It's not the fault of the Galician working folk that they're under foreign domination and have been suffering under it for years."

... When we came out of school and went to the hostel to have dinner, Petka, who adored Polevoi, pounced on Sasha: "Couldn't you ask your questions another time? You could see he was upset by that rotten article, but you had to start worrying him: 'What's "Dr." mean?' Do you want to know what it means? 'Dr.' means daft like you!"

"All right, don't shout," Sasha grunted. "Perhaps I did it on purpose to cheer him up, I wanted to take his mind off things. How about that?" And Sasha smiled complacently.

I remembered how Polevoi had been liked and respected by the students at the Party School when he was group secretary there.

One day, when he was still at the Party School, Polevoi had dropped in to see us. Father was out—he was printing the school newspaper Student's Voice in our little print-shop. Polevoi noticed a poetry album on my table. We still had the high-school boys' habit of keeping such albums. The girls in our class would stick pictures in their albums and draw flowers all round them—narcissuses and tulips usually—then write sentimental verses there about beautiful flowers, white-winged angels, harps, forget-me-nots, and so on.

I am ashamed now to admit it, but I had such an album too. It was full of verses and good wishes from friends. To my amazement, Polevoi leafed through my album, chuckled to himself, then, sitting down at the table, picked up a pen and wrote on a clean page:

*Far beyond the stormy present
Lies the Future's happy shore
Where the sky is clear and pleasant
And the tempest roars no more.
It is only the courageous
Whom the waves will carry there.
Forward, friends! The tempest rages,
But these sails it cannot tear!*

I had not asked him to do it. He just wrote, then got up and left the room without a word.

I was very surprised, I remember. At first, I thought it was an acrostic. I read the first letters of each line from top to bottom, but couldn't make any sense of it.

Polevoi's action pleased me. It was nice to feel that he didn't mind having to do with a youngster like me...

At the factory-training school everyone knew that Polevoi was rather rough and strict on the outside, but a very kind man at heart. He spent all day at the school trying to make us into skilled workers and

good citizens.

We all liked our director and Pecheritsa's article staggered us. Although Polevoi gave no sign of being hurt, we guessed it was only in front of us that he was so calm; underneath he must be feeling very bitter.

After dinner I left the forge with two rams under my arm and headed for the school gate. Just as I was going through the gate I heard a shout from Nikita:

"Special committee meeting after school!"

"Oh, good! Tiktov's been asking..."

"I don't suppose we'll have time for Tiktov today. There's something more important," said Nikita.

"What's up?"

"Don't you know?"

"No. What is it?"

"Pecheritsa wants to close down the school."

"You don't mean it?"

"Of course, I do!"

"But what about us?"

"Private tinkering, labour exchange, or get your Mum and Dad to keep you," Nikita said, twisting his face into a grin.

I thought for a moment he was pulling my leg. "But they can't do that! Surely, you're joking, Nikita?"

"Never been more serious in my life! Mind you come," Nikita answered shortly.

BAD NEWS

Never since we started school had we held such a stormy committee meeting as we held that evening. The last light had gone out in the windows of the neighbouring houses, the iron shutters of the shops in the old part of the town had rumbled down long ago, but still we argued and shouted about what we should do...

On the table lay Pecheritsa's order to close the school.

No one could resign himself to the idea that in two week's time, when we still had another month and a half at school, we should just be kicked out.

While we argued and fumed and racked our brains for a way of softening Pecheritsa's heart and making him withdraw his order, Polevoi, our director, and the only Party member in the whole school, sat quietly in a corner and said nothing. Apparently, he wanted to hear what we had to say, and then, as a representative of the Party, tell us his opinion. At length, when everybody had had his say, Nikita looked inquiringly at the director.

"It's a foolish position that I'm in, a very foolish one, lads, and I don't know whether you'll understand me properly," Polevoi said rising to his feet. His voice trembled as he spoke and the room grew so quiet that we could hear the snow on the pavement outside crunching under the feet of some belated passer-by. "As I look at you, the young, hot-headed lads you are, I just can't imagine how we can part. In the time we've been together we've become real friends, and I believe that all of you will make good. As a member of the Party, here, at this Komsomol committee meeting, I can tell you frankly: the whole

thing is wrong from beginning to end. It's unjust that you shouldn't be allowed to finish this last six weeks. It's unjust of them to close the school. That decision is against the Party line. . ."

Polevoi rummaged in his tunic pocket and, taking out a scrap of paper, went on: ". . . it contradicts the directives of the Fourteenth Party Congress. All right, suppose what he says is true—at the moment there aren't any suitable factories in our district that we can send you to when you finish school. But there are such factories in other towns of the Ukraine. Then why won't Pecheritsa get in touch with the government and arrange something for us? The long and the short of it is that he doesn't believe in the future of our industry. He doesn't want the blue sky of Podolia soiled with factory smoke!... But without that we shan't be able to maintain Soviet power! If we don't build factories all over the country, we shall be finished, and not only that—we shan't be able to help any of the peoples who are waiting for our aid. That's as clear as two and two makes four. Only this perishing conductor doesn't want to understand the obvious truth. . . And I've got a very definite feeling that Pecheritsa's tactics are playing right into the hands of the Ukrainian nationalists, if Kartamyshev had been in town, I would have got this order cancelled today. But Kartamyshev caught a chill during the alarm and his lungs are bad -again, so he's gone to Yalta for treatment. His place has been taken by Sokorenko—a new man to our organization. Sokorenko's heard that Pecheritsa was sent here from Kharkov and he's afraid of pulling him up. I shall have to talk to Sokorenko, and explain things to him. But it seems to me that there's no need for you to stand aside. While I'm protesting here, on the spot, why shouldn't you go and stir them up in Kharkov? We've not only got to fight to keep our school going, we've got to make Kharkov find jobs at factories for our first lot of trainees, for all of you. You have every right to them."

And we decided to fight.

A resolution was carried that immediately after the general Komsomol meeting a pupils' delegation should be sent to the District Party Committee. It was also decided that I should be sent to Kharkov to see the Central Committee of the Komsomol.

That was the last thing I had expected! When all the chaps shouted, "Mandzhura! Mandzhura ought to go!" I could scarcely believe my ears.

I tried to make excuses, but Nikita said confidently: "Never mind that, Vasil. It's all bunk about your never travelling on a train before and losing yourself and all the rest of it. Your tongue will get you anywhere and Kharkov's not far away. Are we the kind to get scared over such journeys! Who knows, we may have to take a trip to Berlin or Paris one of these days. And you're afraid of going to Kharkov, to one of our own Soviet towns! But you're quite a brave chap on the whole and we're sure you'll find your way about there all right. So get cracking on the long trail and stick up for our interests! Get justice, or die! That's all."

The meeting was declared closed.

Tired and excited, we walked back to the hostel through the quiet snowy streets of our little town. Of was in a daze. The decision to send me to Kharkov had hit me like an avalanche. But it was good to feel that my friends trusted me, and I swore to myself that I would do my best.

AN UNEXPECTED TRAVELLING COMPANION

No one came to see me off at the station, not even Pet-ka. That evening there was to be a pupils' conference. Pecheritsa was expected to attend. After two invitations, he had condescended to "drop in." Everyone wanted to hear what this ginger-moustached bureaucrat had to say besides what was in his order. Well over half the school's pupils were preparing to speak. They intended to give Pecheritsa a real fight and demand that he cancel the order. But the train left at seven fifteen in the evening. I had told the

chaps myself not to see me off. They had better stick together and give that bureaucrat a hiding.

I arrived at the station half an hour before the train was due to leave and saw that no one was being allowed on the platform yet. With one hand in my pocket feeling the hard little ticket that we had clubbed together to buy, and the other gripping a brief case, I strolled about the station, glancing up at the clock.

Firmly pinned with two safety-pins in the inside pocket of my jacket were forty-three rubles sixty kopeks. At dinner-time we had been given our grants and most of the chaps at school had contributed a ruble each for my journey. That was how I had come to possess such a large sum, I had never had so much money before in my life. My papers for the journey were in the brief case that Nikita had forced on me. He had gone specially to the District Komsomol Committee and borrowed it from Dmitry Panchenko, the head of the instructors' department. Afraid of being laughed at, I tried to refuse it, but Nikita was adamant.

"Try to understand, old chap," he said persuasively, "when a brief case is necessary, it's nothing to be ashamed of. There's no reason why it should be a sign that you've turned into a bureaucrat. If you haven't got a brief case, what will you do with all your papers, the school estimate, the lists of pupils? Stuff them in your pockets? You'll get everything crumpled. And where will you put your towel, soap, tooth-brush? There's nowhere, is there? But it all goes fine into a brief case. Suppose you go in to see the chief of education himself. Do you want to fish a lot of crumpled papers out of your pocket?... You'll feel much better with a brief case."

I tried every excuse I could think of to get out of taking the brief case, for I knew that the Komsomol members who carried brief cases were called bureaucrats. And if one of these brief case owners went so far as to put a tie round his neck, he was sure to be dubbed a petty bourgeois or an upstart. Before I left the hostel, I wrapped the brief case in old newspapers and carried it under my arm, like a parcel. Not until I reached the station did I glance round and throw the newspaper into the ditch.

There was no one I knew at the station. In the buffet a samovar was steaming and an elderly waiter with a white overall over his fur jacket was pouring the hot water into thick glasses. In the luggage department customs men were checking the passengers' luggage for contraband.

I strolled along the corridors, crossed the entrance-hall several times and surveyed the passengers, trying to guess who would be with me in my compartment. Then I went out on the platform. Soon the platform grew empty as the passengers took their seats in the train. Only the stationmaster paced slowly over the ice-coated platform, glancing at his watch. At last, he straightened up, assumed a dignified air, put his watch away in his pocket and struck three ringing notes on a brass bell.

I showed the conductor my ticket and scrambled up the steep steps into the warm sooty-smelling carriage. It looked as if no one else would get in and I should have to travel alone. I walked through the empty carriage to the last compartment and took a seat by the window.

Behind the wooden wall, in the toilet, I thought I heard someone cough, but paying no attention to it, I started examining the cosy compartment, which reeked of tobacco smoke.

What a thrill it had been a few years ago, when we were kids, to climb into the long, green carriages like these standing in the sidings! Why, only a few days ago, if someone had told me that I should soon enter such a carriage as a real passenger, I should never have believed him.

In the hush before the train started I could hear two greasers talking to each other by the station warehouse, then behind the wall someone coughed again, more clearly this time, and at last, from the head of the train came the cheerful whistle of the engine.

It had given a similar cheerful whistle several years ago, when Petka and I had seen Yuzik Starodomsky, "Weasel," off to Kiev from this same station. How we had envied Yuzik his long train journey! And now I, Vasily Mandzhura, was setting out on a long journey too!... A jerk.

Gazing out of the window, T watched the places I knew gliding past. How many times had I run barefoot over those paths and tracks! The willow pond near the candle factory flashed by. How dismal it looked in the snow! Nothing like as good as in summer. What big crayfish you could catch under its steep banks with a bit of old meat or a dead frog. Half the pond was overgrown with tall bul-rushes with brown cat's tails on their slender stems.. .

The door behind me gave a loud click.

I turned round.

Within two paces of me, holding a little suit-case, stood —Pecheritsa.

"Now it's all up," I thought. "Pecheritsa's found out everything, he knows I'm going to the centre, and he's decided to beat me to it. Now, of course, he'll try to scare me. He may even order me to go back at once."

In the first shock of meeting, I had not noticed that Pecheritsa had shaved off his moustache. Clean-shaven, he looked younger and not quite so bad-tempered as before. I was very: surprised to see that Pecheritsa was not dressed in his usual clothes. He was wearing an old Budyonny hat with the star taken off and a long cavalry . great-coat that reached to his ankles.

I hadn't the courage to look straight at Pecheritsa for long, so I turned away and pretended to be looking out of the window, now and then glancing at him from the tail of my eye. Huddling against the wall of the compartment, I waited for the questioning that I was sure would come. But glancing over his shoulder, Pecheritsa said kindly, and what was more, in Russian: "Going far, lad?"

"To 'Kiev," I lied, making up my mind not to confess on any account. "Here's a swindler," I thought to myself. "He sacks other people for speaking Russian, but as soon as he gets in the train, he goes over to Russian himself! Why should he be allowed to when others aren't?"

"So we're travelling together," Pecheritsa said calmly.

He raised the top bunk and tossed his little suit-case on to it. Wiping the bunk with his finger to see if it was dusty, Pecheritsa asked:

"Who sent you alone on such a long journey?"

Noticing that he was paying rather a lot of attention to my brief case, I lounged back and, without appearing to do so on purpose, covered it with my elbow.

"I'm going to see my aunt. I've got an aunt in Kiev who's ill."

"Everyone's getting ill now," Pecheritsa agreed readily. "It's a rotten time of the year—spring's coming. I'm not well myself, shivering and coughing all the time. I just don't want to do anything but sleep." And he coughed.

I realized that it was he who had been coughing and fiddling about there, behind the carriage wall, before the train started.

When his spell of coughing was over, Pecheritsa leaned towards me and asked in an even more friendly tone: "You're not going to sleep yet, are you, laddie?"

"No, I want to read for a bit."

"Then I'll ask you a favour, old chap. Here's my ticket and travel warrant. If they come round to check up, just show it to them, will you? I'll get up on my bunk now and have a snooze. Don't let them wake me. If they ask anything, just tell them I'm your uncle and I'm ill and you've got my ticket. Understand?"

"All right," I said, and taking Pecheritsa's ticket and the travel warrant wrapped round it, I put it away in my jacket pocket.

Pecheritsa climbed on to the bunk, turned his face to the wall and, placing the little case under his head, quickly fell asleep with one hand thrust into the pocket of his long great-coat.

And thus we travelled, my new "uncle" and I.

Needless to say, I was even rather pleased things had turned out as they had. I congratulated myself for tricking Pecheritsa so cleverly. I had expected him to worry me and keep asking whether I was the delegate from the factory-training school who had been sent to Kharkov; but it had not been like that at all, we had just come to a quiet family agreement. "Where's he going to, then, the old blighter?" I wondered, glancing up at the belt of Pecheritsa's great-coat dangling from the bunk.

I opened my brief case and took out Voinich's wonderful novel *The Gadfly*. I had promised myself I would read this book in the train and even make a summary of it, so that I should be able to speak about it at the next "What new books have we read?" evening at school.

Our Komsomol group often held such meetings. And mock trials were even more popular. Whom didn't we put on trial in those days! There was Vanderwelde, the tricky Belgian Foreign Minister, and Don Quixote who wasted his time fighting windmills, and Lord Curzon who sent all those haughty notes and ultimatums to the young Soviet land...

... I could not read properly. The noise of the wheels put me off. The pencil I was using to make notes kept jumping all over the place. And Pecheritsa's presence did not make things any easier. I wanted to have a peep at his travel warrant, but I was afraid he had not fallen properly asleep.

The inspector did not come round until it was quite dark, after we had passed Dunayevtsy, and as if to show that he was not to be wakened, Pecheritsa started snoring so loud that the inspector could hardly make his voice heard.

The candles had not yet been lighted and only the feeble gleam of the inspector's lantern reached my corner. The inspector pulled out his key and was about to tap on the bunk to wake Pecheritsa, when I said hastily: "Don't wake him up, he's ill. I've got his ticket. Here you are."

"Pretty loud snorer for a sick man," grunted the inspector, checking the tickets.

The conductor standing behind him stared at Pecheritsa's boots.

"Where did he get in?" he said in surprise. "I don't remember him. I thought you were my only passenger, young fellow. Where did he come from?"

"We've been here all the time," I mumbled.

"Change at Kiev," the inspector said curtly and handed me the tickets.

Thinking that there might be a bilker hiding on the upper banks, he swung his lantern up to the luggage rack. The light flickered on the ceiling. There was no one else in the compartment. Having set his mind at rest, the inspector went on down the carriage.

Lulled by the monotonous drumming of the wheels. I dozed off...

A hoarse voice wakened me. "Have they checked the tickets?"

The train had stopped. A lamp hanging from a post outside shed a greenish light through the carriage window and I could see Pecheritsa's head above me.

"Yes."

"Then I'll have a bit more sleep. If they come round again, just show them the tickets, old chap."

I nodded silently, looked at the window for a minute and closed my eyes. It was warm and cosy. The gentle swaying was nice. I lay down on the seat in my chumarka and, putting the brief case under my head for a pillow, soon fell asleep. How long I slept, I don't know. I was awakened by the light of a

torch shining on my face.

"Tickets!"

"There's two here, mine and his. . ." I muttered, groping in my pockets. "He's in the bunk on top. He's not well."

The inspector turned the beam away and took the tickets. Behind him stood a man in a wadded jacket, who also looked at the tickets.

"Shall I wake him?" the inspector asked quietly and flashed the torch on Pecheritsa's back. Pecheritsa had rolled himself in a ball and was still fast asleep.

"We'll have to," said the man in the wadded jacket, but then checked himself: "Wait, here's the travel warrant!" And detaching the long white slip of paper from the tickets, he started examining it intently.

Blinking at them sleepily, I could not make out what it was all about. I wished they would go away.

"You needn't wake him," the man in the wadded jacket said quietly, folding the warrant and handing it back to the inspector. "He's not the one. . . Let's go on."

The inspector gave me back both tickets wrapped in the warrant. The two men went away. I fell asleep at once, and so soundly that by the time I awoke we had reached a big station. A truck rumbled along the brightly-lit platform, people were running about with bottles and tea-pots.

The station lamps shed their light right into the compartment. I noticed that the upper bunk was empty—Pecheritsa had gone.

Pressing my face to the window, I read the name-board on front of the station:

ZHMERINKA

We had come a good way!

Knocking the legs of sleeping passengers, I walked to the door.

The carriage had filled up and the air was heavy with the smell of sheepskin and makhorka tobacco.

What had become of Pecheritsa? Perhaps he had gone to the buffet?. . . Fine chap to travel with! Couldn't even wake me up. And afraid to leave his case behind! Must think I'm a thief.

At the end of the corridor I felt the tang of the frosty night. The puddles on the platform were iced over. Stars twinkled below the rim of the station roof.

A new conductor in a leather cap with a smart badge on it was walking up and down beside the carriage with a rolled flag in his hand.

"Will we be here much longer, Comrade Conductor?" I asked.

"That we shall!" the conductor replied cheerfully. "A long time yet. The Odessa express has got to come through."

"Have I got time to go to the station?"

"Plenty. We shan't be moving for over an hour."

"Nobody will take my place, will they?"

"If they do, we'll make them give it back to you. You've got a seat ticket, haven't you?..."

I walked all over Zhmerinka Station. Huge and clean, in those days it was spoken of as the best station in the Soviet Ukraine. I even went down the famous white-tiled tunnel.

Passing the first-class buffet, I glanced at the pink hams, at the white sucking pig that lay spread-eagled on a bed of buckwheat porridge, at the fried chickens and green peas, at the plump,

glistening pies stuffed with meat and rice, at the dark-red slices of smoked tongue, at the stuffed perch that seemed to be swimming in its trembling coating of jelly. I was so anxious for just a taste of these delicacies that I lost all self-control, I had a slice of cold pork and a salted cucumber, drank three glasses of cold rich milk with fresh pies, then I ate two custard tarts and washed it all down with a glass of dried-fruit salad.

But as soon as I came out of the station into the fresh air, I began to repent. Fancy throwing money away like that! With an appetite that size I'd never get to Kiev. And I felt specially ashamed because I had allowed myself such a bourgeois feast at a time when our chaps had so little to eat. Cabbage soup and lentils—that was the usual dinner at our hostel. And beans, beans, beans! Beans for supper, beans for breakfast. Even the afters on Sundays was beans with a kind of sickly treacle sauce. Nikita Kolomeyets tried to console us by saying that there was a lot of phosphorus in beans and they would make us much cleverer, but there wasn't a single one among us who wouldn't have given all his rotten beans for a portion of good meat rissoles or a peppery goulash and fried potatoes. Tortured by remorse, I climbed into the carriage and returned to my seat.

Pecheritsa was not there.

After my meal the warmth of the compartment made me sleepy and I did not feel like going outside again. I just felt like sitting back on the hard seat and dozing.

The express from Moscow rumbled in on the main line amid clouds of steam. The station became noisy. Fighting with sleep, I peered at the lighted windows of the carriage that had stopped by us. Covered with sheets and blankets the passengers lay in their comfortable bunks. "Made themselves at home, haven't they!" I thought enviously.

The express only stopped for a few minutes, then moved on smoothly. The red light on the end carriage flashed past the window and again I found myself staring at the yellow walls of the station.

Soon we moved on too.

Pecheritsa had not returned. I still had his ticket and travel warrant.

When it got light, I took a look at the warrant. The first thing I noticed was that it had been made out not for Pecheritsa, but for a second-year student at the agricultural institute, Prokopy Shevchuk. Across the bottom of the warrant ran the flowery signature of the director of district education Pecheritsa. Hum, something underhand about that! Pecheritsa was the only man in our town who had the right to issue warrants for free travel on the railways. I remembered how even before Pecheritsa had ordered the closing of the factory-training school, we had asked him to send a few of the very best pupils for a trip round the factories of the Donbas during the holidays. Pecheritsa had refused. "The factory-training school won't get a single warrant out of me. They are only for students." And the blighter was travelling with one himself! I made up my mind that as soon as I got back I would show Pecheritsa up, if only on this score.

But where had he got to! The destination on the warrant was Millerovo. . . If I was not mistaken, that was the other side of Kharkov. He couldn't have missed the train—we had stopped too long in Zhmerinka. There had been time to have breakfast and dinner as well. All I could think of was that Pecheritsa had bought a fresh ticket and changed on to the express.

IN KHARKOV

The line was snowed up in places and our train did not reach Kharkov until evening, ten hours late.

Crossing the street with some care, H walked down Yekaterinoslav Street towards the centre of the

city.

Lighted trams rolled past, scattering greenish sparks from their collector-arms.

"Evening Radio! Evening Radio! Latest report - from Rome! Mussolini still alive!" a little news-boy was shouting at the top of his voice.

The shop signs dazzled me. The windows were heaped with nuts, ginger, heaps of pastila, baskets of Caucasian salad, sultanas, dates, Antonovka apples, oranges and lemons wrapped in tissue-paper. On the door of a shabby two-storey house I noticed a wooden placard: Eva Kapulskaya's Delicious Dinners Home-Cooked in Pure Butter. Tasty. Simple. Cheap!!!

Delicious odours of roast lamb and garlic steamed through the open window of the cook-shop.

"O for some dinner!" I thought, and licked my lips. It was two days since I had eaten a hot meal. All the journey ;I had fed on sausage and cold milk—except for my little treat at Zhmerinka, of course. Today I had hardly had anything to eat since morning... But on the very threshold of Eva Kapulskaya's fairyland I changed my mind. I didn't know yet what "cheap" meant. What was cheap for her, a private restaurant-keeper, might not be at all cheap for me. I must not waste public money. Who could tell how many days I might have to stay here!

Perhaps from hunger, my legs felt light as air and my head swam as if I had just come out of hospital. I strode on, not knowing the way, but guessing that Yekaterinoslav Street would bring me to the centre. Splashes flew from under my feet—the pavement was covered with melting slush. What a good job I had borrowed Sasha's new galoshes for the journey!

The narrow side-street brought me out on to a broad square and before me I saw the yellow columned building of the All-Ukrainian Central Executive Committee. It was surrounded by little snow-sprinkled fir-trees that seemed to guard it. Now and then a hooting omnibus drove past; sledges with bear-skins thrown over the seats trotted by, their bells jingling. In the distance I could read sparkling letters in the sky—VISTI—the biggest government paper in the Ukraine in those days.

At that moment I remembered our little far-off border town and the school hostel on its quiet outskirts. Perhaps right now the chaps were talking about me, hoping that I would bring them good news. Perhaps they were still sitting on the long benches in the Komsomol club in Kishinev Street. Of course, they would be there now! Tonight they were holding a show. They had been rehearsing it a long time. And what was more, there was going to be a musical scene called "Troika" with my friends in it—Galya Kushnir, Monka Guzarchik, Furman the "philosopher," and even Sasha Bobir.

I felt sad at the thought of not seeing the performance of our dramatics circle, and missing a chance of laughing with the other chaps at Sasha's acting. But as I stood there, on the square of this strange city, I knew that even though they were having a good time, my friends would be sure to remember me.

Peeping at the lighted windows, I wandered on to the next square—Rosa Luxemburg Square, it was called.

The latest edition of a Kharkov newspaper was pasted on a board near the House of Ukrainian Trade Unions.

A small head-line caught my eye:

MUSSOLINI ATTACKED

At 11 a.m. today an unknown elderly woman fired a revolver almost point-blank at Mussolini. He was coming out on to the ; Capitol Square from the building where the 5 International Congress of Surgeons is being held. The bullet grazed Mussolini's nostril.

The woman who fired the shot has been arrested.

"What a shot!" I thought. "No better than Sasha! Fancy getting that close to a dirty fascist like Mussolini and not finishing him off! She shouldn't have taken the job on, if she couldn't shoot. Grazed his nostril! ... So that's why the kid was shouting 'Latest report from Rome!' I wonder if there's anything more about it."

Next to the report from Rome there was a column about the outrages committed by the Bulgarian fascists on the Communist Kabakchiev. Below it I read that the airship Norway would soon be flying from Italy to Leningrad. In the centre of the next page, I saw a picture of a man with a beard. Above the picture was a head-line:

CURRENT TASKS OF THE PARTY

From the Concluding Speech of the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukraine at the Plenary Meeting.

I scanned the portrait of the General Secretary and noticed his kind, smiling eyes. Hadn't I seen him somewhere before? But of course—on the cover of the magazine Vsesvit in our hostel.

I strolled along the pavement, swinging my brief case. "I'm in Kharkov! I'm in Kharkov!" the thought drummed in my temples. People hurried past me and I tried to be like them in every way. I marched on confidently, showing no surprise at anything, and little by little I began to feel I was an old inhabitant of this large, capital city...

Ever since I had left the train, I had been pursued by the thought that Pecheritsa would suddenly pop up in front of me just as unexpectedly as he had appeared in my compartment.

A street sign was flashing on a building ahead of me:

New American Thriller!

SHARKS OF NEW YORK

Both parts in one programme

Nervous people and children not admitted

At the sight of this enticing notice I lost my head for the second time since I started on my journey. Forgetting all about my hunger, I made a bee-line for the cinema. When should I get a chance of seeing such an interesting film in our little town!

The box-office was in a dark, damp-smelling archway. From the commotion that about half a dozen lads were making round the box-office I realized that there were very few tickets left. A bit of shoving and pushing got me a place in the queue.

Clutching my brief case under my arm, I unfastened the safety-pins with trembling fingers. It would be my turn soon.

"Next! What row?" the ticket-seller snapped at me from her box.

At last I got the second pin undone. Glancing over my shoulder all the time, I pulled the wad of money out of my pocket. As I took two ruble notes out of the wad, I felt someone was watching me.

Two suspicious-looking fellows in check caps pulled low over their eyes were lounging near the box-office.

"Pickpockets!" I thought and pushed the wad of notes deeper into my jacket pocket. Thrusting the change into the pocket of my chumarka and grabbing the little blue ticket, I charged after the lad who had been in front of me in the ticket queue.

"Hurry up, dearie—it's just starting!" said the ticket-woman, tearing my ticket with one hand and releasing the wooden turnstile with the other.

As soon as I got into the buzzing hall, the lights went out and a bluish beam from the projector pierced the darkness. I trod on someone's foot. "Good-heavens, what a bear!" A voice hissed irritably. Trying not to look at the owner of the voice, I plumped down in the first vacant seat. . . Ten minutes passed... I forgot I was in Kharkov, I even forgot it was dark outside and I had nowhere to spend the night.

... The New York gangsters—terrible hairy fellows, with brutal faces, broken noses and square jutting chins, roamed about the screen with huge Colts and Brownings. They filed through steel bars, cracked open fire-proof safes, chased each other on express trains, aeroplanes, speed-boats and cars, shooting down their rivals point-blank in a practised way that made you think they even enjoyed doing it.

I felt as if I had been shot through in ten places, and by the time the terrible spectacle was over I could scarcely understand why I was not dead. Only when I got outside, hot and excited and glad to be still alive, did I remember that I had nowhere to stay the night.

It was all because of that train getting into 'Kharkov so late! If it had arrived earlier, when it was still daylight, I could have gone to the Komsomol club and they would have found me a bed in a hostel. But now where could I go?

The light under the archway had already been extinguished and the people were feeling their way out in darkness, treading on one another's heels.

"Stop pushing for God's sake!" said a voice behind me and at that moment someone gave me a tremendous shove in the back.

"What are you pushing for?" I said, turning to a lanky fellow in a cap pulled down over his eyes.

"Beg your pardon, it wasn't me, it was him," and the lout, grinning impudently, nodded to his neighbour.

Then someone shoved me again. And what a shove! I nearly dropped my brief case. And suddenly someone crushed my foot with his heel. I jumped with pain.

But deciding that I had better not make trouble, I gripped my brief case firmly and struggled out of the dark archway into the lighted street.

What a bunch of louts! Must have learnt their tricks from those American gangsters! That's what they came to the film for. . . Spoiling other people's galoshes!

The station buffet was still open and I decided to have a snack and then doze on a bench until dawn.

The air of Kharkov had made me ravenous, and as I went up to the glass counter I was already groping in my jacket pocket. Suddenly I remembered that after buying my cinema ticket I had not pinned my pocket up again.

Oh! I felt my legs sag under me. The glass chandelier hanging from the stuccoed ceiling swam before my eyes. . .

My pocket was empty!

"Steady," I told myself. "The main thing is not to panic. Pull yourself together!"

With sad, hungry eyes :I gazed at the grinning mouth of a pike on a salad dish, then crept miserably away from the counter.

"Steady on, don't get excited!" I tried to reassure myself. "You've just got your pockets mixed."

Going over to the window-sill, I tossed my brief case on to it and rummaged through my pockets with trembling fingers. But all in vain—the money had gone, gone with the Sharks of New York.

In the pocket of my chumarka I found the crumpled ruble and coins that the ticket-seller had given me for change. But what were these in comparison with the wealth that had been stolen from me! It must have been those scoundrels in the check caps who had taken it!

But how should I get home?

"Keep it up along the sleepers!" I remembered the words of a long-forgotten song.

Yes, along the sleepers. . . There was nothing for it. I would do a day's work here and there for the kulaks on the road. I would work as a farm-labourer and get back!

Perhaps I could sell my chumarka?. . . But who would buy a ragged old thing like that?

When we were in a tough spot Nikita had advised us to remember the old sea saying: "Rub your nose and you'll get over it." I scratched my nose so hard that I nearly took the skin off. But it didn't help a bit!...

Should I send Nikita a telegram asking for help? Just one word—"robbed!" and the address—"Kharkov Station —To be called for"?... But what a row it would cause at school! "Look at that!" they would say. "We've sent a fool! Instead of sticking up for us, he's been wasting our money! Just a wool-gatherer!" And wouldn't Tiktov gloat!

No, I mustn't send a telegram.

I must find my own way out of the mess. It had been my fault and I must take what was coming to me! Now I realized the truth of Nikita's advice, when he used to tell us: "Mind you never have anything to do with those Harry Peels and Rudolph Valentinoes. They're poison. Those films are a school for bandits. They can't lead a man to any good!"

How right he had been! What on earth had made me go and see those "Sharks"! . . . It wouldn't have mattered if I had never even heard of them!... What could I do? How could I get out of this mess? And the money they had stolen! A small fortune!

I started to count the change that the thieves had left me. A ruble forty kopeks. Not very rich! But it was enough for bread and soda water. I would stick it out for a couple of days somehow, get everything done, then bilk my way home. I would creep under the carriage seat and lie there quietly so that the conductor wouldn't notice me. Or perhaps I could jump a goods train.

SPRING MORNING

Day came. The porters started cleaning the station and I went out into the street. Sleepy and hungry, I felt I should scarcely be able to last a day on bread and soda water. The long journey, the lack of food, the worry and excitement of it all had drained my strength. I swayed as I walked down the street.

The trams had not started yet, but there were plenty of people about. Janitors were opening gates. Housewives with shopping-bags in their hands were hurrying off to market. They were all heading in one direction, so to kill time I wandered after them.

"Blagbaz," the famous Kharkov market, was the first place to wake up.

Stalls were opening one after the other. Miserable and unwashed, I walked round "Blagbaz" until a pungent appetizing smell struck my nostrils. It even ousted the smells of salted cabbage and celery. Nostrils quivering, like a hound on the scent, I made in the direction of the smell. A lean-faced market woman, in a wadded jacket, was bustling about by two smoking braziers on which stood two huge pots.

"Hot flachkies! Hot flachkies! Buy up, buy up, good people! Very tasty, very cheap! You'll never find such tasty flachkies anywhere else, not even in fairyland! Oh, they're lovely! The best cheapest food you can get in the world! Buy my flachkies! .."

... If any of you have ever stood in a market, beside a blazing brazier, with a clay bowl in your hands, and a rough wooden spoon—it must be a wooden spoon—and standing thus, eaten fresh, hot, peppery tripe cutlets, or flachkies as they are called in the Ukraine, with cream and spice, and onions, and garlic, and red pepper, and grated cheese, all scented with laurel leaves and parsley, you will understand just how hard it was for me not to break into my last ruble.

Even three hours later, when the offices opened and I walked up to the tall building on the corner of Karl Liebknecht Street, my mouth was still burning with the red pepper.

Those flachkies hadn't been so cheap, after all. Half a ruble gone already! Now what? Suppose the head of the Central Committee's education department was away and I had to wait for him?

Enough! No more luxury today! Until tomorrow I must not spend a single kopek. No soda water for me. I could drink from the tap—it was free and just as good. I must save my money, so that I could at least buy a scrap of bread to keep me going on the road back, when I should be dodging the inspectors.

I had no trouble getting into the building. My Komsomol membership card and other papers were inspected and returned to me with a pass.

I walked into the spacious entrance-hall and handed the pass to the sentry. The sentry checked it and showed me where to go. As soon as I entered the hall, I began to feel timid. When I had to take my coat off, I felt worse. At the cloak-stand, together with my hat, galoshes and chumarka. I seemed to lose half my courage.

"What floor, comrade?" the liftwoman called out to me. I had heard before that in the capital there were machines that carried people right to the top of buildings, but it was the first time I had ever seen a lift.

"I want Room 246," I said to the liftwoman, looking at my pass.

"Get in, I'll take you up."

"No thanks," said I and walked off hurriedly down the carpeted corridor to the stairs. Stairs were safer!

At a cautious pace I mounted the stairs. During my travels, my feet had got used to the warm galoshes and now, as I walked along in my thin-soled shoes, I felt as if I had nothing on my feet at all.

Wondering at the cleanliness and quiet everywhere, I turned into a corridor at the top of the stairs. All the doors had little numbers on them, but I could not find the education department.

A shortish, thick-set man in top-boots was walking down the corridor towards me with steady, deliberate tread. I could not see his face—the sun from the windows was shining in my eyes.

"Please, comrade, can you tell me..." I began, hurrying up to the man.

"I can indeed," he said and stopped in front of me.

But I could ask no more. . , Before me stood the very man whose photograph I had seen the evening before in the newspaper.

In my surprise I forgot the number of the room I was looking for.

To help me out of my confusion, he asked cheerfully:

"Got lost? Where are you from, lad?" "I'm from the border. . ." "From the border? A visitor from afar, eh? What's your business?"

And at that moment a daring thought flashed into my head—what if I told the General Secretary himself all about our troubles?

"May I speak to you?" I asked.

As soon as we entered the big, light office with its large square windows looking out over a garden, he offered me a chair, and I suddenly felt my courage return. It was as if my old acquaintance Kartamyshev were sitting in front of me. Still a little nervous and glancing at the bunch of telephones assembled on the end of the big desk, but speaking quite calmly, I explained why my mates had sent me to Kharkov.

The Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukraine heard me out very attentively.

Twice he picked up a big green pencil and noted something on his pad. When he did this, I would stop, but then he would nod and I would go on again.

When I began to narrate how Pecheritsa had in-, suited Polevoi with that article in the paper, the secretary asked: "So Pecheritsa insisted on the dismissal of an instructor merely because he had not learnt Ukrainian soon enough?"

"Yes, that's it! And the way he insisted! He called Polevoi a chauvinist. But how can he be a chauvinist when he's been a Bolshevik right from the start of the Revolution! And why force Nazarov to learn Ukrainian in such a hurry, when he hasn't been in the Ukraine a year yet?" I asked hotly.

The secretary smiled, and encouraged by his smile, I went on: "And now what's happened?—they're going to close the school. Well, it's not so bad for a chap who's got a mother or father living in town, they can help him until he gets fixed up somewhere. But what about the chaps who came to us from orphanages—what are they going to do? The Petlura men killed their fathers, and there's nobody in town they can turn to. They won't even have anywhere to live. They used to live in the factory-school hostel, but now, as soon as the school is closed, Pecheritsa wants to put the musical college students into the hostel. They're his favourites, they sing in his choir. But what will happen to the chaps from our school? And our training hasn't cost the state a thing—the school pays its way entirely. We make straw-cutters ourselves and sell them to the peasants and live on what we make out of it. It's good for us, and the peasants get the machines they need. It brings town and country together. We thought we would finish at school, become workers and be sent to factories in the Donbas, and other chaps would be taken on at the school. And suddenly this happens... And all because of Pecheritsa. . ."

The secretary smiled again and said: "Steady on, don't get so upset. The situation isn't half so bad as you think it is."

"But just imagine it!" I said, spurred on by his encouragement. "They've got enough unemployed at the town labour exchange as it is, and now Pecheritsa will push us on to them. After all that training... And even if the exchange sends us out as pupils to private craftsmen, what shall we be doing? Mending saucepans or soldering wash-tubs! Was that what we hoped to do when we started at the factory-training school? Is it our fault there aren't any big factories in our district yet? . . ."

The secretary interrupted me with a question concerning what I had told him earlier.

"Is that what he actually said: 'No one will allow the blue sky of Podolia to be soiled with factory

smoke?' Or did you just make that up for effect?"

"What, do you think I'm making all this up?" I said offendedly. "That's just what he said."

"Curious... very curious... I didn't know he was working so openly. What a landscape-painter, eh! Luckily for us, the people of the Ukraine won't ask him where to build their factories. We shall build them where they are needed. We'll soil the sky a bit here and there, and the air will be all the fresher for it."

"Polevoi always tells us that our country can't live without industrialization because the foreign capitalists would swallow us up," I agreed.

"Does he now! Good! You are lucky to have such a good director. Everyone who's in charge of even the smallest undertaking should look at the future from a revolutionary point of view. Tell me, how many fine young chaps like you are there at your school?"

"Fifty-two... And we all belong to the metal-workers' trade union."

"Many Komsomol members?"

"Over half."

"And when is your course due to finish, according to plan?"

"In May. Very soon. That's the whole point!"

"Will all your chaps want to go away to other towns?"

"Not half they will! They'd go on foot! What do you think we studied for? When we started at school they promised us we all should get jobs at big factories ..."

"When did you arrive—today?" the secretary asked unexpectedly, again writing something on his pad.

"Yesterday evening. I would have got here yesterday, but the train was late."

"Where did you spend the night?"

"At the station. I got a bit of sleep on one of the benches..."

"At the station?. . . Why didn't you go to a hotel? Or the peasants' hostel? You know, the big building in Rosa Luxemburg Square.. ."

"Well, er. . . It wasn't bad at the station. . ."

"What's come over you all of a sudden? You were rattling away just now. Come on, confess: you didn't have enough money?"

"I did, but..."

And little by little I told the secretary my troubles.

Shaking his head sympathetically, the secretary smiled, then breaking into a laugh, said: "Those Sharks of New York let you down, lad! You're feeling hungry now, I bet?"

"Oh, no ... no, thanks, I've had breakfast. . ." "Well, listen to me, lad," said the Secretary of the Central Committee, rising. "I am quite sure that decision will be rescinded. I'll make enquiries today and I think your hopes will come true. Not one of you will be left stranded—that's certain. Very soon we shall be needing young intelligent workers like you everywhere. Both in the Donbas and in Yekaterinoslav. At a meeting in Moscow last year, Comrade Stalin put it quite plainly: 'We need fifteen or twenty million industrial proletarians, we need the electrification of the principal regions of our country, the organization of agriculture on co-operative lines, and a highly developed metal industry. And then we need fear no danger. And then we shall triumph on an international scale.' And isn't it the duty of our young people to help the Party carry out that task? Of course it is. Don't you worry, the Party won't let you down.. . As

for your personal troubles, they can soon be put right. Go to Comrade Kirillov in room thirty-two. He will find you accommodation and all the other things. Take this note."

He scribbled a few words and handed me a sheet from his note-pad.

"Have a rest today and go to the theatre in the evening. Go and see Saksagansky acting. There's a really great Ukrainian artist for you! One of these days, when you grow up, people will envy you that you saw him acting in person. You'll find it a lot better in all ways than those 'Sharks.' Spend the night here and leave tomorrow. . . Yes, and give Kartamyshev my regards. Tell him to keep a close eye on that frontier. Well, good-bye, lad!" And the secretary offered me his hand.

I said good-bye and sped joyfully out of the room, nearly tripping over the carpet as I went.

As I closed the door behind me, I heard the secretary speaking into one of his telephones: "A comrade who's come here on a visit will be dropping in to see you. He's been robbed. We shall have to help him. . . Yes, from the fund for Communists in need of assistance. . ."

I don't know how long I spent at the Central Committee. Maybe an hour, maybe more. The time flew past without my noticing it. When I came out from under the arch, the sun shone brightly in my eyes. The morning mist had drifted away, and on the bare trees in the university square opposite, the crows, sensing the approach of spring, were cawing loudly. The roofs were dripping, and the snow, dark and crumbly like sugar soaked in tea, melted before my eyes.

Here was luck! I still couldn't get over my good fortune. I had thought I should have to stay here for about three days, arguing and going all over the place, but after one talk—everything was settled! And so quickly! It was really amazing. Perhaps I had dreamt it all? Of course not! I fingered the crisp new notes in my pocket. They were from Kirillov. Just in case they might be needed I had given him the list of pupils and our letter to the Central Committee of the Komsomol. I had never expected to get any money when I went to see Comrade Kirillov. I had just gone in and shown the secretary's note to an elderly man in a navy-blue tunic, and after asking me a few questions and having a good laugh, he had handed me a whole fifty rubles. He had also given me a pass to the hostel for visiting Party workers, in Artem Street, as if I were already a member of the Party.

With a great load off my mind and rejoicing for my friends at school, I skipped gaily across the street and wandered into the deserted park covered with melted snow.

The last snow of winter, grey and thin as jelly, slithered about under my feet. Here and there, black patches of sodden earth covered with dead leaves and frozen grass showed on the mounds. What a fine park it was on that glorious sunny morning! And no one else about except me, who scarcely knew whether I was on my head or my heels for joy!

I turned round. Through the bare trees I could see the familiar outlines of a tall building. For a moment I fancied I could see someone smiling in the sunlight and waving to me from a big window—the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Ukraine, a true friend of Comrade Stalin. In my joy I stamped my foot so hard that I cracked the hard trampled coating of ice on the foot-path and sunk ankle-deep in snow. I stood like that and listened.

Far away the trams were clanging, crows were flapping about in the birches, in the next street a motor-horn quacked like a duck, but all these sounds were drowned by the beating of my heart.

Spring was coming and the sun was warm, and that spring morning I quite forgot I was in a big, strange city...

BY TORCH-LIGHT

Swaying torches blaze in the spring breeze. Tails of sooty smoke weave above the heads of the Komsomol column marching down the cobbled road leading from the station into town. Beyond the roadside ditches filled with the water of the thaw stretch black, desolate allotments. How quickly the snow has vanished while I have been away in Kharkov! Very likely the deep gullies that run down to the Dniester, right on the border, are the only places where the last, dirty snowdrifts remain.

At the head of the column a taut canvas sheet strains in the wind. The marchers' feet strike firmly on the cobblestones. A single clear voice is singing in the front rank:

In the storm of October

An army was born

Of the Komsomol, daring and brave and young.. .

Then the ranks pick up the familiar chorus:

The oppressors to crush,

The oppressors to crush...

The fresh spring air helps on the song. I sing, too, hugging my brief case, which is now once again wrapped in newspaper.

... The young railwaymen's Komsomol group had already formed up with lighted torches on Station Square when the train steamed in to the platform and I, jumping off before the train stopped, ran out on to the station steps. Panchenko of the District Committee, in a sheepskin hat, was pacing about with the group secretary in front of the ranks.

"Hullo, Mandzhura!" he said as he passed. "Got back? Fall in with us. We're holding a demonstration to get Kabakchiev, the Bulgarian Communist, out of jail. Hurry up—we're late!"

I fell in quickly and we stepped off at once, carrying a red calico banner on which was written:

WE DEMAND THAT THE BULGARIAN FASCISTS LIBERATE THE HEROIC
REVOLUTIONARY FIGHTER KHRISTO KABAKCHIEV

"I'll march with them as far as Soviet Square and join up with my own chaps there," I thought, picking up the song.

White cottages, the first buildings of the town, loomed out of the darkness.

My home town! I felt its evening stillness shattered by the boisterous songs of the marchers. They were songs that frightened the musty representatives of the old world who still lived among us—former tsarist officials, priests, private traders and all those who hoped for the return of the tsarist regime one day.

Lowering storm-clouds gather above us,

Sinister forces threaten us still. . .

the marchers struck up a fresh song.

How I longed to tell the fellows beside me that I had just come back from Kharkov where I had talked with no less a person than the Secretary of the Central Committee himself. How I longed to tell everyone that the secretary had called Pecheritsa a "landscape-painter." If only I could have related how I had seen Saksagansky acting in a play called Vanity! But my neighbours went on singing and took no notice of me.

Even Panchenko had not asked about my trip. From the way he had greeted me you would think I had been to the next village, not the capital... Panchenko was marching at the side of the column. I could make out his deep, soft voice among the other voices.

Along the other side of Hospital Square, near the dark building of the factory-training school, another torch-light column was moving towards the centre of the town.

Was it the factory-school chaps? Of course it was! Only our group had such bright torches.

"Cheerio, chaps! Thanks for your company! I'm off to my own group!" I shouted to the railwaymen and, breaking away from the column, I sped across the square.

My feet dragged in the muddy clay. What a fuss Sasha would make if I lost his galoshes! Splashes of ice-cold water flew out on all sides. My trouser-legs were wet through already. Nearer and nearer came the light of the torches. I gasped for breath. Everything would be all right as long as I didn't get caught on the barbed wire! There was a gap in it somewhere round here. Yes, here it was. . . One last spurt and I was running along the firm road, overtaking the rear of the column.

"Hey there, chaps! Hurrah!" I shouted, waving the heavy brief case so joyfully that the paper flew off. But who cared! No one would call me a bureaucrat now. "Pugu!" I shouted like a Cossack, spotting Sasha's ginger mop. "Take your galoshes, Sasha!"

"Vasil's back. . . Mandzhura's here!" came excited voices.

"Fall in here, with me," Nikita shouted from the head of the column.

I pushed into the front rank and gripped our secretary's hand firmly.

There were familiar faces all round me—Sasha Bobir, fatty Maremukha, Furman the know-all. I glanced back and saw the dejected face of Yasha Tiktov in the rear.

"Well, what's the news?" Nikita said, glancing into my face.

"Everything's all right, Nikita!" I answered simply. "We'll be going to the Donbas. Listen..." Choking with excitement and trying not to trip over, I told Nikita hurriedly about my visit to the Central Committee. A drop of tar from a torch dripped on my nose. I rubbed it off with my fist and gasped out my story in bits and pieces. The ranks were very close together and it was difficult to march. Trying to hear what I was saying, the chaps kept treading on my heels and pushing me from behind.

"Is that what he said, 'your dreams will come true'?" Nikita interrupted me.

"That's right. And then the secretary said: 'Very soon young intelligent workers like you will be needed everywhere—both in Yekaterinoslav and in the Donbas.' "

"Splendid! So there's justice in the world after all Polevoi was right, wasn't he? See what a clever bloke he is?" Nikita said triumphantly, and turning to the rest of the column, he shouted: "We'll soon be going to the Don-f bas, chaps! What did I say? Let's have a song to mark the occasion—our school song!" In one voice we struck up with the trainees song composed by a young worker-poet Teren Masenko. "We'd toss you, Vasil, but it's a bit too muddy," Nikita shouted. "We're so grateful, we might drop you—you'd get yourself dirty if you fell, you know." Proud and happy, I sang with the others. "Is Pecheritsa back yet?" I asked Nikita. "Try and find him!" Nikita flung back grimly. "What, have they

sacked him already? By telegraph, I suppose?"

"He's sacked himself." "When I was with him in the train..." "Where?" Nikita exclaimed, fixing his eyes on me. "Where? Why, we travelled together as far as Zhmerinka, then..."

"What's that?" Nikita snapped, very alert suddenly. "You went as far as Zhmerinka with Pecheritsa?"

Before I had time to tell how I had met Pecheritsa in the train, Nikita swung round and shouted right in my face: "You ass! Don't you realize this is very important! Why didn't you say anything about it before? Come with me... Furman, take charge of the column!"

We slipped out of the ranks. The group marched on with their blazing torches towards the stands on Soviet Square carrying a big portrait of Kabakchiev. Nikita and I dashed off at top speed to the house in Seminary Street.

A CALL FROM MOSCOW

I had always known that Nikita liked making a mystery of things.

You would ask him about something that interested you. All he had to do was to tell you the answer without keeping you on edge. But no! Nikita would keep you beating about the bush for goodness knows how long, and then, when you fairly were bursting with impatience, he would calmly start telling you about something quite different.

And that was more or less what he did now.

Not a thing would Nikita tell me all the way to the district OGPU office. His only answer to my questions was: "Wait a bit!"

Clutching our blue passes in our hands, we climbed the stairs. Anyone could see that Nikita had been here before by the bold way he climbed the stairs. I followed him.

We reached the top landing. Nikita walked confidently down a dark corridor and stopped at an oak door. He knocked loudly.

"Come in!" said a voice from inside.

Heavy curtains on the windows. Two glass-fronted bookcases. A big, fire-proof safe standing in the corner. In an alcove, a map dotted with flags, half covered by a curtain. Below the map, which must have been of the frontier, in the shadow cast by a table lamp sat Vukovich, the tall fair-haired frontier guard chief, who had spent so long scouring about round headquarters with Polevoi after that anxious night when Sasha let the bandit get away.

"Here's a lad who's just got back from Kharkov. He says he saw Pecheritsa in Zhmerinka," Nikita flashed out straightaway.

"Near Zhmerinka," I corrected him. "That's interesting!" said Vukovich and offered us a seat.

... When my story was nearly over, Vukovich asked: 'But just which station was it where you saw Pecheritsa last?'

"I was asleep when he got out."

"I understand that, but when did you see Pecheritsa last?"

"After Dunayevets... No, half a mo'... That was where the tickets were checked first time."

"Where was the second check-up? You know, when this chap in the wadded jacket read the warrant?"

"I don't know... The train was moving and they woke me up."

"Just a minute!" And Vukovich glanced at his notepad. "You said Pecheritsa asked whether the tickets had been checked."

"That's right."

"Where was that—when the train was moving or at a station?"

"The train had stopped... At a station, I think." "Now, what station was it? Didn't you see any notices?"

"I just can't remember... If I'd known... You see, it was the first time I'd been on a train..."

"Perhaps it was Derazhnya?"

"No... I don't think so..."

"Chorny Ostrov?"

"No... "Kotuzhany?" "No."

"Was it light on the platform?"

"Uh-huh."

"What kind of light?"

"Same as usual. You know, not very bright."

Vukovich frowned. "No, wait a moment. That's not what I mean. Was it electricity or kerosene lamps? Or gas, perhaps?"

"A sort of greenish light from a lamp—a lamp with a round glass, and a burner inside. It was hanging from a post. You remember, we used to have lamps like that in Post Street, near Shipulinsky's cafe. . ."

"Gas lamps?"

"That's it—gas lamps!"

"The station wasn't on a hill by any chance? Stone steps, and the platform all rutted? If it had been raining there'd be a lot of puddles about? Is that anything like it?"

"Yes, I think so. The train comes in a long way from the station."

"And you are sure that Pecheritsa didn't get out there?" Vukovich continued with great interest, dropping the last trace of formality in his manner.

"Of course! It was later on that the conductor checked up again and read his warrant, after that station, and he was still asleep on the bunk."

"Sure he was asleep?"

"Yes, he must have been. Although ... he might have been faking, who knows. All I remember is that I saw him there."

"So then you went to sleep yourself, and when you woke up you were in Zhmerinka?"

"Uh-huh." .

"And Pecheritsa wasn't there?"

"Uh-huh."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Dead sure."

"You're a lucky fellow! You got off lightly. With a travelling companion like him, in an empty carriage, you might have gone to sleep and never woken up again," Vukovich said rather mysteriously, then with another glance at his pad where he had been making notes, he asked: "What struck you about Pecheritsa's appearance?"

"Well, his coat was sort of ragged... I'd never seen him in a coat like that before."

"And what else?"

"Oh, yes! He hadn't got a moustache."

"None at all?"

"Not a hair left. He'd shaved it right off."

"Aha, Comrade 'Kolomeyets,'" Vukovich said triumphantly, "so it was his moustache we found in a bit of paper outside the District Education Department. I said it was Pecheritsa's moustache, but Dzhendzhuristy wouldn't have it. 'No,' he says, 'that blighter wouldn't give up his moustache. That's one of the nationalists' traditions—a big bushy Cossack moustache. He'd rather shave off his beard!' Just shows you how people come to expect the usual thing! Why, any enemy in Pecheritsa's shoes would throw away every tradition he ever heard of. You can't bother about traditions when your life's at stake!" And turning to me, Vukovich went on: "You're telling the truth, aren't you, Mandzhura?"

"Why should I tell lies?" I said indignantly. "Only people who're afraid and have guilty consciences tell lies. I want to help you catch that snake myself."

"That's the idea, Mandzhura," Vukovich praised me smilingly. "It's the duty of all young workers to help us. We are dangerous only to the enemies of the Revolution, and the better we work, the sooner we shall get rid of them altogether."

"You've got a big job on," Nikita put in.

"Yes, to make the whole country free of parasites," Vukovich assented. "Just a minute." And he lifted the telephone receiver. "Shemetova? Vukovich speaking... Is the chief there? We'll be round in a moment, tell him we're coming, please."

The office of the chief of the frontier guard detachment and the district OGPU department glowed in the soft light of bowl lamps hung close to the ceiling. How strange to find people here, at this late hour, when all the other offices in town had closed long ago!

The arm-chairs were soft and comfortable; a glass of strong tea steamed on the edge of the big walnut desk. The chief nodded to us to sit down and with a telephone pressed close to his ear went on listening attentively.

Soon he got an answer.

"Is that the commandant's office, Vitovtov Brod?" the chief shouted into the telephone. "What's become of you down there! ... Yes, what happened?... Yes... Yes... Steady, Bogdanov, not so fast, let me get it down." The chief picked up a sharp pencil and, pressing the receiver even harder to his ear with his left hand, jotted notes on a pad with his right. "Who led the group? . . . What? That bandit again? Yes, gone to the right place! Less work for the revolutionary tribunal... Who stopped him?... I see... Yes... Splendid! Thank him officially on my behalf... What?... Of course... To headquarters at once!...

What?.

Listening involuntarily to this one-sided conversation, I glanced round the big room and, I must admit, began to feel rather timid. It was the first time I had seen the security chief at such close quarters.

I had seen him before, from a distance, when he rode round the ranks of frontier guards and convoy troops on his white horse. His face reminded you of Kotovsky, who had been murdered only a short

time ago. Lean and erect, a born horseman, pistol belt strapped tight across his body, he would bring his hand up to the shiny peak of his green frontier guards cap and greet the troops in a cheerful ringing voice, and the troops of the garrison would answer with a shout that drowned the chiming of the clock on the old town hall.

And now he sat before us without his cap, dressed in a well-cut field tunic of good cloth. His fair hair was combed back from a high, slightly bulging forehead.

When he had finished speaking, the chief put down the receiver, surveyed Nikita and me with a quick glance and said cheerfully to Vukovich:

"Another attempt to cross the border, at Zhbinets. Nine smugglers. And not one of them got through. The commander of that post, Gusev, is a good man. Dealt with them with his own forces without calling up the emergency group. Got the ringleader with a grenade."

"What were they bringing over?" Vukovich asked. "Saccharine again?"

The chief looked at his pad and said slowly: "Not much saccharine. Only—thirty pounds. A lot of other trash— scarves, stockings, gloves, razors, ties, and even a whole bale of Hungarian furs."

"Who wants Hungarian fur when the winter's nearly over?" Vukovich said smiling.

"Oh, perhaps some profiteer's wife wanted it for her bottom drawer," the chief said. "But something else was found, more important. In a walking stick that the leader of the gang threw away as soon as the shooting started, Gusev discovered seventy hundred-dollar notes."

"Seven thousand dollars?" Vukovich replied, making a quick calculation. "Not a bad salary for someone..."

"We'll get to the bottom of it," said the chief and, abandoning the subject, looked inquiringly in our direction. "These comrades from the factory-training school," Vukovich reported, "have some important information about Pecheritsa... Go ahead, Mandzhura." The chief nodded.

I told my story quietly, without hurrying. The chief watched my face keenly with his light penetrating eyes. Suddenly he raised his hand and stopped me:

"And Pecheritsa spoke Russian to you all the time?" "All the time. That's the funny thing! After kicking our instructor Nazarov out of school just because he spoke Russian!"

"And he spoke it well, fluently, without an accent?" the chief asked.

"Yes, just like a Russian. If I hadn't known he was a Ukrainian, I'd never have guessed it from the way he talked."

"We shall have to bear that in mind," the chief said to Vukovich. "That means he may be anywhere in the Soviet Union by now. Go on, young man."

I related how I had discovered Pecheritsa's disappearance, and the chief said to Vukovich: "There, you see? Dzhendzhuristy's theory that he made a break for the border turns out to be wrong. He's not the kind of enemy that puts his head in the noose straightaway. Perhaps he has three or four other tasks to carry out. He thinks he'll lie doggo for a bit and let us forget about him..."

A bell rang sharply outside the door. Shemetova appeared.

"Moscow on the line, Comrade Chief!"

"Now then, look sharp with those latest reports on anti-contraband work!" the chief ordered and picked up the receiver.

A minute of silence.

"District chief of frontier security speaking," the chief said in a loud clear voice. "Hullo, Felix

Edmundovich..." And he signed to Vukovich for us to leave the room.

... Long ago the marchers had returned to their homes. Long ago their torches had cooled in the club store-rooms. Silence reigned over the steep white streets of our little town. Cocks were crowing far away across the river.

"You know who that was on the telephone?" Nikita said impressively, stopping in the middle of the road. "Felix Edmundovich Dzerzhinsky! Do you realize that, Vasil? Dzerzhinsky himself! The top security man of the Revolution! ... On a night like this you don't want to sleep at all... Are you very tired after your journey, Vasil? If you aren't, let's go for a walk round town."

... I shall never forget that calm spring night on the cliff near the Catholic church.

Tired after walking all over the town, we sat down to rest on the oak rails of the old stairway that led steeply down the cliffs to the river. Here and there the moon was reflected in the little puddles on its worn steps.

The dark silhouettes of the Catholic saints on the portals of the church rose up behind us. They seemed to be petrified for ever in some strange ecstasy that was incomprehensible to us. The sleepy crows cawed quietly on the bare branches already swelling with the sap of spring. A motor purred down at the power station. Far below, the river Smotrich glistened at the bottom of the cliff. A trembling bar of moonlight lay across it. Beyond the hamlet of Dolzhok a faint gleam on the horizon signified the approach of dawn.

"That's how it is, Vasil..." said Nikita, as if thinking aloud. "All over the world a terrible, desperate struggle is being waged between the oppressed and the oppressors. And you and I are in that struggle. Our country has been the first in the world to show the oppressed the right path to a better life. We ought always to be proud of that. We've got cunning and clever enemies to fight. But we shall win, the working people will win. I am sure of that."

The familiar chimes of the town hall clock came to us from behind the old houses of the town.

"Three," said Nikita. "Three in the morning... Yes, Vasil, we're living at a very interesting time. Believe me, none of our descendants will see as much in their youth as you and I, because it's not only our youth, it's the youth of the whole Soviet land... And one day we'll be telling them about it, perhaps even about tonight. 'Yes,' you'll be saying, 'I used to live in a little town on the border. The Civil War had only just finished. There were still a lot of bandits about—the last remnants of the old order who were up in arms against us. There were quite a few people who hated Soviet power in those days, because it had trod on their corns pretty hard. Soviet power had said: "Enough! You've done enough grabbing to last your lifetime, enough squeezing of blood out of honest working folk, now come on, and get down to work yourselves." But they wouldn't have it, the snakes! They were all for back-sliding, for squirming off the path of labour and equality, and every day they longed for Soviet power to be overthrown... And once, you will say, 'a friend of mine and I went on important business to the headquarters of OGPU (you'll have to explain to them what OGPU was, you can be sure of that) and just when we were in the chief's office, the chief had a telephone call from Moscow, from Felix Edmundovich Dzerzhinsky. That same Felix Edmundovich Dzerzhinsky who was a terror to all enemies of the Revolution and saved tens of thousands of homeless children from typhus and starvation, from lice and scab, to make them into healthy, happy people...' "

Taking advantage of Nikita's falling silent for a minute while he lit a cigarette, I asked him to tell me just why Pecheritsa had run away from our town. I had wanted to ask Vukovich, but I hadn't dared.

Nikita explained to me that any idle talk could only hinder the search for Pecheritsa. I promised faithfully not to tell anyone anything about it and said that if anyone should hear what he was about to tell me it would only be twenty years after this night.

"Not until twenty years have passed? Do you give me your word?" Nikita asked.

"I give you my word," I said in a trembling voice. "The word of a Komsomol member! You can be sure of that!"

"Well, be careful," said Nikita and began his story, every detail of which I strove to remember.

THE PRIEST'S SON FROM ROVNO

It turned out that when Pecheritsa's wife told Furman she had killed a chicken on her front door-step she had been deceiving him. But she did not deceive Vukovich.

When Polevoi said to Vukovich: "Why, think of that, we nearly mistook chicken's blood for human!" the security man had pretended to agree. And what was more, to cover his real opinion, he replied loudly, so that the tenants who had come out on to the porch should hear: "That bandit isn't fool enough to hang about here for long!"

When he got to the square, Vukovich gave the watchman a sound dressing-down for letting such a dangerous criminal slip through his fingers. The watchman swore by all that was holy that no bandit had been anywhere near him, but Vukovich refused to believe his protestations and returned to headquarters. There he learnt that a big Petlura gang trying to cross the border that night had been routed by frontiersmen in the region of Vitovtov Brod. "So that Galician refugee, a labourer from Okopy village, was right when he warned the frontier guards that bandits were assembling near Zbruch!" Vukovich thought to himself.

While telephoning the frontier posts, Vukovich still did not forget about the woman who had chosen such an unsuitable place to kill her chicken. Who had ever heard of people killing chickens on their front door-step, and certainly not at the main entrance to a building where such cultured, educated people lived! Usually housewives killed their chickens, geese, turkeys, and other livestock in woodsheds and out-of-the-way corners, where no one could see, but not in full view under their neighbours' windows.

By the evening of the same day Vukovich knew the woman who said she had killed a chicken on her front doorstep as well as if he had been acquainted with her since childhood. One thing he learnt about her was that she was the daughter of the owner of a sugar refinery who had been condemned to death in 1922 for working with the Angel gang.

Everyone knew that Doctor Pecheritsa and his wife lived in a three-room flat in the red-brick building in Trinity Street. It was a good flat, light and warm, but with one shortcoming—it had no kitchen. The reason was that before the Revolution the whole second floor of this large house had belonged to the lawyer Velikoshapko. Together with the Pilsudski men the lawyer had run away to Poland in 1920, and soon afterwards the town housing department had divided his seven-room apartment into two separate flats. The larger of them had the kitchen. The housing department had not had time to fit up a kitchen in the three-room flat that Pecheritsa had been given on his arrival.

But Pecheritsa had not insisted that they should. "We're birds of passage," he had told the engineers who came to measure up his flat. "Here today and gone tomorrow. If they send me to Mogilyov, I shall go to Mogilyov, if they send me to Korsun, I shall go there. The People's Commissariat of Education plays about with you. I don't intend to build a home. What's the point of making kitchens when you're on the march, it's just wasting people's time! We'll manage as we are, without a kitchen!"

Twice a day—afternoon and evening—Pecheritsa's wife Ksenia Antonovna, a tall, dark-haired woman, would carry her shining aluminium dinner-pans to the Venice Restaurant by the fortress gates. Martsynkevich himself, the head cook, served Pecheritsa's wife with dinners and suppers.

She carried the food home in her little dinner-pans and warmed it up on a small spirit stove; and that was how she and her husband lived. They kept themselves to themselves and never had any guests. Even

Pecheritsa's colleagues at the Education Department had never visited his flat.

They had neither kerosene stove, nor primus—just a little spirit stove burning with a blue flame on which Ksenia Antonovna boiled her husband's black coffee in the mornings. Pecheritsa was very fond of that stimulating drink.

On learning all this, Vukovich became even more surprised that Pecheritsa's wife had killed a chicken. Where had she roasted it? On the little spirit stove? But why should people who took their meals from a restaurant go to all that unnecessary bother?

Vukovich also learnt that the day after the night alarm at headquarters, on Sunday, Pecheritsa's wife started taking three dinners and three suppers from the Venice Restaurant. She hadn't enough dinner-pans, so she brought earthenware pots in a string bag for the third, extra meal.

"You must have some guests?" the extremely polite head cook asked sympathetically.

"Oh, it's only my sister from Zhitomir..." Ksenia Antonovna replied, rather hastily.

It was rather strange, however, that none of the neighbours ever saw this sister. Moreover, having investigated Ksenia Antonovna's past, Vukovich knew quite well that she was the only daughter of the sugar manufacturer.

Vukovich also knew that Pecheritsa had no servants, but that every Monday the education department's messenger, Auntie Pasha, came to scrub the floors.

When he arrived at work on Monday morning, Pecheritsa said to Auntie Pasha: "You needn't come to us today, Auntie. My wife's not very well. Come next Monday."

After this instruction from her strict department chief, Auntie Pasha was very surprised when going home from work to meet the "sick" Ksenia Antonovna on New Bridge. Pecheritsa's wife was walking quickly across the bridge, on the other side, carrying her dinner-pans.

Ksenia Antonovna was in such a hurry to get home that she did not notice Auntie Pasha and did not answer her when the messenger bowed and said: "Good evening, Ma'am!"

At exactly six thirty in the evening on the day when I left for Kharkov, Doctor Gutentag- burst agitatedly into the duty officer's room at district security headquarters.

Gutentag said he must see the chief at once. The duty officer sent Gutentag up to Vukovich and the surgeon told him the following story.

That morning, when Doctor Gutentag was still in bed, Pecheritsa's wife had rushed in to see him and said that her husband was seriously ill. Ksenia Antonovna said that Pecheritsa must have appendicitis and begged him to go with her to their flat.

Gutentag knew Pecheritsa. A short time previously he had cut a tumour out of his neck. Besides, Gutentag was very fond of music and singing and enjoyed listening to the concerts that Pecheritsa conducted. And so, in spite of the early hour, Gutentag promptly got ready and set off for Trinity Street.

What was his surprise when the sick man himself opened the door to him! Inviting the doctor into the empty dining-room, Pecheritsa said:

"Listen to me, friend! I could, of course, play blind man's buff with you, I could invent some story about my poor relative who was accidentally shot during a hunting trip, but I have no desire or intention of doing anything of the kind. You and I are grown-up people and we're too old for fairy-tales. Besides, I know you are a man of the old school. You studied at the medical faculty in Warsaw, and I don't think you have any particular liking for Soviet power. To put it in a nutshell, behind that door lies a wounded man. He has a bullet in his leg. His condition is getting worse; the leg is swollen and he may have blood-poisoning already. That man is being searched for. No one must know that you have helped him.

If you do your duty as a doctor and save my friend, it will be good for you and it won't be bad either for your chemist brother who lives in Poland, in Pilsudski Street in the town of Rovno."

Even before Doctor Gutentag's story was over, Vukovich realized that he had done the right thing that day in issuing a warrant to search Pecheritsa's flat.

About five minutes after the doctor had finished his story, two groups of mounted security men rode out of headquarters.

One group led by Vukovich turned in the direction of the red-brick' building in Trinity Street.

Auntie Pasha, whom the security men from the second group found at the Education Department office, said that Pecheritsa had run into his office about five minutes ago. He had brought a small suit-case, put some papers in it out of the office safe, asked Auntie Pasha for a towel and told her that he had been summoned urgently to the border village of Chemirovtsy. Before leaving the building he had slipped into the wash-room where he had remained for two or three minutes.

Security Officer Dzhendzhuristy rang up at once from the education department and ordered a party of mounted security men to be sent after Pecheritsa to Chemirovtsy.

The hands of the station clock pointed to past seven when the security men arrived at the station. By that time the train taking me to Kharkov had already passed the first little station of Balin.

Meanwhile the group led by Vukovich surrounded the big house in Trinity Street.

Vukovich knew that Pecheritsa's flat had no back door but he also knew that a fire escape reaching from the ground to the roof passed near one of the bed-room windows. At the very moment when one of the security men walked up to the front door with a metal plate bearing the name "'Doctor Zenon Pecheritsa" and pulled the brass bell handle, Vukovich was cautiously climbing this narrow, slippery ladder.

As he had expected, no one opened the door. The security men knocked louder. Still no answer. There was a faint sound as someone tip-toed up to the door, moved the brass cover of the spy-hole and, having made sure who was knocking, went back into the flat. Then the security men decided to break the door down.

As he climbed the rickety ladder, Vukovich heard a man's angry voice coming from the open window:

"I tell you we must fight, Ksenia Antonovna!"

"Everything's finished!" the woman said.

"Ksenia Antonovna, you must believe me!" the man shouted.

"It's too late!" Pecheritsa's wife replied and a shot rang out in the room.

"Hysterical fool!" Pecheritsa's guest muttered, crawling to the window, but at that moment Vukovich leapt to him from the window-sill like a whirlwind.

Taken by surprise, the man crawling across the floor missed his aim and the bullet flew wide. Vukovich kicked the heavy Mauser pistol out of his hand and at that moment the door gave way under the blows of the security men.

At first the bandit denied that it was he who had intended to blow up Special Detachment Headquarters and its ammunition stores. But when Doctor Gutentag came to the prison hospital and removed the bullet from the bandit's leg, it turned out to be a bullet from a Webley Scott revolver.

It was with a revolver of this rather rare pattern that Polevoi had fired at the bandit on that memorable night when Bobir had made such an ass of himself.

At the second interrogation the bandit gradually began to confess, and soon it came out that he and Kozyr-Zirka, the notoriously ruthless ataman of a regiment of Petlura storm-troopers, were one and the same person.

In the year when the Pilsudski and Petlura men fled for ever from the Ukraine, it was on Kozyr-Zirka's orders that the cut-throats of the "Carefree Soul" regiment had slaughtered over half the innocent population of the hamlet of Ovruch, including the parents of one of our trainees, Monus Guzarchik. . . It was Kozyr-Zirka who was rumoured among the frightened inhabitants of the Ukrainian border villages to be either the Count of Belaya Tserkov or a runaway convict from Galicia... It was he, Kozyr-Zirka, who when surrounded by a partisan detachment in the village of Privorotye had murdered his orderly, a tall, dark fellow like himself, and, to hoodwink the partisans, thrust his own papers, signed by Petlura, into the pockets of the murdered man. The partisans had thought they had killed the real Kozyr-Zirka and he had managed to escape.

Vukovich conducted the investigation himself.

It turned out that Kozyr-Zirka was neither a count nor a runaway convict, but a very ordinary son of a priest from the town of Rovno.

Having run away from the Red Army to Poland after the unsuccessful alliance between Pilsudski and Petlura, Kozyr-Zirka spent a short time in a Polish concentration camp at Kalish. The camp was visited twice by a well-dressed man in civilian clothes, who wore a black Homburg hat and carried a heavy walking stick. He was lean and dark and spoke excellent Russian. Kozyr-Zirka, like many inhabitants of the part of Volyn that had once belonged to the Russian Empire, also spoke Russian. He and the visitor talked together for a long time, and Kozyr-Zirka became quite convinced that the visitor must be some important Russian whiteguard, one of those who had joined the notorious terrorist, and enemy of Soviet power, Boris Savinkov, in Poland.

Great was Kozyr-Zirka's surprise when soon after these visits he was summoned before the camp commandant, the Pilsudski man Nalegcz-Bukojemski, who said to him: "Congratulations, ataman! You have found favour with Captain George Sidney Railey of the British Intelligence Service. Captain Railey is an old enemy of the Bolsheviks. He knows Russia as well as I know this camp and he was very pleased after his conversation with you. By permission of Marshal Pilsudski, Captain Railey is touring all the camps where Petlura troops have been interned. It is his mission to select the bravest and most experienced supporters of the independent Ukraine. At Captain Railey's personal request, I am granting you leave to go home to Rovno for a holiday. Have a rest and get your weight back. You will be found when you are needed. In the meantime you had better forget about our conversation."

Kozyr-Zirka had other things to think about besides getting his weight back on the free meals at his father's vicarage. Thanks to the dark Englishman, his days of imprisonment behind barbed wire were now over, and Kozyr-Zirka began to seek out the friends who had served with him under Petlura.

At that time, after the Red Army's defeat of Petlura, many ex-commanders of the Petlura forces found themselves in emigration. Some had run away to Czechoslovakia, others to Canada, others to Austria and Germany, but most of them were still skulking in Poland, particularly in the largest city of the Western Ukraine—Lvov. It was these men whom the former Austrian-paid Colonel of the Galician riflemen, Yevgen Konovalts, began to rope in and register in his secret lists. Konovalts was known in the Soviet Ukraine as the ruthless butcher of the workers of Kiev. He and his riflemen had suppressed the revolutionary uprising of the Arsenal workers, who had shown no desire to support what Petlura called "independence."

Finding it hard to seek out his old ataman friends by correspondence, Kozyr-Zirka decided to go himself to Lvov, which at that time was swarming with Petlura men and former "gunner-boys." At that time Konovalts was banding together those traitors of the Ukrainian people into his criminal UMO (Ukrainian Military Organization).

When the leaders of a secret counter-revolutionary organization admitted Kozyr-Zirka to their ranks, he did not tell them the real reason why he had got out of Kalish so quickly. Kozyr-Zirka had taken good heed of the camp commandant's advice to forget about their conversation and the dark Englishman's repeated visits to the camp. True, Kozyr-Zirka doubted whether he could be found and made to repay the favour he had received. Captain Railey, however, had taken good note of the bandit with the raven-black hair and dashing side-whiskers, and through his secret agents found Kozyr-Zirka even in Lvov.

In the summer of 1925, arriving one day in Lvov, Kozyr-Zirka stopped at the People's Hotel. Scarcely had he taken his bath and dried his stiff blue-black hair, when a porter knocked at the door and said that someone was asking for 'the gentleman from Rovno' on the telephone. A woman's voice asked him to come at once to the neighbouring Hotel *Imperiale* where an important and intimate matter awaited his attention. Very intrigued to think that anyone should have been able to find him so quickly in Lvov, Kozyr-Zirka got dressed, performed a hasty toilet and went, as the unknown woman had suggested, to the Hotel *Imperiale*, a favourite stopping-place for merchants from the out-of-the-way townships of Galicia.

He was very surprised when on knocking at the appointed door a loud man's voice told him to enter. As soon as Kozyr-Zirka crossed the threshold, an immaculately dressed Pilsudski officer rose to meet him.

This was Major Zygmunt Florek, a veteran officer of Polish military intelligence, who was working in Lvov simultaneously for Marshal Pilsudski and a foreign intelligence service.

"And so we have found you, my dear ataman!" said the major. "Forgive me for asking you to call on me. I am rather well known in this town and if I had paid you a visit rather a lot of people would have got to know about it. Your organization has been accused often enough already of being in league with the Polish authorities."

Taken aback by the major's first words, Kozyr-Zirka was even more surprised when Florek told him that Captain Railey sent him personal greetings and wished him success in his first and rather dangerous mission.

Major Florek told Kozyr-Zirka that governments all over the world were preparing for war with the Soviet Union. Anxious to convince the priest's son from Rovno that this was so, Florek produced from his bag a recent copy of an English newspaper and translated part of an article which declared that Bolshevism would be smashed that year, and that Russia would return to the old life and open her frontiers "to those who wish to work there."

"And she will open them to you too, my dear ataman!" Florek said. "Do you know who wrote that? Henry Detterding, the biggest oil manufacturer in the world. He has already sacrificed millions of rubles in gold to crush Bolshevism and he'll give as much again to see it accomplished. You can trust what he says."

Having offered Kozyr-Zirka a fine position in the Ukraine when Soviet power was crushed, Florek asked him to carry out an important task.

Major Florek instructed Kozyr-Zirka to cross over, to the Soviet side and blow up Special Detachment Headquarters in our town, and all its stores. Major Florek was speaking the truth when he told Kozyr-Zirka that war with the Soviet Union was imminent. Egged on by foreign imperialists, Pilsudski's generals were preparing to make war on the Soviet Union that year. Their hired agents assassinated the Communist Pyotr Voykov, Soviet plenipotentiary in Poland, on the platform of a Warsaw station. The Polish general staff began massing troops on the Soviet frontier. Bombs were thrown into the Party club in Leningrad.

Major Zygmunt Florek offered Kozyr-Zirka a handsome reward in cash from himself and from

Captain Railey if the headquarters in Kishinev Street was blown up. "The whole world will hear the roar of that explosion and your name will go down in the annals of history, my dear ataman!" said Florek in farewell, giving him a list of addresses and contacts for use on Soviet territory.

Kozyr-Zirka crossed the border at a place he knew well. Lieutenant Lipinsky himself, commander of the Rovno "frontier-defence corps," saw him off as far as Zbruch and wished him luck when they parted...

"Write it all down," Kozyr-Zirka said to Vukovich at the interrogation. "The game's up. I've nothing to lose now." Kozyr-Zirka made no bones about telling Vukovich his whole life-story, joking cynically about the many blunders he had made and recalling his crimes with a sneering grin. He smoked cigarette after cigarette, tapping them with his long swarthy fingers and drawing deep, as if he felt every cigarette might be his last. The cardboard holders, scarred with the marks of his sharp teeth, he tossed carelessly into an enamel spitting-bowl.

"What's the point of my hiding anything from you, gentlemen?" Kozyr-Zirka repeated at the interrogations.

"You've got my heart on a plate in front of you. Why should I keep back one rotten little murder or raid I've done. It's all the same to me. You know yourselves I won't be getting any more dollars or pounds. If your frontier guards have shot my chief, that Englishman Sidney Railey, somewhere up near the Finnish frontier, what's the use of my trying to diddle you! The world can come to an end when I'm gone, for all I care. Believe me, I'm confessing to you here, as before God himself on judgement day!"

But Vukovich realized that, although Kozyr-Zirka was confessing to crimes that the OGPU knew nothing about, he was really making a last bid to get his revenge on the Soviets by leaving his friends at liberty.

Vukovich was certain that when Major Florek sent Kozyr-Zirka across the frontier he must have given the bandit at least a few addresses. Without them the bandit would have been quite helpless.

At the interrogation the bandit flatly denied that it was Pecheritsa who had helped him to find his way on to the roof of the shed at headquarters.

"I did it all myself," Kozyr-Zirka insisted. "I took a few bricks out of the wall and nosed around a bit to see how things stood in the yard. We're lone wolves of the top class, you know, and we always work alone. That's why our skin is worth more. If everything had come off as I had planned it, I'd be having a good time in Paris by now, and even my dear old Dad wouldn't know where I got all the money from."

The only offence Pecheritsa had committed against Soviet power, according to Kozyr-Zirka, was that he, had taken pity on a man who was bleeding to death, given him shelter, and called a doctor.

"I had never set eyes on Pecheritsa before," Kozyr-Zirka insisted. "If you ask me, he's a completely loyal Soviet citizen. The only thing is he's a bit soft-hearted, I grant you that. I'm very sorry I got him into such a mess."

According to Nikita Kolomeyets, who told me the whole story, Kozyr-Zirka was very put out when Vukovich called in Polevoi and told the bandit it was our director who had winged him in the attic.

"Well, I'd never have thought it!" the bandit confessed. "I thought it was a trap you, security men, had laid for me. Shot by a civilian! Why, it's ridiculous! I'll be ashamed till the end of my days!"

"You haven't many more days left!" Polevoi remarked, stung by the bandit's words. "You're going to answer for your sins!"

Kozyr-Zirka looked savage for a moment, then recovered himself and, smiling, continued to testify in his former cynical manner, as if neither Polevoi nor Kolomeyets were present.

The day after Kozyr-Zirka's arrest someone made an attempt on Doctor Gutentag's life.

Coming home from an evening at the theatre with his daughter, the doctor switched on the light and went to the window to close the shutters. A shot rang out from the bushes in the garden and a bullet, piercing the window-pane about an inch from Gutentag's head, crashed into an antique Chinese vase standing on the shelf behind him.

The assassin got away, but this shot told Vukovich that there must be someone else in town connected with the people who had sent Kozyr-Zirka.

A little later Vukovich learnt from a peasant refugee who had fled from the Western Ukraine that at about that time the chemist Tomash Gutentag had been murdered by unknown bandits in the town of Rovno. The murderers had shot him in his shop and stolen much of the medicine.

On the night of the unsuccessful attempt on Doctor Gutentag's life, frontier guards at a remote post in the village of Medvezhye Ushko, twenty versts from our town, detained a half-witted old beggar, who had tried to slip away to Poland. In the collar of his lice-ridden shirt the guards found a rolled slip of paper containing the following code message,

"Dear Mum,

"The doctor sold the bull to strangers, I'm taking back the deposit. Gogus has moved to another flat, God damn him. Find him yourself and have a business talk with chemist G.

"Your son, "*Yurko*."

Lying in the prison hospital until his wound healed, Kozyr-Zirka knew nothing of the capture of this beggar, who was in reality a messenger for a spy group working on Soviet territory. Kozyr-Zirka was also firmly convinced that Pecheritsa's wife, before putting a bullet through her head, had burnt all secret documents that might incriminate her husband.

Indeed, when the security men seized Kozyr-Zirka, Vukovich, who at once opened the brass door of the stove in Pecheritsa's study, discovered a heap of charred papers smoking in the grate. But before his sudden flight from the town Pecheritsa had apparently forgotten to warn his wife about something that was hidden in the left-hand drawer of their wardrobe. Or perhaps Ksenia Antonovna in her panic had forgotten about the drawer?

At the bottom of the drawer, which was full of clean linen marked with the initials K- P. and Z. P., Vukovich discovered a neatly-folded handkerchief.

It was very well ironed and embroidered at the edges with light-blue thread. Beside it, at the bottom of the drawer lay several other handkerchiefs of the same kind. To Vukovich, however, it seemed that this particular handkerchief was slightly different from the others. The material was the same and the embroidery was the same, but the handkerchief itself seemed a little thicker.

When Vukovich unfolded the handkerchief, he found that it contained a document printed on a fine piece of cambric.

"The bearer of this document, Cossack Lieutenant Zenon Pecheritsa has remained behind during the withdrawal of our troops to Galicia to perform work which is to the advantage of the sovereign and independent Ukraine. We request all military and civil institutions, when our army returns to the greater Ukraine, under no circumstances to accuse Zenon Pecheritsa of Bolshevism.

"Colonel Yevgen Konovalets, "Commander of the Galician Rifle Corps."

That was all. No further trace of Pecheritsa remained.

True, thanks to the message taken from the sham beggar, Vukovich was able to guess that Pecheritsa

and the "Gogus" who had changed his flat were one and the same person. '

My encounter with Pecheritsa in the train might help Vukovich to solve the other riddles.

The records concerning Pecheritsa that remained in the files of the District Education Department showed that he had been born in Kolomya, had served first in the legion of Galician riflemen, then in a detachment of the so-called "Ukrainian Galician Army." When a group of officers and men from this army had refused to return to Galicia, which was then under Pilsudski rule, Pecheritsa had remained with them in Proskurov, and then moved to Zhitomir.

The questionnaires, the testimony of his fellow-officers, the good references of organizations in which Pecheritsa had worked before coming to our town all tended to confirm this. But the forgotten fragment of cambric with its printed message and, above all, the personal signature of Yevgen Konoalets in indelible ink made Vukovich think otherwise.

Vukovich was well aware that Colonel Yevgen Konoalets had been working ever since the First World War for German military intelligence and had been supplied with German marks. When he withdrew his men from the Ukraine, Konoalets had left behind quite a number of secret agents with instructions to conceal their true function by pretending to be revolutionaries and supporters of Soviet power. A few of them had even succeeded in attaining very high positions in the People's Commissariat of Education. Later on, in the thirties, these spies were unmasked:

Yevgen Konoalets did not give every agent such protective authorizations. One had to have served under this pro-Polish commander in more than one of his bloodthirsty campaigns through the Ukraine to win his trust and be given one of those strips of cambric.

People who had stored away these cambric strips for years in hope of using them one day had friends and helpers. There could be no doubt that the fleeing Pecheritsa also had such friends. Otherwise he could never have discovered that Doctor Gutentag, having performed several urgent operations at the hospital, had gone straight to security headquarters. It was these friends and assistants of Pecheritsa's who had sent the old mad-looking beggar to Major Florek in Poland. When he was questioned, this beggar simply muttered a lot of nonsense. Left alone in his cell, he suddenly started singing Cossack ballads and dancing the gopak in the middle of the night. He did everything he could to make people think he was mad.

Vukovich, however, waited patiently for the beggar to give up his pretence. Vukovich guessed that besides this beggar Pecheritsa's friends had sent yet another messenger, to Poland who had been the cause of the mysterious death of the chemist Tomash Gutentag in the town of Rovno.

It was obvious that some of Pecheritsa's associates had remained in our town. The most convenient way of tracing them, of course, would have been to enlist the aid of Pecheritsa himself. But Pecheritsa had "moved to another flat..."

All this was told to me by Nikita Kolomeyets that night, after we had been to district OGPU headquarters. Not everything, of course, that Nikita told me then had the same shape that I give it in retelling his confused story today. There was much that Nikita could still only guess at, and many of the details were supplied by his own suppositions, and I too, it must be confessed, have been helping him all these twenty years, investigating quite a number of black spots in the biographies of the priest's son from Rovno and of Doctor Zenon Pecheritsa, making inquiries in what is now Soviet Lvov to discover for sure whether everything really happened as we thought in those far-off days of our youth.

There is one thing I will confess. This world of secret war into which Nikita Kolomeyets had plunged me on that long-to-be-remembered night when we sat until dawn; on the rails of the cliff stairway seemed

to me very terrible and dangerous.

Until then I had been very simple-minded. I had never thought that among us there could be scoundrels who, like Pecheritsa, lived the crooked double life of spies. I just could not imagine that among those who rubbed shoulders with us every day there were slinking creatures who while pretending to be sincerely in favour of Soviet power were only awaiting its downfall and looking out all the time for a chance to stab us in the back. How great, how noble, and how dangerous is the work of the frontiersmen, who, like Vukovich, at the risk of their lives, penetrate that dark terrible world where these crimes are plotted, and manage to thwart the enemy just when he is least expecting it!

And Nikita's story also made it clear to me how much the world capitalists and their agents hated us, Soviet people, and I realized that we must be on our guard against them.

A LOW TRICK

Three days later, not long before the dinner-break, Kozakevich, our instructor, walked into the foundry. The weather was so warm - that he had been across Hospital Square to the office without a cap. He had even left his heavy metal-scorched tarpaulin jacket behind in the foundry.

The sleeves of his faded blue blouse were rolled up showing his big muscles.

"Mandzhura! A message of vital importance for you!" he said with a wink, handing me a folded slip of paper.

From the tone of his voice I concluded that Kozakevich was in a very good mood.

I took the note and read it.

It was from Petka Maremukha.

"Vasil, mind you come and see me at dinner-time today. Something important has happened.

"So long,

"Petka."

I worked harder with my slippery tamper. Now I simply must get this fly-wheel moulded before dinner. I packed the damp sand tightly into the wooden mould, forcing it in with a wedge. The job was nearly done. Somewhere under the tightly-packed layer of sand lay the cold, damp fly-wheel. Tossing my tamper aside, I swept the loose sand off the mould-box. Where was the vent wire? Ah, there it was. I snatched up the sharp-pointed length of wire and started punching holes in the mould. The wire crunched into the solid sand, bending when it struck the iron model of the flywheel.

Finished! Now I could open the mould.

There were no other chaps about. Only Kozakevich was in the foundry, carefully arranging his new freshly-painted models on the shelves.

"Can you give me a hand?" I said to the instructor.

Kozakevich strode across the sandy floor to the place where I was working.

"Knocked the wedges in, made your vents?"

"Don't worry, everything's all right."

"I'm not worrying, but people forget sometimes. Specially you. Since you went to Kharkov, you've been going about in a dream. Come on, then!" And Kozakevich bent down and grasped the handles of the mould.

We both heaved together. We turned the mould over and stood the top half on its side by the window. Pushing back his sleeve, Kozakevich looked down at the lower half of the mould. The fly-wheel model had left a round black hollow in the greyish sand. Soon we should fill that hollow with metal and a new fly-wheel would spin on some peasant's straw-cutter, giving speed to the flashing blades.

In one place the mould had "caked" as the foundry men say. A little clot of sand from the upper half of the mould had stuck to the model.

"Put that right," Kozakevich said, pointing to the break.

The Motor Factory's hooter sounded in the distance. It was dinner-time.

"Can I do it afterwards, Comrade Kozakevich? I want to slip over to the school."

"Well, I'm not making you to work during your dinner-hour, lad. Go where you like."

The path, which had been wet and streaked with puddles the day before, had dried in the warm sunshine. It was good to run across the square without a coat after being muffled up all the winter. And it would be even better when the grass grew on the square and we started kicking a football about there!...

Here was the school. Taking two steps at a time, I dashed up to the third floor. Furman was coming down the stairs, a packet of food in his hand. Must be going out into the yard. Every spring, as soon as it got a bit warm, the trainees, just like beetles, came out into the yard during the lunch-hour to eat their food in the spring sunshine, sitting on rusty boilers and broken-down field kitchens. "Maremkha still upstairs?" I asked Furman. "Yes, he's making some draughts for the club," Furman replied, clumping away downstairs in his heavy boots.

Petka's lathe stood just by the door. As soon as I ran into the joiner's shop, I saw his broad back. Pedalling the lathe with his foot, Petka was paring down a length of birch. Fine yellow shavings were curling off the blade of the cutter and dropping on the floor. There was no one else about except the joinery instructor, Galya's father, sitting at the far end of the shop eating his lunch and staring thoughtfully out of the window. There was a nice smell of fresh wood shavings in the air.

"Eat that," said Petka, pedalling away at his lathe. "That's your roll on the window-sill and there's sausage in the paper."

"What about yourself?"

"I've had mine already. It's all yours."

"You old spendthrift, Petka! Your grant will be all gone in a couple of days, then you'll be in a fix like you were last month."

"What's so terrible about it! We'll be finished with grants soon anyway and earning wages," Petka retorted confidently, slicing the length of birch in two.

What a good chap Petka was, when you came to think of it! Saving lunch for me like this. Really generous. Not like Tiktov, chewing sausage in a corner and looking round all the time afraid that someone might ask him for a bite! Petka always shared what he had.

The well-baked bread was crisp and fresh, one of the special rolls that Madame Podnebesnaya, widow of the former inspector of taxes, used to sell at the school gates for the first day or two after we had been given our monthly grants.

The bits of sausage—"dog's joy"—we bought at the grocery stall. Those odd scraps of sausage—with the posh co-operative store name "Prime Assorted"—were the goods! They were very

cheap and just about as tasty as anything you could buy. The point was that in a quarter of a pound, say, you got so many different sorts—nobs of liver, fat rings of Cracow sausage, ends of salame with the string round them. One day Sasha Bobir even got a great lump of the best ham.

Munching roll and sausage, I watched Petka. How had he learnt to work so fast?... Suddenly Petka stopped his lathe and said solemnly:

"You and I, Vasil, are old friends, aren't we? Remember the vow we made in the Old Fortress over the grave of Sergushin? There can never be any secrets between us, can there? Well, I must tell you this then: Tiktora is trying to get you into trouble."

"As if I'd never heard that before! What trouble?"

"You needn't laugh. It's no laughing matter. Yesterday he reported you to the Komsomol committee."

"Don't try to scare me, Petka. What could he have reported me for?"

"I'm not trying to scare you, Vasil. I'm telling you the truth. In his report Tiktora wrote that you should be expelled from the Komsomol."

"Me? Expelled from the Komsomol?... Petka!... You can't pull my leg like that. I'm not Bunya Khokh..." (Bunya Khokh was the town half-wit.)

"Vasil," said Petka in a thick voice, "people don't joke about things like that. I'm giving you a friendly warning, as an old comrade, and you think I'm playing the fool like a kid!"

"Hold on, Petka, what does he say about me in his report?"

"Do you think I know? I never read it myself, but I saw Tiktora give it to Kolomeyets."

"To Kolomeyets? To Nikita?... But what makes you think it was about me?"

"Listen. Yesterday I slipped in to get a magazine off Nikita, and Tiktora was with him. This is what I heard him say to Nikita. I didn't want to get mixed up in this dirty business, but when you're a worker like me your conscience won't let you stand aside. This is important. I've put it all down on paper. Read it. I don't know what you'll think, but I think Mandzhura ought to be chucked out of the Komsomol for it. People like him only stain our fine reputation!" "

"And you actually heard Tiktora mention my name?"

"I'm not deaf, Vasil... Then he gave Nikita a sheet of paper. What did I do? I tried to have a look, of course, but Tiktora noticed and covered it with his hand. 'What do you want, young fellow?' he says. 'When we need you we'll ask for you.' I didn't know what to do, so I took the magazine and went away."

"And you didn't read the report?"

"But how could I? I say, Vasil," Petka looked at me sharply, "you haven't done anything, well, suspicious-looking, lately, have you?"

"What could I have done? You're an ass, Petka!"

"But there are all kinds of things... Perhaps you recommended some rotter for the Komsomol..."

"Since I seconded Sasha's application last year, I haven't recommended anybody."

"What about Kharkov?"

"Kharkov? But I've told you about that!"

"Perhaps you did something, you know..."

"But what? What could I have done? I can't make it out!"

"Well, you know ... perhaps you started a row somewhere. . . Or got drunk, God forbid ... or

clipped someone on the ear..., Perhaps you broke a shop-window?"

"What are you talking about, Petka? I'm not Tiktora... I bought some flachkies off a profiteer at the market, I'll admit that, and I got robbed, and I saw that American, picture Sharks of New York, darn the rotten thing, but there wasn't anything else."

"Nothing at all?"

"Not a thing!"

"I wonder what that twerp has got against you?"

"I don't know."

"Look here, Vasil," Petka said solemnly, "go and see Nikita and ask him straight out what you've been accused of."

"Nikita?... Why go and ask Nikita? I won't go of my own accord. If I start asking questions myself, it'll look as if I know I've done something wrong and am afraid. What have I got to be afraid of? It's daft!"

"Yes, perhaps you're right," Petka said slowly.

"You could ask if you wanted to, Petka."

"Do you think I haven't already?" Petka answered quickly. "As soon as Tiktora left, I went up to Nikita. 'What was that complaint Tiktora handed in?' I said. 'It's an accusation, an accusation on a pretty big scale,' says Nikita. So I asked him what it was about. 'It's a report of a political nature against Mandzhura,' says Nikita. 'But for the time being,' he says, 'let's keep quiet about it, Maremkha. Not a word about this until the next committee meeting!' Well, I wouldn't let it go at that, so I kept on at him, 'Must be something very important,' I said. 'Well, how should I put it?' says Nikita. 'A dirty trick of the first water. Human nature at its worst, I should call it.'"

"Eh?"

"Human nature at its worst!" Petka repeated.

"Who does he mean by that?" I asked, my voice trembling.

"Do you think I understood? You know our philosopher! He likes words no one else can understand... I advise you to speak to him personally all the same."

"But I can't, you know! ..."

At that very unsuitable moment Galya Kushnir ran into the shop. She was wearing a blue working overall and her hair was tied up under a white-spotted kerchief.

Before the factory-training school started, I had been very much in love with Galya, and had even kissed her on the wall of the Old Fortress one cold autumn day. I had written letters to her from the farm on the Dniester. I was still in love with Galya when we started at the factory-training school. When some of the other chaps began taking an interest in her, I felt very bad about it. Someone noticed this and chalked a notice up in the forge: "Vasil Mandzhura is pining for Galya Kushnir something terrible!" Under the inscription there was a drawing of a heart—more like a cabbage than anything else. It was pierced with an arrow, and from it poured a stream of blood like molten metal pouring from the furnace. This notice certainly lowered my authority as a member of the committee in the eyes of the other chaps. It's very bad when your personal feelings become public property. "Love should be the greatest secret in the world!" I had learnt the phrase by heart from a novel I had read, and even written it down on the margin of my political lecture notes. When he was checking my notes, Nikita spotted it. "Where did you get that middle-class twaddle from, Vasil?" he asked. I could not bring myself to say that the words had been spoken by a tsarist general, so I avoided the point. "It's from Comrade Kollontai's book," I said. "Well,

it's a middle-class prejudice all the same," Nikita retorted, and I had to tear the page out of the notes. But I could have forgotten even the notice in the forge and gone on loving Galya as before, had it not been for her own conduct.

She took sides with Tiktora in the row about my casting of Francis Joseph! I told her Tiktora had dubbed me a "monarchist" and Galya answered coldly:

"Do you think it's the right thing for a Komsomol member to portray tyrants and despots?"

"But I did it for practice, Galya! ..." I said in a voice full of reproach, thinking that she would take her words back.

But this time her reply was even colder, as though I were a complete stranger to her:

"If it were practice you wanted, you could have cast a model of a bird or something. There's a brass hawk on Dad's inkstand. If you had asked me, I would have taken it off and brought it to you."

"Thank you very much... You can take it to someone else," I answered rudely, and since then we had had nothing more to do with each other.

True, something of the old feeling lingered in us both. We could not talk calmly to each other and felt awkward when we met.

And now, too, when she saw me standing by Petka's lathe, Galya stopped short. But she overcame her embarrassment and walked up to us. A slight flush had appeared on her cheeks.

"The boys are talking about you outside, Vasil," Galya said. "They're saying Tiktora has reported you and he's boasting that you're in for trouble. What have you done, Vasil?"

"What have I done? ... Nothing!" "What is the report about then?" "Go and ask him."

"He's not telling. He says it mustn't be announced until the committee meeting. But when the church bells ring, there must be..."

"I don't care two pins about his report! And you can keep your church out of it!" I snapped. "He can report on me until he's blue in the face, I haven't done anything!"

"Have you spoken to Kolomeyets?" Galya asked sympathetically.

"What for?"

"Well, I should have thought you would," Galya said in surprise. "After all, he's our secretary, and a member of the District Committee, and he's known you a long time..."

By this time Galya's concern had made me thoroughly angry. What was the point of all this! ...

The chaps came in from the yard one by one. Lunch-time was over. So that no one should think me a coward, I said as calmly as I could:

"Well, I'm off to the foundry, I've got a mould that needs attending to there."

NIKITA IS SILENT

That day Tiktora seemed to be round me all the time. Now he would come to fetch a shovel from my corner, now he would snatch up a chisel under my nose. Then he would go and tinker about in the next room for a little while, but as soon as I glanced up again—there were Tiktora's stiff, rusty-looking boots clumping about round me in the wet sand. Now it was the wire brush he needed! There was a cunning gleam in his eyes and his mop of hair was swept back like a Don Cossack's. Gay and pleased with himself, Tiktora looked as if he had won the day. All the time he kept humming a popular little tune. In

Batavia there's a little house that stands alone in the fields...

When Yasha came near me, I pretended to be engrossed in my work. He needn't think I was afraid of him, the longhaired busybody!

... Knocking-off time at last! I washed my hands quickly and slipped out into the street.

I walked past fences and gardens where the trees were still bare. The market square was alive with noise and bustle. I walked on to Proreznaya Street, not knowing myself what took me there. For a long time I wandered about the deserted avenues of the boulevard. The river, still yellow and muddy from the recent thaw, flowed past below, washing the foot of the cliffs and flooding the allotments of the old part of the town. On the boulevard, which was dry now, they were burning last year's leaves. Here and there, heaps of leaves and twigs were smoking like little volcanoes; the smoke hung low over the sloping avenues and the steep cliff, and its bitterish smell reached me even on the edge of the boulevard. In the distance, beyond a little gate, I caught sight of a lonely bench. I walked over to it and sat down. My fingers wandered over the familiar letters "V" and "G." Before the days of the factory-training school, when I was madly in love with Galya Kushnir and she was going with my rival Kotka Grigorenko, who had now fled the country,

I had come here on a quiet summer's morning and, gritting my teeth with anger, carved those letters with a penknife on the hard oak plank.

How trivial the disappointments of those years seemed in comparison with what confronted me now!

Tiktor's mysterious report pursued me everywhere. The words of warning that I had heard from Petka and Galya made me even more worried. Already the whole school knew about this mysterious report. As I was coming out of the gate today I had run into Monka Guzarchik. Monka was a kind, rather ungainly lad with red, watery eyes.

In our first year at the factory school, Monka quite unexpectedly received an inheritance from his grandmother. He had never seen his grandmother, who had immigrated to New York long ago, in the time of the tsar, but when she died she had left Monka all her savings.

Monka was found through a notary by some distant relatives, and one fine day he received three hundred and twenty-five rubles cash down, in Soviet money. Of course, the simplest thing would have been to donate it all to the Children's Friend Society, or to hand it to Sasha Bobir, who collected money for the Aviation and Aeronautics Society of the Ukraine. But the amount was so large that it turned Monka's head and as soon as he came back from the bank on Saturday he took a party of our chaps to the Venice Restaurant. "I want to enjoy myself!" he announced, showing the manager his money. "We must have the whole restaurant to ourselves!"

What they did there, how exactly they enjoyed themselves, I don't know. Most of us were at the club attending a lecture called "What came first—thought or speech?" The only-thing I do know is that on the following day the revellers and their generous host looked very much the worse for wear. They all felt sick. After stuffing themselves with cakes and pastries, they had eaten every dish on the menu— salted herrings, biscuits, caviare, pork, souffle, beef-steaks, sturgeon... and washed it all down with wine of the most outlandish sort they could order. The whole inheritance had been spent in one evening.

At that time the incident caused quite a sensation in town, and when Monka applied for membership of the Komsomol, we did not accept him. "You may be a working lad, but you're a playboy. You're petty bourgeois at heart, my lad!" Nikita told Monka at the committee meeting. "The sons of the rich used to guzzle like that and you're following in their footsteps. You'll have to wait a bit and we'll see."

Now Monka Guzarchik lived on his grant and liked to refer to himself ironically as "a member of the non-Party layer of society..."

When he had met me at the gate today, Monka had whispered: "Poor old Vasya! I hear Tiktor's

started something against you. Is that so? He wants to get you expelled from the Komsomol, doesn't he? Poor old chap! So you'll be one of us."

I must have sunk pretty low if even Monka was sorry for me!

Sadly I gazed at the far bank of the river, at the fortress bridge linking the two cliffs, at the Old Fortress. So far I had kept the vow that Petka, Yuzik Starodonsky and I had made over Sergushin's grave; I had worked as well as I could for the cause of the Revolution. But why this report, and why were my friends so sorry for me before there was need? ...

The waterfall thundered out of the low tunnel under the bridge, swooping downwards in a thick yellow flood; only when it struck the rocks below did it break into white foam. '

I remembered the old legend that many years ago, when the Turks quit our town for ever, they had thrown from the bridge an iron chest full of ducats, rubies, gold bracelets and huge glittering diamonds as big as hen's eggs.

Before sinking to the bottom, the heavy chest, swept on by the raging current, had been thrown several times against sharp rocks which had split it open. People said that every year, after the ice had gone down the river, the turbulent spring floods brought up gold coins and precious stones from the river-bed. Once, so it was said, in the time of the tsar, Sasha Bobir's grandfather had found a fragment of the ruby-studded crown of some Turkish vizir who had fled before the advancing Russian and Ukrainian army. Beside himself with joy, Sasha's grandfather went to a tavern and scratched a ruby out of the piece of crown. In return for the ruby the tavern-keeper gave him so much vodka that when he drank it he no longer knew what he was doing. Sasha's grandfather woke up at the other end of town, by Windy Gate, without his crown. It had been stolen by vagrant horse-thieves. The disappointment sent the old man out of his mind and he ended his days in an asylum, where he used to wander about the shady garden with a crown of burdock leaves on his head.

When Sasha was admitted to the Komsomol he related even this sad story about his grandfather, and Nikita did not miss the opportunity of saying: "You see, chaps, what wealth does for you! We of the young generation must be free of the power of money and possessions!"

The old folk of our town, however, related the story of the crown rather differently. According to them, it was on this bridge that the Turks had strangled the young Yurko, son of Bogdan Khmelnytsky, and thrown him into the waterfall with a stone tied to his feet. Before his death, Yurko had cursed the Turks and all their treasure.

How many times had we, Zarechye chaps, ignoring the hetman's curse, wandered along the river when it was in flood, our eyes fixed on the muddy bank, hoping to find among the-bits of wood, wet hay, and melting ice, just a small coin to buy elastic for our catapults!...

It was not Yasha's report that worried me. Certainly not! Having thought it over, I had firmly decided that the report did not matter at all. Tiktov could have written anything he liked against me—that I was a supporter of Petlura, that it was me who had planned to blow up Special Detachment Headquarters—and I shouldn't have minded. False accusations can always be exposed sooner or later.

I was not frightened. What depressed me was the sympathetic remarks of my friends, and above all, the strange silence of Nikita Kolomeyets.

"If someone sends in a report against a member of the committee and you are the secretary, you ought to come and tell the chap straight out what he has been accused of. Find out whether it's true or not, but don't pretend to be dumb, don't let a chap torture himself for nothing," I reasoned as I walked up and down along the cliff. And I felt sure I was right.

Nikita's silence—that was what surprised, worried and offended me.

Yesterday we had been together in the hostel all the evening and he hadn't said a word! Although

Tiktor's report was already lying on his desk.

When he sent me to Kharkov, Nikita had said: "You go, you're a lad of spirit!"

Didn't that mean he trusted me? Of course, it did!

Now Nikita was silent. Putting people off with vague phrases! "Human nature at its worst..."

Evening was approaching. A cold wind with a touch of frost in it blew from the river. Again I went up to the little bench on which those familiar letters "V" and "G" were carved. The bench stood on a hummock and the wind whistled round me. I don't know why I slipped my hand in my pocket and took out my Zauer. Even when I went off to work at the factory-training school, I took the pistol with me. Nikita often pulled my leg about it.

"What do you want with a gun at work, Vasil?"

"But where can I put it?"

"Leave it in the hostel."

"That's all right for you, you've got a locker that locks. But mine's always open."

"Ask the locksmiths, they'll put a lock on it for you."

"What's the use of a lock? Locks can be broken."

"Vasil, you're incurable! You've got used to guns. You'd like to be living in the period of War Communism all the time! Vasily Mandzhura can't adapt himself to peace-time conditions!"

I knew that Nikita was joking, but his jokes nettled me a little. Fine peace-time conditions with what was going on all round us!

It was not a year since the Pilsudski men had attacked the Soviet frontier post near Yampol and killed the commander. Quite recently enemies of our republic had murdered the Soviet diplomatic courier Theodor Nette. And the murder of Kotovsky? ... I ought not to be the only one with a gun—all the young workers who lived on the border should be armed and ready for anything. And I went on bringing my pistol to work with me...

I took aim at one of the battlemented towers of the Old Fortress, but it was already rather dark and the sights were blurred.

But what was this mysterious report of Tiktor's? ...

I shoved the pistol into my pocket and wandered back to the hostel, utterly fed up.

Our hostel was unusually quiet. But, of course—there was a film on at the club. All the chaps would be there. Pity I was late.

There were two lights on in the dormitory, one on the ceiling, the other by Nikita's bed.

Our secretary lived with us. There was a heap of books on his bedside locker. As usual, Nikita had stayed at home. "I'll have my fun, when I'm old," he used to say, "now, while my eyes are all right, it's better to read books." "To read books a to exchange hours of boredom for hours of delight." "A book is a friend of man that will never betray him," Nikita often repeated to us the dictums of certain philosophers known only to himself. And he read like a man bewitched—on the way to the hostel, walking blindly along the pavement with an open book before his eyes, at home in the hostel until late at night, and during the lunch-hour, sitting on a rusty boiler in the school yard.

Obviously Nikita had no intention of going out anywhere this evening. He was lying on his bed undressed; his clothes lay neatly folded on a chair beside him.

I walked silently over to my bed and took off my cap.

Nikita looked round and said: "There's a questionnaire for you under your pillow, Mandzhura. Fill it up and hand it in to me in the morning."

My heart sank. Now it was starting!

It must be a special, tricky sort of questionnaire.

"What's it about?" I asked in a whisper.

"For your pistol," Nikita replied, not taking his eyes off the book. "Special Detachment papers aren't valid any more, we've got to make personal applications for permission to carry fire-arms."

A page rustled. Nikita felt for the pencil on his locker and marked something, as if to show that the conversation was over.

All right! I'm not going to beg you to talk...

It was very still. The sound of spring streets floated in through the open window. That special sound of spring! Have you noticed that in spring every noise comes to you as if you were hearing it for the first time? A cock crowed in the next yard and it seemed to me I had never heard such a fine, full-throated crow in my life...

In the stillness of the room, I examined the printed questionnaire that I had to fill in for the right to carry la pistol. I was expecting Nikita to say something about Tiktov's report.

"Oh, yes, Vasil, I nearly forgot," Nikita murmured, looking round. "There's a parcel for you in your locker. I signed for it." And again he buried himself in his book.

The square heavy parcel, criss-crossed with packing thread, smelled of bast matting and apples. Across the bottom was written in indelible pencil: "Sender: Miron Mandzhura, Cherkassy, District State Printing-House."

Now that he had gone to work in Cherkassy, my father sometimes sent me parcels. Everything they contained was shared round the hostel—an apple for one, a lump of glistening salted pork for another. The other chaps' parcels were shared out in exactly the same way.

There were a lot of tasty things in that parcel. And I was hungry. But I could not open it. If I started treating Nikita now, without waiting for the other chaps to come in, he might think I had heard about the report and was trying to get round him—trying to bribe him with home-made poppy cakes.

And sad though 'it may seem, I had to leave Dad's parcel where it was, in the locker by my bed.

I undressed and lay down to sleep, listening to the rustle of pages as Nikita went on reading his book.

CLEARED!

The committee assembled the following evening in the locksmiths' shop at school. The long room seemed much too large for such a small meeting, specially in the evening, when the school was so quiet.

We seated ourselves on the benches. Tiktov, whistling quietly, sat, or rather lounged on the bench opposite me. There was a triumphant sneer on his face, his blonde locks hung luxuriantly over his big forehead. He felt good.

"Let's start, comrades!" Nikita nodded his head and walked forward between the benches. "There's not much on the agenda today, so we'll have time to prepare for the tests as well. We have two questions to discuss. The first concerns the conduct of Komsomol member Yasha Tiktov, the second is to investigate Tiktov's report on the conduct of Komsomol member Vasily Mandzhura, who is also a

member of our committee. If anybody's got anything else they want to bring up, we'll 'discuss that as well of course. Are there any objections?"

"I want my report to be discussed first," Tiktov grunted.

"Why?"

"Because I gave it in two days ago."

"What difference does that make?"

"I write a report and you want to discuss my conduct! What do you mean by it? What grounds have you got for that?"

"What grounds?" Nikita frowned, knitting his thick black brows. "All right then, Yasha, you and I will go along to Central Square and I'll show you the broken window in the pub—it still hasn't any glass in it—and the chaps will wait for us here.. . How about it, chaps, do you agree? Will you wait for us?"

The chaps laughed and Tiktov's face fell. "Don't try your games on me!" he said threateningly to Nikita. "Let's take a vote on it."

"That's always possible," Nikita replied with surprising calm. "All we have to decide is what we are going to vote about. I think we should discuss these questions in order, in chronological order, so to speak."

Tiktov looked bewildered. "What d'ye mean?" "Just this. On the evening of the twenty-first of February, Komsomol member Yasha Tiktov went to Barenboim's pub, got himself roaring drunk, started a fight, smashed a window, failed to turn up after an alarm from Special Detachment Headquarters..."

"There's no more special detachments, so that doesn't matter!" Tiktov interrupted.

"It does matter, a lot!" Nikita said sharply. "There are no more special detachments, they've been combined with the other security organizations, that's true, but we have always had, and we still have, strict military discipline, which is obligatory for every Communist and Komsomol member. I repeat, on the evening of the twenty-first, of February, Komsomol member Yasha Tiktov did not act as befits a member of 'the Komsomol. That's the first point. The second is this. On the night of the fifth of March, Komsomol member Vasily Mandzhura travelled in the same carriage as the escaping counter-revolutionary Pecheritsa and, in Tiktov's opinion, intentionally refrained from detaining him. Let us discuss both questions in that order."

Nikita's harsh words rang out with terrible suddenness in the quiet, dimly-lit room: "... travelled in the same carriage as the escaping counter-revolutionary Pecheritsa and, in Tiktov's opinion, intentionally refrained from detaining him."

So that was the trap Tiktov had laid for me! "The rotten scoundrel!" I nearly shouted the words aloud.

"Let's vote," Nikita continued. "Who is for Tiktov's proposal to discuss his report first?"

The members of the committee sat in silence. Their faces were stern and thoughtful.

"Who is for the proposed order of discussion?"

"Why bother to vote, Comrade Kolomeyets!" Galya called out. "It's quite clear!"

"Perhaps someone has refrained from voting?" said Nikita and started counting hands.

Petka, who had been about to raise his hand, suddenly remembered that he was only a candidate for the committee and had no right to vote. He snatched his plump hand away behind his back, as if he had burnt it.

"The majority, I think .. . Shall we proceed?"

"Ganging up on me, as usual! ... All pals together, aren't you?" Tiktorg mumbled, lowering at Nikita.

"Did you say something, Yasha?" Nikita asked, going pale.

"He meant ... he meant to say he ought to be called to order!" Petka suddenly blurted out in a very squeaky, excited voice.

"Quiet there, Maremukha, I didn't give you permission to speak," Nikita said, and turning to Tiktorg, he went on quietly and very calmly: "Speak up, Tiktorg, say all you've got to say, don't be afraid, speak so- that you needn't complain afterwards that Kolomeyets suppressed your criticism. I believe you'd even go to that length too..."

"What's the use of me saying anything—you've got it all pat like an exercise-book. Get on with it and start running me down!" Tiktorg flung out idly, lounging back on the bench kicking his legs.

Keeping a firm grip on himself, Nikita ignored Tiktorg's last words and began quietly:

"When a Komsomol member drinks and acts like a hooligan, he..."

"What I drank I paid for with my own money and that's none of your business!" Tiktorg shouted.

And then something happened that startled everyone. Never in all our school life had we seen Nikita Kolomeyets blaze up as he did on that quiet evening in the locksmiths' shop.

"Scoundrel!" Nikita shouted so loudly that he could have been heard in the turners' shop next door. "You've got the nerve to boast that you drank on your own money! Who gave you that money you call your own? Who taught you a trade? Who's making you into a citizen? Who's trying to make you live your life decently, for the good of society? Did our fathers fight for your freedom so that you could disgrace the name of the Komsomol in the first pot-house you could find, so that you could hobnob with all kinds of scum—profiteers who only live for the day when we'll be dead? People who ought to have been in jail long ago! They try to get you in their clutches and you drink with them and kow-tow to them. Where's Bortanovsky now, your client, that 'honest craftsman,' as you called him? In jail for smuggling. Go and see the Komsomol members in the militia, talk to Granat, the criminal investigation man, about your friend. He's in charge of that case. Did the best people in Russia die in exile, in tsarist prisons, on the gallows, so that a working man's son, Yasha Tiktorg, should sleep in a puddle in Proreznaya Street, when his mates, with rifles in their hands, were defending their town from Petlura's thugs! 'And even that wasn't enough. You acted like a pig yourself and now you've tried to smear your dirt on someone else. 'Let's see if I can stir up a bit of trouble,' you thought. 'Perhaps it'll help me to save my own skin.' You poor fool! Do you think we can't see why you made that report against Mandzhura? What do you think we are—kids? Couldn't we guess why you suddenly found the energy to write a report of three pages. And with eleven spelling mistakes in it! Yasha, Yasha, it was a crude bit of work, that's a fact..." Nikita paused and his voice became softer. "We haven't come here to punish you. You're our comrade and we want to say this to you: Think what you're doing, Tiktorg! You can live a fine life, a life with sense in it. Clean off that scum of the past! Don't wallow in dirt!" Growing visibly calmer, Nikita went on: "Another chap in your place would have said, 'Yes, I made a mistake, I got tied up in that rotten spider's web. I'll try and see it never happens again.' And that would be the end of it. But you kick up a row and try to make out you're in the right and all the other Komsomol members want to put you wrong..."

"Don't start your propaganda, we've heard it all before!" Tiktorg growled.

"What did you say?" Nikita asked. "I didn't quite hear. Do you mind repeating it?"

"Ask the cuckoo in Proreznaya Street to repeat it, there's one been flying round there a lot lately. I'm not going to cuckoo for you!" And Tiktorg tossed his hair back challengingly.

Pale and tight-lipped, Nikita looked Tiktorg straight in the eye.

Tiktorg sneered.

"Let me speak, Nikita," said Galya Kushnir with a catch in her voice..

I thought Galya was going to reason with Tiktov. Everyone thought so.

"Go on, Galya," Nikita said.

"I think the best thing, comrades, would be for Tiktov to put his Komsomol card on the table here and now," Galya said clearly. "I am very ashamed he still has a card in his pocket." And she looked at Yasha with such contempt that he quailed under her glance and, lowering his eyes, started fumbling in the breast-pocket of his blouse.

"Here you are, Miss," he said, pulling out his 'Komsomol card in a cardboard cover, and offered it to Galya.

"Wait a moment, Kushnir," said Nikita, and put the question to the vote: "Who is in favour of relieving Tiktov of this document?"

All hands were raised. And, then Yasha, it seemed, saw that he had gone too far.

"We'll see what the general meeting has to say about that," he said, trying to sound hopeful.

"Of course we shall, Tiktov," Nikita responded. "Let's go on to the next question."

Yasha jumped noisily off the bench. Straightening his leather jerkin, and dusting off the shavings, he made for the door.

"Where are you off to, Tiktov? We're just going to discuss your report," Nikita called out.

"You can do without me. What's the good of telling you anything! You wouldn't believe me anyway." And Tiktov shrugged his shoulders.

"You can stay at the meeting while we go into your report," said Nikita.

"Thanks a lot! I'd rather take a walk—the air's fresher outside!" And with a show of cheerfulness, Tiktov left the room.

In case we should think he was frightened, Tiktov struck up a song as he clumped away through the dark turners' shop.

Gay nights of Marseilles In the Vagabond Inn...

We waited until the outside door slammed shut behind him, then Nikita looked at us and sighed.

"Yes... Let's go on to the next question," he said bitterly.

But the question no longer existed now that Yasha had gone. No one thought of supporting his accusation against me.

After the meeting I drew Nikita aside.

"Look here, Nikita," I said, "why did you hide that report from me? I've been so worried. . ."

"Me hide it from you? You're very much mistaken."

"Am I! You didn't tell me a thing."

"Why talk about a lot of tripe before it's necessary. I didn't want to worry you over anything. The point is that Tiktov showed himself up with that report. I kept it back for a bit so that all the chaps should understand just how low Tiktov has sunk. It happens like that sometimes. Father a proletarian, a railway worker, but the son gets infected by the petty-bourgeois atmosphere in our town..."

MAP WANTED

Our town's a pretty place, specially in spring, when the willows blossom on Old Boulevard, and the town gateways, the ancient, mossy walls of the Old Fortress, and the watch-towers perched on the cliffs above the river wear a mantle of leaves and flowers. From every crack young shoots reach out towards the sun; on every ledge, where the winds of centuries have piled soil in plenty, the colza blooms, and tender, tousled dandelions sway on their thin hollow stems; here and there festoons of bluish ivy cling stubbornly to the overhanging walls. Sweet, juicy grass grows even on the battlemented tops of the towers, where no one goes, except perhaps a stray goat which has climbed up there by way of the fortress wall and crops the green shoots, heedless of the precipice below.

When you go through the gates, even if the day is sunny, there is often a cutting wind. You look round and there, above you, rise the mighty walls of the Stephen Bathori Tower built at the order of the king of Poland. How gloomy it looks, specially on the shady side. Surely nothing grows there. But no—look, on a ledge four stories up, by some miracle there's a bush of sloe, or is it hawthorn? And swaying on its branches two robins are chirping merrily—and so they should too, with all the town spread out below them. On the river-banks, still muddy from the spring floods, the pussy willows are the first to bloom. Their golden catkins appear on the branches long before the sticky buds throw out their first glistening leaves. And when the willow has bloomed, it is nice to wander along Old Boulevard of an afternoon and listen to the cones cracking on the fuzzy branches of the pines.

You walk along the avenues of Old Boulevard and all the time, now here, now there, you hear that faint snapping sound, as if a bushy-tailed squirrel is scraping away somewhere in the tree-tops, and suddenly a brown cone comes tumbling down from a branch, bounces once or twice on the gravel path and rolls into the young grass. Now and then the warm breeze shakes a cloud of yellow pollen from the trees.

And if you get tired of walking about under the pines, you can sit down and gaze at the yellow clusters of dandelions on the fortress bastions, or the bright patches of colza on the battered rounded walls of the defence towers that once withstood the siege of Turkish raiders from Constantinople. And just by the end of the bridge it looks as if someone has hung out a lot of gay flags on the bridge rail. But they are not flags, they are the bunches of flowers that the cottagers of Privorotye have come out to sell to the townsfolk. Their baskets are full of tulips—red, white, yellow, pale-pink; and they have bunches of white lilies of the valley too, wrapped in damp cloths to keep them fresh. Young shoots of pale-blue periwinkle have long since appeared on the gravestones of the ancient cemeteries; the allotments round the clay-walled cottages of Podzamche are green already and the first soft tendrils of beans, sweet peas, and mauve bindweed are curling round the wicker fences, so that by June they will be able to look out into the street.

It is sad to think that in the midst of such a wonderful spring-time we shall be leaving our home town...

As yet, however, there had been no news from Kharkov.

Sometimes I would wake up at nights and lie in the moonlit dormitory listening to the steady snoring of my neighbours and thinking worriedly about the end of term.

Kharkov was silent.

At times I began to think I had never been there at all, that instead of talking to the General Secretary in his office in Karl Liebknecht Street, I had only seen his picture in a magazine.

One of my troubles had been disposed of on the evening of the committee meeting. How wrong I had been to suppose that Nikita thought badly of me and was planning something against me. When he had read Tiktov's report out to the meeting, Nikita had said for everyone to hear:

"This is what Tiktov writes: 'In view of the fact that Vasily Mandzhura helped Pecheritsa to escape, I, as a politically-conscious young worker, consider that the only thing for us to do is to expel Mandzhura

from the Komsomol.' Well, chaps, I think you know what value to put on accusations of that kind. Mandzhura let Pecheritsa get away, not because he wanted him to escape, but because he did not know what type of fellow Pecheritsa was, and why he was leaving town. I don't know about you, but personally I trust Mandzhura completely."

And two days later, at an open meeting of the Komsomol, Nikita had said:

"Mandzhura did his duty. He has been to Kharkov and fixed things up so that when we finish our training we shall go and work at factories."

"But we haven't gone yet, have we!" came Tiktor's surly voice from the back of the hall.

"As I was saying, we trust Mandzhura!" Nikita shouted. "So far, all we have seen of you has shown that you aren't to be trusted!"

But although Nikita had said in front of everyone that he trusted me, that he believed we should go to the big factories of the Ukraine, I was very much afraid that he might have to say something else later on.

"Of course we'll go!" Furman said to Petka one day, not realizing that I was standing behind him. "We'll go and cart dung in some village or other!"

One more week till the end of term.

It was Saturday and we had no home-work that evening. Some of the chaps and I were walking through the town towards the waterfall. The river had long since returned to its green banks and now that the rubbish had gone was already attracting swimmers.

We wanted to see the last of the chestnuts in bloom on Old Boulevard and, added to that, Sasha had boasted at dinner today that he might go for a swim. Of course, we knew that Sasha would not jump off the wooden bridge over the waterfall, as some of the early bathers did; he wasn't that crazy. Sasha would creep in at the calmest spot he could find. Even so, he had tried hard to go back on his word, but Petka and I weren't having any. Now it was decided: Sasha was to go for a swim while we watched him.

That Saturday evening the old part of the town was very crowded. There were so many people about in Post Street that it was hard to make your way along the pavement.

Not long ago Petka had bought a new blue shirt with a pocket in front. Today he was wearing it for the first time. The blue sateen fitted well over his broad chest.

In his last parcel, Father had sent me a fawn shirt with a high, embroidered collar, and a pair of striped trousers. I had decided to try out my new clothes too.

Sasha Bobir, who had been saving up for a long time, and had not eaten white bread for two months, had at last splashed out and bought a grey suit—coat, vest and trousers in Cheviot tweed. The first time he saw Sasha in this outfit, Nikita said:

"Do you know what's missing, Sasha, old boy? First you need a gold watch-chain to give you a solid appearance, and then you need a tie. You can't run to a gold chain, of course, and I don't think you'd take a tie if it was offered to you free. You know the difference between real culture and petty-bourgeois snobbery, and you don't want us to put you through it at the next self-criticism meeting. That's so, isn't it, Sasha, old chap, our dearly beloved Comrade Bobir? ..."

From the street vendor by the fortress bridge we bought pop-corn and strode on gaily down the middle of the road. Banishing my gloomy thoughts, I too began to smile, as I thought of our Sasha creeping into the icy water.

By this time, we had reached the town hall. Light streamed from the basement windows of the town's

first model Komsomol cafe. The cafe had been opened quite recently by Komsomol members of the food-workers' group in the building that had once housed Barenboim's tavern. Hard-pressed by the finance department's high tax on private enterprise, Barenboim had surrendered, and the whole tavern, the cellars of which extended "far under the town hall, had been handed over to the youth of the town. Komsomol members from the town power station had put in new wiring, the public utility groups had painted the walls and put the floors in order, joiners from our school, under their instructor's guidance, had made fine tables for the new cafe; even we, foundry men, had cast a new stove for it, in our school foundry.

The first Komsomol cafe was the pride of every Komsomol member in our town, and not only because we had taken part in the making of it; we saw that this was the way to deal with the private traders and drive them for ever out of Soviet trade.

As we passed the cafe window, we noticed with pride the young waitresses in white aprons going to and fro between the tables we had made, taking the customers glasses of fragrant Chinese tea, coffee with whipped cream, and flavoured soda water in blue siphons. The cleanliness and order, and above all, the knowledge that no one would fleece you, attracted many customers to the cafe. Nearly all the tables were taken.

While we lingered near the cafe, the door opened and Vukovich and his wife came out. I raised my cap.

Vukovich smiled and gave me a very smart salute, not just a careless wave, but a real salute, with his fingers straight and touching the shiny peak of his frontier guard's cap.

"Who's that, Vasil?" Sasha asked curiously.

"That's. . . Comrade Vukovich," I answered carelessly.

"You mean the Vukovich?" Sasha exclaimed, staring after the frontier guard enviously. "And I never knew. . . But he saluted you. . ."

"What of it? He knows me well."

"Didn't you see him when we were on duty at headquarters?" Petka asked.

"Er, no. . . I didn't," Sasha mumbled.

And suddenly I remembered how Sasha had pretended to be ill, while Vukovich and Polevoi were trying to find out what could have happened to the unknown bandit. All the chaps had peeped out of the guard-room window to have a look at Vukovich; only Sasha had lain on the couch, making his teeth chatter and pretending he had an attack of fever...

"I say, chaps, what about going to the river tomorrow morning?" Sasha said suddenly. "The water will be even colder in the morning."

"Will it really!" Petka jeered. "So you've lost the bet! All right, come on and treat us to some pop. With a double dose of syrup in it, mind you!"

"Hey, chaps!"

Jumping over a near-by fence, Furman and Guzarchik came running towards us.

"Is that how you've been getting ready for your tests!" Petka demanded.

"What tests!" bawled Guzarchik, who seemed to be madly excited about something. "Tell us where we can find a map of the Ukraine."

"There's one at school, you asses. In the cupboard in the office," said Petka.

"What do you want a map for?" Sasha asked.

"I know it's in the cupboard," Guzarchik shouted, ignoring Sasha, "but the clerk's got the key to the cupboard and he won't be here till the day after tomorrow."

"But what do you want a map for?" I asked. "You're taking mechanics."

"What for! Are you joking? Don't you know?" And clapping his hand to his forehead, Monya shouted: "But you don't know anything, you duffers! We're going!!!"

"Going where?" Sasha exclaimed.

"Going, going, going!!! Hurrah! Vivat!" Monka roared, tap-dancing on the pavement.

"Talk sense, can't you!" I shouted at Guzarchik.

"We were sitting there swotting away at mechanics and suddenly we saw the postman. And in his hand there was a letter. A great big thing, with seals all over it. 'Where's your director?' he says. 'I've got a registered letter for him.' So we took the postman to Polevoi's room. Polevoi signed for it, but we didn't go away. We stood there waiting. Just as if we knew what was in it. 'Let's open it up quick, Comrade Polevoi,' I said. So we opened the letter and there were the passes!" And Furman, having babbled out the news, burst out coughing with excitement.

"Special meeting at the school in an hour's time!" Monka put in. "Everyone's got to be there."

"Where are the passes for?" Sasha demanded inquisitively.

"To factories all over the Ukraine. For us! Understand? From the Supreme Council of National Economy!" Furman rummaged in his pocket and dragged out a long slip of paper. "I've copied them all down... Read it out, Guzarchik!"

"Odessa—two places..." Monka boomed with as much pride as if he himself had written out the passes and sent them to us.

"I'm going to Odessa, that's definite!" Sasha chimed in.

"Just the man they're waiting for!" said Furman sarcastically. "They make soap there out of softies like you."

"Don't you get cheeky!" Sasha retorted huffily.

"Keep quiet, Sasha!" Petka begged. "Let a fellow read, can't you? ... Go on, Monka!"

"... The Toretsky plant, Druzhkovka—three places, Enakievo—four places, Grishino—two places... Furman, do you know where Grishino is? You never spent a night under a railway truck there, by any chance, did you?"

"No idea!" Furman grunted stolidly.

"... Makeevka—five places, Alchevsk—four places, Lugansk—one place. . . I say, Lugansk is a big town, I think, why are they sending only one there? Queer..."

"Go on, go on!" Petka said, nudging Guzarchik.

"All right... Kramatorsk—two, Zaporozhye—four, Mariupol—five... That's somewhere by the sea, I think."

"Of course, it is," our know-all Furman grunted, "but the sea's very shallow there; you keep wading out, but it never gets deeper than your knees."

"... Slavyansk—two places, Kiev—five places... Look at that, even to Kiev! That's a wonderful town! ... Bolshoi Tokmak—four..."

"Look here, it's a waste of time reading like this!" Petka interrupted. "We're all in the dark... The thing is to go and find out what Bolshoi Tokmak is and where it is. You might choose, then."

"No one'll let you choose yourself," said Furrnan.

"All the same,... I want to know beforehand where I'm being sent," retorted Petka. "Let's go and find a map. Perhaps there's one in the Komsomol club? Let's go to the club, chaps! We'll have time before the meeting."

The five of us rushed off to the club. We strode past the fading chestnut-trees, past the dense, shadowy park. Someone was singing to the soft notes of a guitar:

We'll dance the "Carmagnole," and may the fight go on!

We'll dance the "Carmagnole," and may the fight go on. . .

How good I felt marching along to the tune of that song, knowing that all my fears were over!

The other chaps talked and joked. Only I had nothing to say. But my joy was greater than anyone's. We walked on past the shadowy park and I remembered Kharkov, the spring morning amid the melting snow on the university square, the bright sun dazzling my eyes, and now, just as then, my heart beat merrily. . .

"The man who sets himself no aim in life is good for nothing," thus Polevoi began his speech at the special pupils' meeting in our locksmiths' shop. "Such people," Polevoi went on, "are just guzzlers of society's bread. But you, lads, are the reserve of the working class, the only force that is capable of remaking the world in a new way. So every one of you, if he wants to be a real man, must keep on setting himself new aims in life. 'Who says I can't!' That's what you should tell yourselves whenever you run into difficulties. Train yourself to hate failure. And failures you will encounter, of course, on your path through life. You have known them here already. We were within a hair's breadth of being closed down. The enemies of the Ukrainian people—the nationalists, the hirelings of world capitalism—tried to harm the country's cause even here. And what happened? We found justice in Kharkov, at the Central Committee of the Communist Party. And here is the result." As he said this, Polevoi lifted the bundle of passes from his table. "These are the blue-prints of your future. But they may turn out to be nothing but useless scraps of paper if you ever let yourself slide, if you say to yourself: 'Enough! I've got everything I want, now I'll sit back and take it easy!' Don't give up, I repeat, when you meet with failure. Don't take it lying down. Clench your teeth and go on ahead again!... You are transformers of the world, remember that! To whom, if not to you, the youth of the Soviet land, does the future belong! You, my boys, are the first shoots of the Revolution. The great Lenin was deeply interested in your future. Be proud of it! You spent your childhood in the old world. Many of you still remember the policeman—that symbol of the past—who used to stand at the corner of Post Street. That past will still try to trip you up. But you must cast off that old rottenness. You have a great future before you, you are in step with the youth of the whole country. Be proud of it!

"I should very much like to meet you, my friends, ten years from now, when instead of young workers you will have become skilled craftsmen, engineers, commanders of production, and what is more—Communists.

"Prepare yourselves for entering the Party right from the start, as soon as you begin work at the new factories. In moments of difficulty and joy rally round the Party. Even before you are Party members, foster in yourselves the qualities of Bolsheviks...

"Yesterday you read the speech made by Mikhail Ivanovich Kalinin to the graduates of Sverdlovsk

University. That speech contained a splendid phrase: "The most valuable thing for a Party worker is that he should be able to work joyfully and well under ordinary, everyday circumstances, that he should be able to conquer one difficulty after another, day in day out, that the difficulties which practical life sets before him every day, every hour, that those difficulties should not swallow up his enthusiasm, that those dragging, everyday difficulties should develop and strengthen his will, that he should see in this everyday work the final aims, and never lose sight of those final aims for which communism is fighting."

"And repeating those words to you, I, for my part, advise you, lads, to work joyfully and well, regardless of obstacles, always seeing before you the bright future—communism.

"At the new places where you are going to work, always foster in yourselves a great desire to find out things that you did not know before. Don't stop. Never stop! Fear only two words: 'slackness' and 'complacency.'

"Others will come after you. It will be far easier for them, but they will envy you, for none of them will see the things that you are now to see and experience... Soon, very soon, you will leave this school. We shall give you travel warrants and you will go away to the big factories. There a great task awaits you. Love your work, carry out your responsibilities honestly. . . Good luck! ..."

As we listened to Polevoi's warm speech, we realized that he was very sorry to part with us. His words were slow and halting, as if he were thinking aloud, and sometimes his voice trembled, but we knew he was speaking from the heart. The words that stuck in my memory were: "You are the first shoots of the Revolution!" There was something wonderfully beautiful about that. Before me there seemed to stretch, as far -as the eye could see, a broad green field of wheat, sown in early spring by the hand of some great man. The first spring storms had swept over it, the ears were beginning to form on the slender supple stems, and now they were shooting up higher and higher towards the sun shining overhead in a deep-blue sky. . .

The meeting was soon over.

Now that Polevoi had told us the glad news that the passes had been received, only one riddle remained to be solved: who was to go where?

Too excited to stay indoors, we again went out for a last wander round the town. Already, it seemed, we could hear the whistle of the train that was to carry us away...

IN THE NEW TOWN

We walked out on to the station square and at that moment a strong gust of wind carried away the straw cap of a cabman who had been sitting on his break waiting for passengers from the station. The cap bowled away across the square like a little wooden hoop.

In a flash the stocky sunburnt cabman had leapt down from his seat and was chasing after it.

"Go it, Volodya! Catch it!" the other cabmen shouted laughing.

Driven by the gusty wind, the cap zigzagged across the square and Volodya had to pounce for it, like a man after a chicken.

Although it was nearly the end of May, the weather here was unusually grim and cold. A damp sea wind slashed across the puddles that gleamed on the square. The low, white-trunked acacia-bushes bowed in the wind and black, rain-filled storm-clouds raced low across the sky, almost touching the station roof.

In these first minutes of getting to know the new town, I remembered very clearly our little border

town, now so far away, with its steep cliffs and mantle of green, and its warm sunshine tempered by the breezes from the Carpathian Mountains. I remembered our final preparations for the journey, the station platform, the meeting we had held there, and the farewell words of our Komsomol secretary Nikita Kolomeyets: "Before you lie the broad vistas of the bright future. Stick to the Party, chaps, as you always have done, and do all you can to help the cause."

Nikita's words were drowned by the squealing whistle of the engine. All the chaps from the factory-training school stuck their heads out of the carriage windows and, squeezed between other passengers, struck up our favourite song: "When we're watching on the border. . ."

How clear the sky had been as we watched the familiar station buildings gliding past. How sunny !... And now, here we were—tossed into the middle of autumn all of" a sudden. And we were supposed to be in the South!

The cabman Volodya ran up to us, shaking drops of water from his cap.

"What about a ride, lads?" he shouted. "Count of Bengal's carriage at your service!" And he slapped the varnished hand-rail of his break.

No one had mentioned taking a cab in the train. We glanced at one another.

Making little puzzled noises with his lips, Petka, our treasurer, kept his hand in his trousers' pocket where the public money was stored. Sasha Bobir, of course, was ready to go without giving the matter a second thought, and eyed the break with pleasure. Breaks of this kind were unknown in our little town, where we only had old-fashioned phaetons.

Tiktor stood a little apart from the rest of us, holding a heavy suit-case. Wrinkling his eyes, he surveyed the square in front of him, pretending that the cabman's proposal was no concern of his.

"Well, what about it, Vasil?" Petka said rather timidly.

"Shall we take it?"

"P'raps we could walk?" I said.

"Walk where?" Sasha burst out indignantly. "It's a long way."

"All right, let's ride," I agreed. "I wonder how much he'll charge though. Ask him, Petka."

"What's the fare?" Petka inquired.

"Nothing to worry about!" the driver grunted and, running up the steps, grasped Petka's basket and white tin kettle. "Jump in, jump in, lads! I won't skin you. Is this all the stuff you've got?" And he pointed to the rest of our things.

"No, hold on, we're not going like that!" I said, stopping the driver. "Tell us how much first." And I thought to myself: "We know your games!. You're nice and kind now, wouldn't think of skinning us, but wait until we get there —then we'll be in for it!"

"Four of you?" the driver asked, glancing round. "Where are you bound—for the holiday resort or Kobazova Hill?"

"The centre," I said firmly. "How much will you charge for four?"

"Count me out, I'm not coming," said Tiktor.

"Why not?" Petka asked.

"Driving in cabs is a bourgeois luxury. We ought to find somewhere to live first, then think about riding around," Tiktor snapped. And swinging his suit-case on to his shoulder, he walked slowly down the steps on to the square.

"Wait, Tiktor, let's. . ." Petka began, but I checked him: "Let him go... He's up to his old game again." "Bit of a handful, that lad!" the driver said indignantly, shaking his head. " 'Bourgeois luxury!' I like that! Why I wouldn't drive a bourgeois for a million rubles. I was a partisan myself once..."

"Well, how much is it to the centre?" I interrupted him. "Oh, I'll take you for fifty apiece." "Too much," I said. "Try some bargaining, Petka!" "How much will you pay then?" the driver asked hurriedly.

"Twenty kopeks each," Petka grunted.

"All right, it's a deal," the driver agreed. "Better than nothing!"

He put Petka's basket and kettle in the break and was about to pick up my wooden case, when I stopped him and said to the chaps: "Why should we take our things? Let's leave them at the station. Then we'll have our hands free."

"Won't they get stolen?" Petka asked.

"Who'll steal them, fat head! The state will be looking after them," I assured him.

The receipt for our luggage was entrusted to Petka, and our treasurer remembering how I had been robbed in Kharkov, plunged the precious document deep into his pocket, glancing warily at the swarthy driver.

We took our seats and the break clattered gaily over the cobbles.

Stone gutters brimming with yellow water stretched along both sides of the road. Low white cottages with red or grey tiled roofs stood back from the road in clean little yards sprinkled with sand and small sea-shells.

Here and there we glimpsed grape-vines, apricots and young cherry-trees through the fences. Flower-beds blazed with nasturtiums and peonies.

We stared curiously at the first street of the town where we were to live and work.

On a sign-board fixed to a corner house I read: "Avenue of the Thirteen Communards," and again I was reminded of our border town and the special detachments.

"Been having a lot of rain?" Petka asked the driver. "Ever since the storm started. Must be the third day," said Volodya, checking the bay horse. "Yesterday we had hail. Great big stuff. More like buck-shot than hail! Knocked the young grapes about."

"But before that was it hot?"

"Africa!-" the driver replied. "I was in the sea most of the day. Sweltering it was. Look how brown I am."

The driver's words cheered us up. So the wind and the puddles in the street were temporary things. If we couldn't find a place to live, it wouldn't be so bad to sleep the night on a park bench.

The familiar figure of Tiktor loomed ahead. He was walking into town with long, heavy strides, carrying his green suit-case on his shoulder.

He had insisted on walking just to show that he did not want to have anything to do with us. But all the same we felt bad about it. He was one of us and there he was, plodding along on foot, carrying his luggage. We really were like a lot of pot-bellied old businessmen jogging along in this flashy break! Petka, who was more soft-hearted than any of us, could not help whispering:

"Let's whistle him, chaps, shall we?"

"We can whistle him," I said, "but he'll only show off all the more. Forgotten what he was like on the journey? He wants us to lick his boots. Nothing doing!"

"Vasil's right," Sasha agreed. "Yasha thinks he's the only pebble on the beach.. . Let him ask for a lift himself, if he's tired."

But Yasha had no intention of stopping the break. He walked on with his head high. The wind ruffled his blonde forelock that bunched out proudly under his grey cap. His eyes were narrowed fiercely. Tiktov pretended not to notice us at all.

Volodya spat. " 'Bourgeois luxury!' Bah! The young devil! Thinks I'll get rich on his twenty kopeks! Carry your luggage, you skinflint... Do you come from the same place as him, lads?"

"Round about there," I answered evasively, reluctant to tell a stranger about our personal relations.

"Come to stay at the holiday home, I expect?" the driver asked, whipping up his horse.

"What makes you think that?" Sasha said in surprise. "Savages, eh?"

"What do you mean, 'savages'?" I asked indignantly. "That's what we call 'em. Holiday-makers who don't book anything in advance. You'll rent a room in some private house, I suppose, and lie on the beach sunning yourselves for a month or two. Is that it?"

Embarrassed by the driver's curiosity, I said sternly: "We've come here to work. We passed out from a factory-training school in our own town and have been sent to work at the Red Lieutenant Schmidt Works. Is there a place of that name here?"

" 'Course there is! Used to be the John Caiworth Works. But they haven't taken anyone on for a long time. Our own folk are -at the office every day asking for work."

We exchanged glances.

"Unskilled, I suppose?" Petka asked worriedly.

"All kinds. Unskilled and skilled. But if you've been sent, may be..."

"And do you know who sent us!" Sasha boasted. "The Supreme Council of National Economy in Kharkov. Felix Edmundovich Dzerzhinsky of Moscow gave the order himself. And our passes say we're to be taken on straightaway. Show him my pass, Petka."

"Not likely!" Petka snapped back at him. "Think I'm going to fiddle about with our papers in this wind!"

Bobir is a silly chap, I thought. Even drags in Comrade Dzerzhinsky to make himself sound more important. Fancy wanting to show such important papers to a man he's never seen before!

The break bowled along down the long Avenue of the Thirteen Communards. Now and then Volodya gave the silky flanks of his bay a lazy flick with the reins.

The street was quite deserted. Here and there we noticed a chance passer-by. The town seemed very quiet. Not much work going on.

"If the local people can't find work, what will happen to us?" I thought. "After all, we're strangers and we're not very experienced. Such a long way from home and from Polevoi and Kolomeyets and Panchenko... There'll be no one to help us if something goes wrong!" And the more I thought about it the less happy I became.

"Where were you thinking of staying, lads?" the cabman asked suddenly.

"We don't know yet..." Sasha volunteered.

"What are you here for, just a spell of practical training, or permanent?"

"If they take us on, we'll be here for a long time," I explained.

"Well, listen to me, young fellows," said the driver triumphantly. "I've got a flat for you. Just the thing! A real dream! The town park's just round the corner, music playing all the summer. If you climb on the roof, you can see a cinema show every Thursday. The place belongs to my aunt. And it's a treat, believe me. The sea's on your very doorstep."

"We don't need a flat. One room would do for us," I said doubtfully.

"Why don't you want a flat, Vasil?" Sasha asked. "If there's two little rooms..."

"Of course! Perhaps you'd like a grand piano and a separate drawing-room!" Petka snapped at Sasha. "If you want a flat, find it yourself. One room will be enough for Vasil and me. Won't it, Vasil?"

"I should think so!" I grunted, realizing that it would be hard enough for us to scrape up enough money for one room, let alone two.

"That's just what my aunt will give you," said Volodya. "My aunt's a nice old soul. Lives alone with the whole house to herself. Makhno's men killed her son, and she. . ."

"But will your aunt take us?"

"Why not! I've only got to recommend you. You'll suit her a lot better than these newly rich. They come here, to the seaside, to get rid of their fat, and then make a fuss: 'Oh, upstairs! It's too high, I've got a bad heart...' No end of trouble they are. But you'll suit my aunt just right."

"Your aunt's got a two-storey house of her own, has she?" I asked.

"That's right. Two storeys," Volodya replied airily. "But there's no furniture—that's the only trouble. What do you care though? You're young. You can buy yourself tropical furniture for the time being—orange boxes and that kind of thing. It's not far from here... Gee-up, Sultan!" And with these words the driver swung off to the left.

The break turned off the road and rolled smoothly down a narrow dusty lane.

This was a nice thing! Going to live with a private householder. In a two-storey house!

I began to look grim. Why the dickens had we got tied up with this gas-bag of a cabman!

But the break drew up sharply in a quiet street, heavily puddled after the rain of the night before, and we jumped stiffly down on the damp sandy earth, and when Volodya introduced us to his aunt, a thin old lady in a long skirt, she turned out to be quite simple and homely-looking.

She was called Maria Trofimovna. Her grey hair peeped out from under a simple, black-spotted cotton kerchief. She came out to us with a gleaming spade in her hands—the old lady had been digging her garden herself.

"I've brought some lodgers for you, aunt. Make them welcome!" Volodya said gaily, cracking his long whip.

NO MORE WORRIES

The "two-storey house of her own" turned out in fact to be a little yellow-tiled cottage standing in a small yard planted with flowers. Farther back, behind the cottage, we noticed the trees of the park and a blue-painted bandstand.

A small dark kitchen and a clean, whitewashed bedroom, the 'door of which led straight into the front passage, made up the whole of the "mansion's" first floor.

From the front passage, which was cluttered with baskets, wooden tubs, and kitchen things, a rather steep and creaky ladder without any rail led up into what appeared to be an attic.

As we climbed up the ladder after the mistress of the house, I expected the two sloping beams that held the rungs to collapse at any moment and send the five of us tumbling down amid the lumber in the passage.

The one and only room upstairs took our fancy at once. Some time ago, by the look of it, it had been converted from an ordinary loft. The ceiling was sloping and the window led straight out on to the roof.

Volodya stood his whip in the corner and, as if he were the owner of the place, flicked back the catch on the window. The dusty little window opened with a creak.

"If you climb out here," said Volodya, "you'll see the screen as well as in the front row, even better. I saw Beast of the Forests last week. No queuing, no charge, and a nice breeze to keep you cool! What more do you want?"

And indeed, even without climbing out of the window, we had a very good view of the white cinema screen in the town park. I leaned farther out of the window and saw the roof sloping away below me, the neighbour's garden on the other side of the fence, and farther away still, beyond the railway line—the sea.

The driver had not mislead us; the Azov Sea, large as life, and pretty dirty near the shore because of the storm, pounded the beach not more than a hundred paces from Maria Trofimovna's cottage. From the window I could see the white caps on the waves. A fishing smack with bare mast was tossing in the bay.

The old lady watched us anxiously as we examined her room. She seemed very willing to let it and Sasha Bobir accordingly acted like an experienced lodger. Where he learnt his tricks, I don't know.

He swaggered about the room, stamping on the cracked floor-boards and poking his nose into every nook and cranny. For some reason he even opened the door in the chimney of the little stove. Noticing a cross outlined with candle smoke above the door, he ran his finger over it with an air of stern disapproval. Finally he examined the ladder; from above, it looked even more steep and dangerous.

"Why no hand-rail?" Sasha asked severely. "If you have to get out of bed in the night, you might break your neck going down there."

"I keep an icon-lamp burning all night in the passage," the old lady answered obligingly.

"What?. . . An icon-lamp? They cause fires!" Sasha said impressively.

"Oh, surdy not, dear! Heaven forbid!" The old lady looked worried.

"What about fuel in winter?" Sasha went on relentlessly.

"Well, if you'll be working at the factory," the old lady said, "you'll have enough fuel. The factory workers always get a ration of coal. Volodya will bring it here for you and we'll store it in the shed where I keep the goat."

"But suppose we aren't working at the factory," I thought. "Suppose they don't take us on and we have to go away altogether?"

"This little attic suits me down to the ground, chaps!" said Sasha emphatically, as if his opinion clinched matters. "Pity it's rather bare, of course."

"But I told you, lads," the driver put in hastily, "buy yourselves tropical furniture for the time being, and later on, when winter's getting near and you've made some money, you'll be able to have all the luxury you want."

"But what are we going to sleep on?" Sasha objected. "You can't get much sleep on an orange box."

"You can buy 'put-you-ups'—camp-beds—but they're a bit dearer, of course," Volodya suggested not quite so confidently.

"But can't we just sleep on the floor?" Petka broke in suddenly. "I like sleeping on the floor in summer. It's good for you. Haven't you got any straw, Gran?"

"I can let you have some hay. There's some left over from what I bought for the goat last winter."

"Hay breeds flees," Sasha said, wrinkling his nose. "Hay and sawdust. Let General Denikin sleep on hay. We'll buy ourselves 'put-you-ups.' Now..."

"Hold on, Sasha," I cut in. "You've done enough talking." And turning to Maria Trofimovna, I said: "If you're willing, I think we'll be staying here. But what about the deposit—do you want us to pay now or later?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. . ." The old lady said helplessly. "Perhaps Volodya could say."

"Listen to me, lads!" said Volodya, thumping the floor with the handle of his whip. "We're all friends together, aren't we? No one wants to diddle you. I've introduced you to my aunt, now you stick to her. She'll be a mother to you. A bit of washing, a bit of cooking when you need it—she'll do it for you. You'll be your own masters entirely, and Auntie, here, will get her keep out of it, won't she? You can discuss the cash later. Now, listen to me, I'm a man of experience. You pop off now to the works, show them those passes you've got from Comrade Dzerzhinsky and find out how you stand. Otherwise you're all in the dark, so to speak. Do you know what grade they'll give you, how much they'll pay you? You don't know anything, do you? But when you've been to the works, you'll be a lot wiser. And in the meantime, Auntie, here, will put her thinking cap on and work out how much to charge you, so that she won't feel the pinch and her nephew, Volodya, will have something to wet the bargain with. Well, shall we be getting a move on? . . ."

Of course, we shouldn't have wasted a minute on this first day of our arrival in the new town. We ought to have taken Volodya's advice and rushed off at once to the works. But we were very keen to discover what the sea looked like at close quarters. We had never seen it before, except in pictures.

The biggest river we had ever seen back home was the Dniester, and that was a good fifteen versts away, along country roads. And in the Dniester, you could only bathe near the bank—if you swam out to the middle, you might get potted at by a Rumanian gendarme.

Leaving the cottage, we turned down a lane leading to the sea, crossed the harbour railway lines, and stopped at the sea wall.

This strange sea that we had never seen before was hurling itself furiously at the shore. Foaming waves thundered against the foot of the wall, then rolled back defeated carrying away pebbles, shells and dead seaweed and making room for fresh waves to repeat the assault. The sea was all hills and dales, and not a calm patch anywhere.

A cloud of cold spray swept over us. With a grimace of distaste, Sasha wiped his freckled face and stepped back.

I must say I had not imagined the sea was like this. What I had expected to see was a great calm expanse of clear blue water.

Once I had given Galya a photograph of myself with the inscription: "My love, boundless as the sea, the shores of life o'erflows."

I had heard these words at the theatre, in a play about seven prisoners who were hung by the tsarist police. I had learnt them by heart and often thought of them. Galya asked me once, I remember, if I had composed them myself. It was a bit too much to tell a lie and say "yes" straight out. So I had to put her off by replying: "What, don't you like them?"

Now, as I gazed at the sea, I remembered the time, not so long ago, when we were still at school. I remembered my friend, Galya; and the line about love being "boundless as the sea" took me back to our far-off town.

Another thing that disappointed me was that the sea here was not boundless by any means. On the left it was bounded by a narrow spit of sand curving to the south-west. At the end of the spit, straight ahead of us, there were some buildings, and farther out stood a sort of pyramid rising quite high out of the water, probably a lighthouse.

The harbour gates to our right were protected by a grey stone breakwater. It seemed to run out of the harbour mole and, from where we were, looked very low, though it must have been quite high really. Only now and then did a wave foam over the massive stone slabs, and these were waves from the open sea, even fiercer than those that thundered on the shore below us.

Buffeted by the damp sea wind and salty spray, deafened by the roar of the waves, we did not hear a girl come up behind us.

We only saw her when she took a running jump on to the wall. The wind wrapped the hem of her blue, white-flowered dressing-gown tightly round her legs. On her feet she wore little pink beach-shoes.

We stared at the stranger.

Taking no notice of us, she stood on the concrete parapet, slim and supple, taking in deep breaths of the stormy air. After a little, she turned and, surveying us keenly, asked loudly:

"Will you be staying here for a while, boys?"

"Yes, just for a bit," Sasha replied awkwardly.

"In that case, do you mind looking after my things for me, please!" And without waiting for a reply, the girl took a jewelled tortoise-shell comb out of her thick hair, thrust it into her dressing-gown pocket, and dropped the dressing-gown on the top of the wall, just in front of Sasha.

Now wearing only a bathing costume, the girl put her foot on the steps and started to go down.

We thought the girl would just take a dip in the surf at the bottom of the wall then run back shivering with cold. That was how most of the women bathed back home, in the Smotrich. But this girl plunged headlong into an oncoming wave, as if she had been doing it all her life. In a minute or two we saw the unknown girl far out at sea. Now her yellow costume showed above the waves, now it disappeared altogether. Instead of turning away from the advancing waves, the girl thrust into them headfirst. Huge walls of water towered over her, but she plunged boldly under them, only coming up again for a second to take breath before meeting another attack of the pounding sea. Now and then she turned towards us and languidly swept the hair back from her face. It was thick and wet and kept getting in her eyes.

"Gosh, a real circus princess!" Sasha exclaimed delightedly. "The way she dives into those waves! ... Could you do that, Petka?" And Sasha sat down on the top of the wall beside the girl's dressing-gown, his eyes fixed on the sea.

"I'd have to find out what the water was like first," Petka replied evasively: "If it's really salty, why not! They say it's easy to swim in salt water; it holds you up."

"It may hold you up, but look at the waves! Can't you see them?" I said. "If a wave like that hit you, you'd go to the bottom like a stone... How will she get out, I wonder?"

"She'll have a hard time getting to the shore!" Sasha agreed.

"Where is she, chaps?" Petka shouted suddenly. "I can't see her."

The girl seemed to have vanished.

"Perhaps she's on the breakwater already," Sasha said dubiously.

"She couldn't have got there so soon," I said, then heaved a sigh of relief: "There she is, you asses!"

Gripping the anchor chain of the fishing smack, the unknown girl was climbing aboard. A wave threw her up and with a final pull she jumped on to the heaving deck. Clinging to the mast with one hand, she straightened her hair with the other, then, like a cabman out in a sharp frost, started flapping her arms round her body. She seemed to be enjoying her rest out there. But now I began to take a less favourable view of her bathing. She had asked us to look after her clothes for a bit, and now, by the look of things she would be swimming right out to the breakwater!

"You're an ass, you know, Sasha!" I said to Bobir. "What made you say we'd stay here! There she is out there, enjoying herself, and we ought to be at the factory. A fine volunteer! . . ."

"All right, then, let's go," Sasha suggested glancing round.

"If we go now, someone may pinch her dressing-gown and she'll think it was us," Petka remarked thoughtfully.

"Come on, Petka, let's go and leave this ladies' man to stand guard!" I threatened Sasha

"I'm not staying here alone. Catch me!" Sasha grunted and hastily moved away from the dressing-gown.

As if sensing our impatience, the girl dived neatly off the smack into the foaming sea. Re-appearing on the crest of a wave, she struck out firmly for the shore. The sea helped her on, pushing her from behind. But near the shore the girl was caught in the backwash of the waves. The foaming rubbish-strewn water rolling back from the foot of the wall swept her to and fro without letting her get any nearer. The girl looked tired. She was swimming slowly to recover her strength.

But just at that moment a huge breaker came roaring towards the beach. As it swept her forward, the girl made a grab for the iron steps, which nearly gave way under the force of the wave.

Somehow the girl climbed up on to the sea wall. She swayed on her feet. Her hair was stuck together and hung down like wet rope. Specks of dirt marked her sunburnt legs.

"Merci for looking after my things," she said breathlessly.

And catching up her dressing-gown she darted away, leaving little wet foot-marks on the concrete.

"Let's go, chaps," I said, turning away from the wall.

When saying good-bye to us, Volodya had pointed out a tall brick chimney rising at the foot of a distant hill with a red flag flying from the lightning conductor.

"That's the Lieutenant Schmidt Works," he said. "Keep on towards that chimney and you'll come straight to the office."

The town was very clean and surprisingly flat, not a bit like our home town with its steep cliffs and gullies.

"Pretty good swimmer, that princess, chaps," said Sasha with envy in his voice. "I wouldn't have gone into the sea in a storm like that. I can still hear it roaring in my ears."

"That's just because you're not used to it," said Petka. "Wait until we get fixed up here. We'll be bathing all the summer. This storm's nothing to the ones we'll be swimming in. One day we'll be swimming out to that lighthouse!"

"Some hopes!" I- said. "It's a good ten versts away."

"But I'm glad we've got a place right by the sea, aren't you!" Petka said, finding it hard to keep up with us. "Think how fine it'll be in the morning. Just run down to the beach and straight into the sea! Then off to work. We shan't even have to wash. Tiktov will be sorry he didn't come with us."

"Don't count your chickens before they're hatched, Petka," I said, remembering what the driver had told us about people without work in the town. "Straight into the sea!" Mind you're not mistaken. We don't know yet how they'll greet us at the factory."

"How do you think they'll greet us? What's wrong!" Sasha exclaimed. "We've been sent there!"

"All this guessing's no good anyway!" I said. "Let's walk faster!" And just then I caught myself thinking about that girl in the flowery dressing-gown.

Some pluck!

THE TEST

The smell of rough coal told us the factory was near. We knew that smell from our days in the foundry at school.

Somewhere near by we could hear a motor chugging. The street lined, with yellow acacias along which we were walking, led into another street running across it. As we turned into this new street, we saw that it was blocked at one end by a green fence. In the middle of the fence there was a similar, green-boarded gate. Above it hung a smart semi-circular sign in iron lettering.

LIEUTENANT P. P. SCHMIDT

ENGINEERING WORKS

As we stood at the corner of the street, the gates suddenly opened and a long line of reapers drove out of the yard. The drivers sat on springy side-seats, urging on their horses. The windmill-like sails of the reapers were motionless. All the reapers were brand new. We could see they had only just been painted with red and black enamel.

As I listened to the rattle of the reapers' broad iron wheels on the hard road and watched the sunburnt drivers in stiff tarpaulin jackets bobbing up and down on their high seats, I could not help remembering the distant state farm above the Dniester, where I had worked three years ago. We had harvested the farm's wheat with just such machines as these.

The machines that we had used on the state farm, however, had been old and rickety, with foreign trade-marks on them; the state farm had taken them over from the former landlords. But these that were driving past us now were new, Soviet ones. Though the sun was still hidden in the clouds, these reapers shone. Their broad sails were glossy with paint. Now their sharp blades were clicking to and fro like hairclippers, with nothing to cut, but you felt that if any wheat or rye got in their path, they would slash it down in no time.

"Do they make them here?" Petka exclaimed in a thrilled voice. "Look how big they are! A bit different from our straw-cutters!"

"Of course they were made here. Can't you see the trade-mark!" And the sharp-eyed Sasha showed Petka the works trade-mark on the side of one of the reapers: "UAMT Lieutenant P. P. Schmidt Engineering Works."

"But what does UAMT mean?" Petka asked. "Is that the station where they're being sent?"

"Can't you guess!" I said, remembering the same letters on our passes. "UAMT means 'Ukrainian Agricultural Machinery Trust.'"

"What machines!" Sasha crowed. "They take some putting together, I bet. Trickier than a motor-bike engine! I am glad they sent us here!..."

The gate-keeper directed us to a little house at the back of the works yard. We stopped hesitatingly at a black oilcloth-covered door marked "Personnel Department."

"Who's going^ to do the talking?" Sasha asked, glancing at us.

It was a decisive moment and he looked worried.

"Vasil's our team-leader, let him speak," Petka muttered hastily.

"Give me the passes," I said.

A typewriter was clattering in the long, low-ceilinged room. Beside a typist with blonde wavy hair stood a young man in a grey checked suit, chewing a cigarette and dictating. His hair was glossy with hair-cream. I was struck at once by his huge lemon-coloured shoes, with long pointed toes. In the stiff collar of his starched shirt he wore a black bow-tie. His trousers were modishly narrow, well pressed and so short that his ankles showed. Many other people besides me must have thought, "Here's a dandy!" and felt accordingly suspicious of this dressed-up young man.

"... Thus the number of personnel at the plant is gradually increasing," the hair-creamed young man was dictating nasally to the typist. Then, seeing us, he asked in surprise: "What do you want?"

"Good morning!" I said, striding up to the dandy. "Here!" And I held out the passes to him.

He frowned, took the mangled cigarette out of his mouth, silently read all the passes and, returning them to me, said in an affectedly deep voice:

"Altez!"

"What?" I said.

"Not needed," the dandy replied, making a scornful face.

"They were given to us by the Supreme Council of National Economy," Sasha burst out.

"I can read," said the young man with a sidelong glance at Bobir. "And I repeat: we do not need workers with your qualifications."

"But we've been sent to your plant, comrade!" I said, looking the dandy straight in the eye.

"Well, I didn't invite you!" And he spread his arms like an actor. "How can you complain! I don't understand! Why, only a half an hour ago, I accepted a student from your place. Leokadia Andreyevna, what was that blonde fellow's name? You know, the one you said was like your friend, Comrade Kuchkov."

"Tiktor," the typist replied languidly, glancing at a sheet of paper. "He wasn't like my friend, he was like the Don Cossack Kuzma Kuchkov!" And so saying, the typist turned away from the dandified young man and stared indifferently out of the window.

"You see, there was room for one, so I took Tiktor on. And incidentally, I did so at my own risk, because if the town labour exchange gets to know about it, I may collect a nice raspberry. We've got enough local people queuing up, as it is. Even footballers!... But you, young people... Alas!" And again he made that theatrical gesture with his arms.

"We're fifth graders!" Petka exclaimed. "We've been studying a long time and. . ."

"I know and I understand," the young man interrupted Petka and tossed his cigarette out of the window. "I come from the working class myself and I quite understand your awkward position, but there's nothing we can do about it!"

Encouraged by the sympathetic tone the young man had adopted, I asked:

"What shall we do?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Take the train to Kharkov. You'll get there tomorrow morning. Get the Supreme Council of National Economy to send you somewhere else. To the Don has perhaps. It's all the same to you."

"What do you mean—'all the same to us!' " Petka burst out indignantly. "Where do you think we'll find the money to go to Kharkov? It cost us the last of our grants to come here."

"Well, I can't help it," the dandy replied, and looked out of the window, obviously anxious to finish this unpleasant conversation. I looked at the carefully pressed lapels of his waisted jacket, at his tough, sunburnt, bull neck, and at the fastidiously knotted bow and thought: "What can we do? What else can I say to this dressed-up noodle? He simply doesn't want to understand what a hole we're in."

Realizing-, however, that it was foolish and pointless to say anything, I turned to my friends and muttered:

"Well... Let's get going, if that's the way things are..." "Au revoir," the dandy called and moved closer to the typist to continue his dictating.

Coming out into the yard, I sat down on the cold stone step. Two workers in rust-stained tarpaulin jackets were pushing a truck of small but for some reason rusty castings along a railway line. I gazed at the workers with envy, although the work they were doing was rough and demanded very little skill.

"What shall we do, eh, Vasil? What are you sitting there for? Can't you hear?" Petka mumbled, standing over me. "We were fools to go with that cabman! That was my fault! We ought to have come straight here with Tiktov. And now he's been taken on and we're left out in the cold," Sasha admitted, very upset.

Sasha's words, his distressed, frightened face spotted with freckles, brought me to my senses.

"The driver's got nothing to do with it, Sasha. Suppose we had all four come here together? There was only one place going. Then what? They might have taken you on, but what about us?"

"Don't get peeved, Vasil! Think of something. You went to Kharkov, you got these passes..." Sasha said very peacefully.

Suddenly I remembered the farewell words of our director at the factory-training school Polevoi: "Don't give up when you meet with failure. Don't take it lying down. Clench your teeth and go on ahead again!"

These words and the memory of all the other things Polevoi had said made me even more furious with that hair-creamed bureaucrat in the office.

"We'll have to go to the very top... That's what we must do!... To the director... And if he doesn't help us— to the Party Committee!" I said firmly.

... The director of the works turned out to be a short grey-haired man in blue overalls. At first we did not believe that he was the owner of the well-lighted office cluttered with machine parts, cultivators, castings, test-tubes of sand and copper filings...

The director's office was more like a laboratory, or an assembly shed. Had it not been for the diagrams on the walls, the comfortable leather arm-chair, and the big oak desk with its telephones and inkstand, we should have thought we had made a mistake.

When we filed into the room, the director was standing at a vice with a hammer and chisel in his hands. The vice was clamped to the window-sill. It held a piece of rusty metal.

Scarcely looking down, the director was cutting through the metal with firm, heavy blows, like a regular mechanic.

Noticing us, he put the hammer down on the window-sill and wiped his hands.

"What can I do for you, young people?"

He looked like an old craftsman and reminded me a little of the fitters' instructor at the factory-training school.

The very tone of the director's voice told us that he was a calm, considerate man. True, he did not read all the passes. He glanced at the first and, when I told him what a fix we were in, he asked:

"All of you from Podolia?"

"Yes, all from the same town," Petka said.

"You've come a long way then. From the Carpathians to Tavria! I know your town a bit. We marched through it on the way to the Austrian front. Some big cliffs and precipices round your way, aren't there? And a fortress standing on the top of the cliffs."

"That fortress is still standing there!" Sasha exclaimed, and we all cheered up a bit.

"But I must say I don't recall there being any industry there," the director said. "Where did your factory-training school spring from?"

"There's a factory-training school, but not much industry yet," I answered, although I knew the workers of the Motor Factory, who considered themselves a big plant, would have been mortally offended had they heard me. "That's why they sent us to you, because there's nowhere to put us at home yet. The Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukraine told us that young workers like us would soon be needed everywhere—in the Donbas and in Yekaterinoslav and... here!" I added.

The director raised his shaggy eyebrows and looked at me shrewdly.

"You don't need to tell me they've sent you, I can see that for myself..." he said slowly. "But they never asked beforehand whether we needed you just now. Where am I going to put you to start with—that's the question."

He picked up the passes from the desk, looked through them again, and shook his head.

"Which of you is Maremukha?"

"Here!" Petka shouted, as if he were answering roll-call at the Special Detachment Headquarters, and stepped up to the director..

"Well, what can you do, Maremukha?"

"I'm a joiner and ... and a turner. I can turn wood."

"Wood?" the director said in surprise. "I thought bread was your speciality. You look as if you knew how to put it away."

Sasha and I laughed at Petka's confusion. Plump and rather clumsy, he stood at attention before the works director like a soldier. His trousers were badly crumpled from sleeping in them during the long journey.

"Well, Maremukha, your luck's in," said the director. "Good joiners are just what we happen to be short of. And I don't suppose there are any down at the labour exchange. Now which of you is

Mandzhura Vasily Mironovich?"

I stepped up to the director.

"What are you, a 'Galician?" the director asked.

"Why?" I said, taken aback.

"The name's Galician. . . But you're not far from Galicia in any case. Almost the same people as you, they are. Only the Zbruch in between... Well, what has Vasily Mironovich Mandzhura got to say for himself?"

"I'm a foundry man!"

"A foundry man?" The director walked over to the little table, picked up the first piece of metal that came to hand, and holding it out to me, asked: "What metal was this cast from?"

"Pig iron," I said, looking at the broken length of metal.

"Oh, was it?" The director puckered his eyes slyly, giving me a piercing glance.

Without another word, he went over to the vice, took out the old, battered piece of metal, put in the piece he had just shown me, and gave it a resounding blow with his hammer. The metal bent like proper iron, but did not even crack.

"Well, is it pig iron?" the director asked and glanced at me even more slyly from under his shaggy brows.

"That's nothing," I said slowly. "There's all kinds of pig iron. Malleable, for instance..."

"You mean ductile, don't you?" the director corrected me, livening up noticeably.

"Yes, ductile."

"And how do you make pig iron ductile?"

"You have to ... put a bit more iron into it ... and a drop of steel..."

"Steel? Steady on, that'll make the casting more brittle! Everyone knows that steel makes iron brittle."

"You have to cast the metal first, then anneal it in special ore... Manganese ore, I think," I said, remembering what our instructor Rozakevich had told us.

"Ah, anneal it!" the director grew even more lively, and a pleased smile spread over his face. "That's the answer to the mystery! I've been struggling with that annealing for over a year now, counting from the time when the workers elected me director of the plant. We took this plant away from the foreign capitalists after the Revolution, and when they ran away with the Whites, they took all the production secrets with them. They thought we'd be done for without their help. But little by little we're finding things out ourselves. Now we're getting down to the secrets of annealing by scientific means, so to speak, so that we won't have to do our founding by rule of thumb. I mean to give the pig iron at this works the same ductibility as iron itself. Get it? So that if a peasant starts harvesting his wheat with one of our reapers and happens to run against a stone, nothing will go wrong. So that the teeth won't break! And those teeth, lad, are a great thing. They save the blades from all sorts of devil's tricks. Get it? And I want the Ukrainian peasant to feel thankful to us for our reapers! It's not enough to blather about bringing town and country together. Those teeth are the things that'll do it!" And the director stroked the rusty piece of metal as if it were a favourite kitten. "Well, young man, what did they teach you?" he asked, swinging his gaze on Sasha Bobir.

"They put me in the fifth grade as a fitter," said Sasha, "but the thing I like most is taking engines to pieces."

The director eyed Bobir, chuckling slyly. "You take engines to pieces! That's the spirit! And who puts

them together again after you?"

"I can put them together myself, if there's need. Depends on the engine. If it's a Sunbeam motor-bike, I can do it easy as pie," Sasha could not help boasting.

"I'll have to put you into RIP then," the director decided.

"How do you mean, 'RIP'?" Sasha's voice trembled slightly.

"That's what one of our departments is called—the Repair, Instrument, and Power department. We call it RIP, because it's easier to say. RIP caters for all the other departments."

Going through our passes again, the director said: "Well, you, young people, for right or wrong, I'm going to take you on at the works. Why do I make such a favour of it, you'll ask. Because in our country there is still unemployment. We've got lots of people and, as yet, not many factories. But that will pass, I'm sure. Very soon we shall get rid of unemployment, just as we've got rid of other troubles. We'll build new factories and maybe, one day, no one will believe that there ever was such a thing as unemployment in Soviet times. But at the moment it exists... All right then, go round the works today, get your papers in order, and tomorrow, at the sound of the hooter, report to the foremen. If you'd been local lads, I'd have sent you to queue up at the labour exchange. But sometimes, I repeat, we have to make exceptions. But mind you work well, to the best of your ability! -Get it? No shirking or turning up late! This is a Soviet works. Get it? We've sent the old owner, John Caiworth, packing, and taken the business we built for him into our own hands. It's to our own advantage to run the works properly. We value and respect workers who treat the works as their own... Any Komsomol members among you?"

"All of us," Sasha put in hastily. "And Vasil was even on the committee!"

"All the better!" the director said gladly. "Those Komsomol lads are a great help to us. When you've signed up in your shops, go to the works Komsomol committee and see Golovatsky. Put your names down there and start your new life."

GETTING SETTLED

Our landlady gave us three long canvas sacks. Petka and I stuffed them with dry, prickly hay and, after sewing them up, propped them against the shed where the goat was bleating to be milked.

Maria Trofimovna wanted to wash the floor in our room herself, but we had got used to the job while living at the hostel, and we decided we could manage without her help. Petka carried up buckets of cold water from the little well in the yard, while I, barefooted and with my trousers rolled up to the knees, scrubbed the cracked boards with a wet rag. Then I cleaned the window. When I had polished it, the window let a lot more light in, and we were both glad to see our little room so spick and span.

In the tree-surrounded house next door, which faced the sea, someone was playing the piano. The windows of the house were open and the sounds of the piano floated into our room, mingled with the bleating of the goat and the boom of the near-by sea, which as evening approached was falling into a calm.

"What a window! So clean you can't even see the glass!" said Petka, surveying my handiwork.

"Bring up the mattresses!" I commanded, encouraged by his praise.

And while Petka went for the mattresses I worked out where we should spread them. I decided to put mine right under the window. "It'll be chilly at night, but I'll get the fresh air. And-I'll be the first to hear the works hooter in the morning," I thought.

The room smelt fine of freshly scrubbed boards and hay.

As I listened to the sounds of the piano, I found myself wondering anxiously how I could kill time until tomorrow morning—the first morning at our new place of work!

The only thing I could remember about the works—not counting our conversation with the director, of course—was the long and dusty alley in the foundry, down which I had walked to reach the foundry office. What with the distant glare of iron being poured from the furnace, the clatter of the moulding machines, the clang of the signal bell, the screech of the tackles which the foundry men used to lift heavy moulds—I had been so stunned by it all that I had not even noticed how my future mates in the foundry worked.

How little this huge foundry with its low glass roof resembled the tiny foundry at our factory-training school, which was always quiet and fairly cool, and where even on casting days there was no noise to speak of.

Fedorko, the shift foreman, whom I met in the foundry office, a little man of about forty, with a red weather-beaten face and sparse scorched eyebrows, showed no surprise when I gave him the note from the director. Perhaps the management office had rung him up before I arrived.

Fedorko put my name down on the foundry register and gave me a worker's ticket and a temporary pass.

"I'll put you on a machine tomorrow," he promised.

"But I've never worked on a moulding machine before," I told the foreman with a gulp.

"You'll get used to it," the foreman said shortly. "Two weeks probation is a long time."

And that was all. The only thing for me to do was to say "good-bye" and leave the office.

With difficulty I sought out the little house near the management building where, as a passing worker told me, the Komsomol fellows "hung out."

Finding a door bearing the notice "Works 'Komsomol Committee," I pushed it open.

A tall man was standing with his back to me on a chair in front of a large map, swishing a ruler about over the territory of China. The room was barely furnished with a desk, bookshelves, a cupboard, and about ten chairs. Maps covered the walls.

The tall man turned round, and to my surprise I noticed that he was wearing a neatly-tied crimson tie.

"Who are you looking for?" he asked, surveying me closely. His eyes were grey and rather clever.

"I want to see the secretary of the Komsomol," I said rather surlily. "I'll come in later."

I was about to go, when the man with the ruler jumped noisily to the floor.

"How do you do!" he said loudly, holding out a big sinewy hand. "I was just studying the situation in China."

Although the stranger wore a Komsomol badge in the lapel of his handsome dark-brown suit, I had already been put off by his smart appearance, particularly his tie, and was anxious to get away.

"I'll come in tomorrow," I muttered.

"Why not today?"

"When today?"

"Why not stay here now? I'm the secretary. Let's get to know each other. My name's Golovatsky. Who are you?"

Something seemed to choke me and for a minute I could not say a word. This was news! The secretary of the works Komsomol organization wearing a tie! Who had ever heard of such a thing! The main point in all the debates we had ever held about culture and petty-mindedness was that the more attention a young man paid to his appearance and all that nonsense of creased trousers and particularly the wearing of a tie, the sooner he lost touch with his mates and became a grubbing bureaucrat who did not understand the needs of the working class. Nevertheless I had to tell Golovatsky what had brought me here.

"What do you think of the opposition?" he asked me guardedly, obviously trying to sound my attitude.

"What, have you still got opposition supporters here?" I countered.

"They weren't our own. A lot of riff-raff came here, got themselves jobs and tried to stir up the workers. It didn't come off. The day before yesterday, when the district Party active debated the decisions of the April Plenum of the Party Central Committee, everyone voted unanimously for the Central Committee's line. Our people stuck together well and those traitors didn't get a look in. Now you answer me, what is your personal attitude to the opposition?"

"My attitude?" I said more calmly, realizing that I was dealing with a real, decent sort of fellow. "I think it's high time that Trotskyite riff-raff was kicked out of the Party and the Komsomol. We've got enemies all round us who want to strangle Soviet power. We must stick together and rally round the Party. Those opposition supporters want to spread disagreement among us."

"Well, I'm very glad you've been put in the foundry!" said Golovatsky. "They're good lads there, I know, and last year when we smashed the Trotskyites who had wormed their way into the management workers' Komsomol group, the Komsomol foundry men were the first to come out for the Party line. They got the whole works round them and didn't let those traitors dig themselves in. But since then, some of the chaps have gone away to the Navy, on the Baltic, and there are not so many active members now. And we'll soon be holding re-elections. . . Now tell me, what have you got a leaning for?"

"I don't drink," I said gruffly.

The secretary frowned. "I didn't mean that. What Komsomol work did you do before? What are you keen on?"

Little by little I told Golovatsky about our Komsomol club and about the evening debates on such subjects as "What came first—thought or speech, the chicken or the egg?" I told him about the mock trial of Don Quixote, and about the evenings of self-criticism, at which every Komsomol member went through the mill for his shortcomings. I also said a word or two about the discussions on culture and petty-mindedness, staring at the secretary's crimson tie, as I did so.

"Oho!" Golovatsky exclaimed joyfully. "You've got some sound working experience behind you, good experience too.

That's fine. Everything flows, everything changes. Every Komsomol member ought to keep his mind alert and active. That's the only thing that can save us from the danger of turning into human cabbages. I'll take account of everything you've told me." And he made quick notes on a pad. "You've obviously got a leaning for cultural work with the masses. We may even entrust you with the job of organizing a Time League' society in the foundry. That's an important job, you know." Golovatsky glanced at his watch. "But for the time being, old man, I'll ask you to concentrate all your energy on the fight against defective output. Your department is on piece-work. But piece-work under a capitalist is one thing, and it's quite a different thing under our Soviet system, when we are working for ourselves and are interested not only in quantity but quality. Some of the foundry men don't understand that. They bash away as hard as they can go, and give us a lot of spoilage. Pay special attention to these castings." And Golovatsky took down from the bookshelf a casting just like the one the director had shown us. "That must be the most perfect casting of the lot," he went on. "All the other castings must be perfect as well, of course. But this one

particularly. And you, as a 'Komsomol member, must wage a campaign against bad workers. Find out where the trouble lies..."

"But I've never worked on a machine before!" I interrupted the secretary, repeating what I had said to the foreman. "I worked on the moulding-bed. I can do fly-wheels even without the bottom mould-box."

"You'll catch on," said the secretary, and he seemed to know something about the foundry. "Where's your card? . . ."

And now, as I stared through the clean glass of the window, I remembered the cold, abrupt words of the foreman, "you'll catch on," and my conversation with Golovatsky, and I thought, "Suppose things go wrong? Suppose I still haven't learnt to work on a machine after two weeks and they tell me to get out! What will happen then?"

I began to feel as if I had never been to a factory-training school, as if the fifth grade that I had qualified for there meant nothing, as if I didn't know anything at all and should have to start tomorrow right from the beginning again. And since I did not know what awaited me on the following day, I felt even more worried.

There was a creak on the stairs and Petka appeared. He was carrying a small round table with a long, thin centre leg.

"Look at this!" Petka said, puffing with exertion and pride.

"Did Maria Trofimovna give it you?"

"That's right! 'Until you've got your own furniture, you can use this,' she says, 'I don't need it.'"

"Now we've only got to get hold of some stools and we'll be all set."

"Maria Trofimovna was asking me what to cook for dinner tomorrow—vegetable borshch or cold cherry soup? 'I don't know,' I says, 'let the other chaps decide.' What do you want, Vasil?"

"What does she think this is—a restaurant?" I replied frowning.

"Well, if she's agreed to give us full board, let her get on with it."

"We don't know yet what wages we'll be getting."

"Don't worry, we'll get our due," Petka said confidently. "When I was signing up, one of the joiners told me that none of them get less than a hundred, even the third-graders!"

"It's all right for you, Petka, you'll be doing work you know. That's easy! But I've got to requalify. Blowed if I know how you use one of those moulding machines! I've never even seen them before."

"Don't worry, Vasil! If you're in a spot, you can always count on Sasha and me."

"Where's Sasha got to?" I said, glancing at the old alarm-clock that our landlady had put on the stove-ledge. "What's become of him? It's over an hour since he left."

"It's quite a way to the station, you know. He's got to find Volodya and get the things. Then he's got to buy some grub. Our landlady won't start cooking for us till tomorrow, you know,"

We had sent Sasha to the station to get our luggage. While he was away it had been our job to stuff the mattresses, wash the floor and get the room ready for sleeping.

"Did he make a note of the address?" I asked Petka. "Perhaps he's been wandering all over town and can't find the way back."

"What for? We agreed that he'd get hold of Volodya at the station and Volodya would bring the stuff

back free."

"Oh yes, that's right," I said. "Well, we've finished our job, let's go for a stroll."

We walked past the landlady, who was ironing our sheets in the kitchen, and opened the gate.

"Let's go left, Petka," I suggested.

We walked along Primorskaya Street towards the harbour, passing the house from which the music had been coming a little while ago.

Now the piano was quiet and a clink of glasses could be heard from the house—it must be their tea-time. The yard in front of the house was a mass of hollyhocks, young vine bushes, tea roses, purple carnations, and mauve wistaria. The sweet tobacco was not out yet, but the scent of flowers, freshened by the recent rain, seemed to pour over us from behind the low fence. Roses of a kind that I had never seen before climbed under the eaves of the roof, weaving a flowery archway round one of the open windows.

In the corner of the garden, just by the fence, stood a summer-house, covered with dark green ivy and mauve convolvulus.

As we passed the summer-house, I heard the sound of voices and could not help glancing in.

On the rail of the summer-house, swinging her sunburnt legs, sat the girl whose dressing-gown we had minded on the sea-front. Kneeling on one knee beside her, pumping a bicycle tyre, was the dandy from the personnel department. I stared at the girl as if I had never seen anyone like her before. Noticing my glance, she raised her eyes and freed her hair from the ivy with a pettish shake of her head. I felt awkward. Blushing, I gave a sort of half nod. As I turned hurriedly away, I noticed that the girl was smiling. "Did you see who that was, Vasil?" Petka asked, nudging me with his elbow. "Who?"

"The princess there?" And mimicking the girl, Petka squeaked: "Do you mind looking after my things, please?..." "Didn't you recognize the lanky fellow?" I said. "What lanky fellow?" "The one who was pumping the tyre." "No. Who was he?"

"That toff who wouldn't take us on at the works!" "-Really?" Petka exclaimed. "You don't mean to say they're our neighbours?"

"I'm sure the girl in the dressing-gown is!" "And he's her brother," Petka declared. "Why should he be! Her boy friend most likely!" For some reason I didn't like to think that the dandy knew the girl next door and might tell her how we had begged him to give us a job.

Petka and I wandered slowly down Primorskaya Street. The railway lines leading to the harbour gleamed on our left. Beyond them the sea stretched away to the horizon.

The wind had dropped completely and the sea was calm. Instead of thundering against the wall, as they had in the morning, the waves rolled up the sandy beach with a rustling sound. A wooden fence ran along the railway line. Above it swayed the tops of masts. The flags on them scarcely stirred. A scarlet sunset gleamed in the west, where the sinking sun was still wrapped in clouds.

On the whitewashed fence there was a notice in big letters:

LIFE-SAVING SOCIETY BEACH

A bicycle bell rang behind us.

We pressed against the fence and the dandy flashed past on his bicycle with the girl on the cross-bar in front of him. He rode awkwardly, but at a good speed.

"Isn't the street wide enough for him?" Petka grunted.

"Don't you see the puddles on it? He's afraid of dirtying his pants," I said with unconcealed annoyance, staring after the rapidly disappearing couple.

The back wheel of the bicycle grew smaller and smaller, leaving a faint pattern on the sandy path.

By the time we had finished staring through the railings at the sidings and a number of long, corrugated-iron warehouses in the harbour yard, Sasha Bobir had brought back our cases and unpacked everything.

We found him getting supper ready. Sasha was carving a big dry roll that had been left over from the journey into three big hunks.

"Where have you been all this time?" Sasha cried when he saw us. "Do you know who I met?"

"The Count of Bengal?" I asked sarcastically. I didn't like Sasha's habit of yapping at you as if you were a kid.

"You can joke!" Sasha snapped. "I've seen Pecheritsa!"

"Pecheritsa?" Petka repeated. "Look out, Vasil, he's starting again. Where's the thermometer? It's time to take his temperature. Feeling shivery, Sasha, old chap?"

"What thermometer! What do you need a thermometer for!" Sasha gave a positive screech of indignation. "I'm telling you the truth, you laughing loons!"

"Hold on, Sasha, old pal," I said. "Who did you say you saw?"

"Pecheritsa!"

"Really?"

"Of course!"

"Where did you see him?"

"Near the station."

"Near the station?" Petka asked more seriously.

"Yes, near the station," Sasha rattled on. "He was drinking buza."

This was too much, and Petka and I yelled with laughter.

"Hear that, Vasil?" Petka asked gurgling. "He saw Pecheritsa, Pecheritsa was drinking buza, and the buza went to this freckle-faced boozer's head, and he's come back here to booze us up too..."

"All right!" Sasha shouted, by this time thoroughly put out. "If you don't want to believe me, you needn't! But I'm not making anything up. Buza is what people drink round here, it's made of millet. It's on sale at all the stalls. I've tried it, and if you don't know about it, it's not my fault. . ."

Much as we should have liked to spare Sasha's feelings, we could not restrain our laughter.

Sasha was not the only factory-school trainee who had dreamed of catching Pecheritsa. When we set off for our various destinations in the Ukraine, we had made a vow that if any of us ran into Pecheritsa we should not let him slip through our fingers.

But the one among us who longed most of all to nail Pecheritsa was Sasha Bobir. By catching Pecheritsa he hoped to make amends for the unfortunate blunders he had committed back in our town. After a time, our hot-headed Sasha simply started seeing things. He imagined he saw Pecheritsa

everywhere.

On his way here, to the Azov Sea, Sasha had twice been on the point of catching Pecheritsa. Once, when the train stopped at Fastov, Sasha, who was looking out of the window, suddenly shouted hoarsely: "There he is, chaps! Grab him!" and made a dash for the door.

The man strolling about the platform whom Sasha had taken for Pecheritsa bore little resemblance to the runaway.

He turned out to be a little hump-backed old man in a tarpaulin coat. Only his big ginger moustache made him look anything like Pecheritsa.

In Yekaterinoslav, when we were having dinner in the station buffet, Sasha nearly upset a plate brimming with rich Ukrainian borshch, and croaking "Look!" pointed with his spoon at the newspaper kiosk.

A man in a grey rain-coat was buying postcards. This time Sasha had decided that he was Pecheritsa. As soon as the traveller in the grey rain-coat looked up from the kiosk, we -all saw at once that he was a young lad a good head taller than Pecheritsa...

Now, knowing the illusions that Sasha had suffered from the journey, could we be expected to take his words seriously?

I said: "All right, Pecheritsa was standing there drinking buza. What did you do?"

"I just took a look and dashed back here."

"Why didn't you grab him? You ought to have grabbed him by the scruff of the neck and laid him flat."

"All very well for you to talk! What about the things?"

"What things?"

"Our things, of course! I was afraid to leave them. Suppose he ran away and I went after him, someone might have nabbed our stuff."

"What about Volodya, where was he?"

"I didn't go with Volodya, you see. Another driver brought me here. Volodya let us down."

"Wait, had he got a moustache?" I asked, deciding to test Sasha.

"A moustache?... No, not a moustache. . . Just little bristles, like a glue brush."

"He got it trimmed at the barber's to please Sasha," Petka remarked sarcastically.

"Go on, go on, laugh if you're so cheerful!" Sasha grunted huffily. "But I'm going to report this to the proper place."

"All right, give it a rest for a bit, Sasha, old chap," I said gently. "Better tell us what you've bought for supper."

"Here's some goat's cheese," Sasha said quite subdued, and unwrapped a piece of grease-proof paper in which lay a piece of goat's cheese that must have weighed well over a pound.

"Is that all?" Petka snorted.

"No, why? Here's some fish I brought... Don't touch that, they're radishes. This is the fish." Sasha unwrapped an oily package. "Look how small they are!" And he lifted three strings threaded with tiny smoked fish out of an old newspaper. The fish had little fat bellies and were glistening with oil. "They're called tulka!" Sasha announced proudly, and hung a string of fish on his wrist, like a bracelet.

"Couldn't you have found something smaller!" Petka grunted disapprovingly. "What trashy stuff! Who's going to clean 'em?"

"Why clean 'em!" Sasha exclaimed. "They don't need cleaning. You eat 'em whole. Look, they showed me at the stall."

Our "quartermaster" pulled a couple of oily fish off the string and popped them in his mouth. After munching for a bit, Sasha opened his mouth like a conjuror, then boldly swallowed the tulkas, heads, tails, and all.

"You'll be getting appendicitis next!" Petka said. For some reason, Petka was more afraid of appendicitis than of any other illness. He was even frightened of swallowing a cherry-stone.

But Sasha's bold example made Petka forget the illness that threatened him. He carefully broke one fish off the string and started nibbling it.

"Tastes all right. . ." he murmured. "You can't even feel the bones. Kamsa, isn't it?"

"Not kamsa, tulka!" Sasha corrected him pompously.

" 'Tulka, tulka!' " I mimicked Sasha. "You didn't bring back some buza, by any chance?"

"I hadn't got a bottle," Sasha replied, thinking I was serious. "But if you want some, we can go and have a glass after supper. There's a kiosk round the corner that sells it."

"Listen, Petka," I commanded. "Buzz downstairs and get some hot water and a bowl from the landlady. We've got to soak the cheese."

While we polished off the tulka, the marble-like goat's cheese, rid of some of its salt and bitterness by the boiling water, grew soft and very good to taste.

We cut it with an old sheath knife and ate it with our tea.

When we had had supper, we took the crockery downstairs and spent a long time washing ourselves by the well in the yard. Then, refreshed and contented, we climbed up into our attic and lay down on the bulging mattresses.

The window was still open. Outside, it was already dark. Now and then a young moon peeped through the ragged, scurrying clouds and the room grew lighter.

"Isn't it quiet here, chaps?" said Petka, breaking the silence. "No shooting, not even a whistle. Makes all the difference when the frontier's a long way away! Only a couple of militiamen in the whole town, probably, and I expect they're asleep..."

Maria Trofimovna clattered some pots and pans downstairs. A primus was hissing in the kitchen. Our landlady must be making breakfast for us overnight.

"We're daft, you know!" Petka spoke again. "When we started at the factory-training school we ought to have all gone in for one trade. Then we'd all be working together in one shop. It'd have been much more fun. Now we're split up..."

And again no one answered Petka. I realized that Sasha, too, who had been making himself out very brave, must be wondering how his work would go tomorrow.

It grew darker and darker outside. Again the sky was wreathed with clouds and the moon showed no more. The steady beat of the waves lulled us as if we were still in the train...

AT THE MACHINE

"Here's a new mate for you, Naumenko!" said Fedorko, the shift foreman, leading me over to an elderly worker who was busy adjusting two moulding machines.

The worker turned round. He was over fifty. Tall and grey, wearing a rough homespun shirt with short sleeves, he looked in surprise at Fedorko.

"Show him the ropes," the foreman said, nodding at me. "You'll get the average while you're instructing."

"Now look here, Alexei Grigorievich! Put him with someone else!" the old man protested.

But the foreman interrupted him, waving his arms:

"You've got to do it, Naumenko! You're an old operator and it's your duty to teach the youngsters."

And the foreman vanished behind a wall of empty iron mould-boxes.

We were left alone. Naumenko eyed me sourly. Evidently it would have suited him far better to mould alone, than to bother with a pupil and have to answer for his work.

When the foreman was gone, my teacher spat deliberately at the ground and said to the moulders working behind the barrier opposite: "Just my luck! First they give me a drunkard to put right, now I've got to teach milksops!"

The men laughed. One of them, tall and thin, with close-cropped hair and dark prominent cheek-bones, looked like a Mongol. The other, with sharp, prickly eyes, was short. He went on packing his mould and said: "Not half, Uncle Vasya, you certainly do pick 'em!"

"But I mean it!" My teacher complained to his neighbours. "Things were going fine today, I thought I'd have fifty moulds ready by dinner-time, and now I'll have to start again from scratch." And turning to me he asked gruffly: "What are you looking down in then mouth for? What's your name?"

"Vasily Mandzhura."

"Hey, what are you moaning about, Uncle Vasya, you've got a namesake! You'll be able to celebrate your name-day together, think how much you'll save!" shouted the nimble little man with sharp eyes, working fast at his mould.

"Ever worked 'em?" Naumenko asked, nodding towards the machines.

"Never seen one before. I always used to work on the moulding floor, I didn't have anything to do with machines."

"Oho, Uncle Vasya, you've got an expert on artistic casting!" cried the sharp-eyed worker. "He'll soon be teaching you to cast sculptures in your old age!"

"Where was it you worked on a moulding floor I wonder?" Naumenko asked with evident curiosity.

I realized that hand moulding was valued much more highly here than machine-work. I had to relate how I had come to be in this town.

Naumenko heard me out patiently.

"All right, we've done enough chin-wagging," he said at last. "Get to your place!" And he nodded to the left-hand machine.

I had to make my way to the machine along a narrow passage past a tall stove, nearly the height of a man, which stood between the two machines. Also between the two machines stood a deep box of special moulding sand, which the men here called "mixture." On my left and on Uncle Vasya's right towered a wall of empty iron mould-boxes piled one on top of the other.

My feet sinking in the dry sand I went up to the machine. There was a babbitt model of some kind of

bush fitted to it.

"You take the bottom, understand?" Naumenko called to me. "These bushes are called 'sausages.' You'll pack the bottom and I'll do the top. Watch and see how it's done."

At first I could not take my eyes off the machine. I pulled the mysterious iron bars sticking out at the corners and touched the two gleaming slippery conical bolts soldered to the model.

"Hi, youngster, look this way!" Naumenko shouted angrily.

With a swift heave he planted a gleaming iron frame with wing-nuts at the sides on similarly gleaming pins, then without looking round, he took a mould-box off the back row, placed it in the frame and deftly tightened the screws. When the screws held the box firmly in the frame, Uncle Vasya took a bag off a shelf and shook it over the model. The babbitt "sausages" were powdered with an even coating of sand. Still without looking round, my instructor dipped his hand in the box and, taking a handful of the mixture, sprinkled it over the model.

The next moment Naumenko had a shovel in his hands. He plunged it into the heap of sand that lay between us and began tossing the sand into the mould. Steam rose from the scattered heap. Apparently the sand had not yet cooled from yesterday's casting.

I watched him closely, trying to remember every movement.

Naumenko smoothed the damp, hot sand with his gnarled but supple hands, picked up a short tamper and started ramming the sand down.

The muscles rippled in Naumenko's rugged old arms. The sharp wooden wedge on the end of the tamper plunged into the sand with such violence it seemed Naumenko wanted to smash the machine, or at least drive it through the floor.

The tamper crushed and forced the sand into the grooves of the model. More and more sand went into the mould-box, until it was hard as a cart-track. Naumenko went over the uneven surface of the mould with a square tamper, removed the tin top and levelled off the mould with an iron ruler. Then with a long vent wire he pricked the ventilation holes. After tapping the bottom of the mould with a mallet to loosen the model in its sandy casing, Naumenko with a deft swing gently raised the packed mould with its iron frame on the four corner bars. For about a minute, my instructor changed from energetic pounding to gentle, cautious, almost delicate movements, while he took the model out of the sand.

The rounded babbitt bushes of the model had done their work, leaving a clean nest for the future casting in the tightly-packed sand.

With a hook Naumenko made a groove in the sand for the pouring lip. Before I noticed where he had taken it from, a rubber hose-pipe with a brass nozzle, like the nozzle of a soda siphon, appeared in my instructor's hands. Naumenko pressed the lever on the nozzle and a stream of compressed air hissed over the mould. After cleaning the frame, he tossed the hose away behind the machine.

"Now we'll set it. Follow me," he said.

With an effort he lifted the rather heavy mould-box in its frame off the machine. Holding it in front of him, he ran quickly to the moulding floor.

Four moulds that Uncle Vasya had packed before I came already stood on the dry sand of the moulding floor, behind our machines. The lower half of a fifth mould lay like a pillow on the soft sand. In it there were four cores that would form the holes in the iron "sausages."

Treading gently, Naumenko walked to the fifth mould and covered it with the moulded top half that I had just seen him make on the machine. The smooth, black-leaded pins of the upper frame fitted tightly into the holes of the lower frame, so that the upper mould rested exactly over the lower mould, joining the channels along which the iron would flow, and the edges of the future castings.

Although everything I had just seen was new to me, the experience I had already gained helped me to imagine how the dry cores were neatly encased in the grooves of the upper mould, and how the finished iron "sausages" would slip out of the mould after casting. And I pictured at once those important parts of a machine which at harvest-time would ply to and fro over the broad fields of our country. And again I felt glad that I had chosen such an interesting and skilled trade.

Meanwhile, Uncle Vasya, making sure not to shift the mould, carefully unscrewed the frame, lifted it, took it apart and threw me the bottom half.

"Catch!" he shouted.

The rather heavy iron frame was hard to catch without practice. Using both hands, I managed to grab it just before it hit the ground, and one of the wing-nuts jabbed into my knee.

"Now go to it yourself!" Naumenko said, taking a packet of cigarettes out of his pocket. "And we'll have a smoke."

Trying not to make a mistake, I repeated the movements he had worked out and tested through long years of practice. Having screwed on the frame, I dipped my hand into the box and without looking, tossed a handful of mixture over the model. Then I started plunging the sharp shovel into the sand. I danced about round the machine, packing the sand with such fury that my arms felt as if they would fly off my body.

It made me sore to think that Naumenko looked upon me as a nuisance. I realized that from his point of view, as an old and experienced moulder, he might be right. Of course, it was a lot nicer for him to get on with his moulding alone than to teach a beginner. As yet I did not know what the foreman had meant when he said, "You'll get the average for instruction," but I concluded Naumenko stood to lose by being given a mate like me.

As I packed in the sand, I felt the sweat break out on my forehead. As usual, I was wasting a lot of energy for nothing. There was sand in my boots, and my teeth felt gritty. Now and then I felt Naumenko's eye on me. He was watching me suspiciously, distrustfully, checking every movement.

"Can I lift it now?" I asked.

"Try," said my teacher evasively.

"Right," I said and, after tapping the mould with the mallet, pulled the lever.

Before I could clean the mould with the hose and take it off the machine, the men on the other side started laughing.

"What's the bit o' cake you've left on your model, youngster?" the tall, dark fellow shouted.

I glanced under the mould—and felt utterly wretched. A big lump of sand had stuck to the model. Some cake! Naumenko stood behind me laughing.

"Fine job o' work, eh?" Naumenko said to the nimble little man, whose name was Luka, nodding at me. "Forgot your sprinkle—that's where the cake comes from," he explained to me.

But I had already realized my mistake. In my hurry I had forgotten to dust the model with dry sprinkle from the bag on the shelf. "But that old devil's a nice specimen too!" I thought. "Saw I had made a mistake and didn't say anything, so that he could make a laughing-stock of me!"

When I had knocked the sand out of the mould, Naumenko said: "Yes, and I expect your model's cold by now. It's some time since I gave it any heat. Take the tongs—behind the box there—and come along to the grate." Carrying the long forge tongs and not knowing really what I should need them for, I followed Naumenko down the main alley of the foundry.

My teacher strode on with long steady strides. His head was slightly bowed. I trotted behind him like

a guilty schoolboy, guessing that he was not in the best of tempers. "Giving me a kid to train from Podolia somewhere!" Naumenko must be thinking. "Now I've got to fiddle about teaching him instead of getting the work done myself!"

We crossed the long foundry shed.

Now from one side, now from another came the banging of a mallet. Mountains of empty mould-boxes towered behind the machines. Near them, finished moulds stood ready to receive their castings.

Powerful ventilators hummed monotonously. They forced air into the cupola furnaces, fanning the slabs of coke and melting the chunks of iron. The molten metal oozed down over the hot coke in white streams and gathered at the bottom of the furnaces in a seething mass, ready to pour out as soon as the furnace man tapped the furnace with his steel bar.

"Look, Naumenko's got a new lap-dog!" someone shouted from the back of the shed.

The shout came from a foundry man with a bronzed surly-looking face. His head was wrapped in a red handkerchief, like a woman.

"Vasya, old man, how do you like your new assistant?" he shouted even louder, thinking that Naumenko would stop for a "chin-wag"; but my teacher went on all the faster.

As we passed the next machine, I caught sight of Tiktov. He must have recognized me, but he looked at me as if I were a stranger.

Tiktov was throwing sand confidently into a mould-box. He was working as mate to the man who wore the handkerchief on his head.

The "grate" was outside in the yard, a little way from the foundry, lit was a round brazier filled with hot coke. The ends of metal slabs that were heating in the coke bristled from its grated sides.

"Remember where I put ours!" Naumenko said, and pushed two heavy slabs into the glowing coke.

"Do you have to come out here every time?" I asked.

"Of course!" Naumenko gave me a look of surprise and annoyance.

"But it's so far!"

"If you want a clean mould you'll keep your slab heated. There's no other way!" Naumenko snapped.

He took the tongs and pulled out the slabs which he had put in earlier, and which were now white hot. I felt sure that if we had not come for them at that moment the slabs would have melted like the iron in the furnaces.

"Now buzz off and put them under the machine!" Naumenko ordered, handing me the tongs.

Holding the tongs out in front of me, I raced back to our working place.

"It's a big place but the way they manage these slabs isn't much good!" I thought, as I pounded along through the shop. "Surely they could put that brazier somewhere nearer?"

The slabs were still a bright red when I pushed them into the slots under the machine. Soon the wet sand on the babbitt turned grey and dried out. The models got so hot that it was hard to keep your hand on them for long. Still Naumenko did not appear. So as not to waste time, I started packing the bottom mould on my machine.

Now that I was alone with the machine, I felt more at ease. No one was standing over me. Our neighbours were busy somewhere behind their machine, and there was no one else about.

"Let the old fellow go for a walk round the shed," I thought, "I know a thing or two without him telling

me!"

The second mould came out nicely. No sand stuck to the model, as it had first time, and I even took the risk of setting the mould on the moulding floor without waiting for instructions. It slid out of my hands gently on to the sandy pillow.

Then I shot back to the machine. After cleaning the well-heated model with air from the pipe, I screwed on the spare frame and started packing another bottom mould. I had no hopes of catching up with my teacher, but I wanted to have a little work in hand.

I became so absorbed in moulding that I did not notice Naumenko's return.

"Who's going to do the cores? Your uncle?"

Naumenko's stern voice at my elbow made me start. The heavy tamper missed its aim and came down hard on my left thumb.

It was an awful wallop. Tears started to my eyes. "Good-bye to my thumb-nail!" I thought.

I wanted to shout and hop about and writhe with the pain, I wanted to hurl that darned iron tamper as far away as I could, I wanted to turn the air blue with curses! But I realized that if I did so I should only call forth fresh jeers, and to smother the pain I bit my lip until it bled. Keeping my face averted so that Naumenko should not see my tear-filled eyes, I said quietly, through clenched teeth:

"I'll just finish this bottom one, then I'll do the cores."

By dinner-time my thumb had swollen and turned blue. The bone felt as if it was broken.

"Who thought of making tampers heavy as that?" I thought to myself. "It might crock a chap up for good... But if it's too light, it won't pack the sand in properly. I'll have to be more careful next time."

When I had to take a mould-box off the machine, I tried desperately to smother the pain. Hiding my feelings from Naumenko, I undid the screws somehow, grabbed the frame and dashed back, trying to save every minute I could. There wasn't even time to shake the sand out of my shoes.

"You're wearing the lad to a frazzle, Naumenko!" Luka shouted to my teacher.

"Why don't you knock off for a bit!" advised Gladyshev, Luka's mate, the moulder who looked like a Mongol.

Although their words stung me, I tried not to show it. You can joke! I thought...

The signal was given to knock off for dinner. Since the works hooter could not be heard amid the din of the foundry shed, when dinner-time came round, the furnace men banged on the iron bar that hung near the furnaces.

Ignoring the signal, I kept working at my moulds.

One after the other the mallets fell silent. Only the furnaces by the wall kept up their ceaseless roar.

"Right. Pack in. Let's go for dinner!" Naumenko said sternly. "Come and wash your hands."

Cold water from the tap splashed on my dusty hands and the pain immediately relaxed a little. Seeing my teacher take a handful of coarse sand from a tin, I did the same. The coarse sand mixed with clay cleaned the dirt off well. Soon I saw my red, work-scarred palms, with the beginnings of fresh corns on them.

In silence I followed Naumenko back to the machine, picked up the lunch that our landlady had prepared for me, and sat down near my teacher.

With slow dignity Naumenko unwrapped his lunch— three eggs, a slice of smoked chebak, curly-topped radishes, a hunk of home-baked bread with butter on it, and a bottle of strong tea.

"Never mind, lad!" Naumenko said suddenly in a kindly tone. "You and I'll earn our bread today—that's a fact. And tomorrow we'll get enough for borshch, and after that, before you know where you are, you'll be having cutlets. . . It's always hard to start with... I've got a boy too, just a bit older than you. Used to work here, in the foundry. Now he's in Yekaterinoslav, studying at the mining institute. At first his letters were all moans and groans. 'I'll never stick it! I'm coming home!' he says. 'It's much easier at the works!' But now, he's not doing so bad. Got into the swing of it. Looks as if he's rumbled this science business. Getting cheeky too: 'When I'm a mine manager, Dad,' he says, 'you can count on a job as time-keeper,' ... Hey, what's happened to your finger?" And looking at my hand, Uncle Vasya frowned.

Now that I had washed the black-lead dust off my hands, the congealed blood under my battered thumb-nail showed up well.

"Just gave it a knock," I said lightly.

"Just a knock! Why, your finger's swelled up like a priest at Easter. Why didn't you show me before? Off you go to the first-aid room. They'll give you a certificate."

"No first-aid room for me!" I said as cheerfully as I could. "Fancy bothering a doctor with a little scratch like this!"

"You're a fire-eater, H see, lad!" said Uncle Vasya, shaking his head. "Want to stick it out. Well, you know best. But they'll always give you a certificate for a thing like that."

There was a note of respect in his voice. He spoke to me as if I had been his partner for a long time. That was something worth far more than any direct praise.

A LADY WAKES ME

My friends were not back yet—their shops stopped work later than the foundry. Unlike the day before, the weather was blazing, but in Maria Trofimovna's half-dark little kitchen it was surprisingly cool; and even in our little room, though we were right under the roof, the air was fresher than out of doors.

The beach was crowded with people. Some were bathing, their wet limbs glistening in the sun. Others were lying motionless on the sand.

As I watched the scene from the window, I felt like going out myself to lie in the sun until Sasha and Petka arrived, and at the same time to have a wash after work.

I did not think for long. Kicking off my working boots, I rolled my clean clothes in a bundle, put on my cap, and after telling the landlady where I could be found if I was needed, ran out barefoot into the yard.

I had only been inside the house for a few minutes, but when I came out the sunshine dazzled me and I walked to the gate blinking. The tall hollyhocks seemed to tremble in the heat.

The sun had made the concrete top of the sea wall nearly red-hot. When I had run a few paces along it, I had to jump down on to the sand. But that was even worse. The top layer of sand was so hot that it seemed someone must have warmed it up purposely on a huge frying-pan. Bathers were lying about everywhere, basking in the sun. I did not envy them in the least.

Tired but proud after my first day's work at the factory, I considered them loungers. "While they twist and turn about here, all for nothing, covering their noses with bits of tissue-paper and lilac leaves," I

thought, "we, foundry men, carry about heavy ladles of molten metal." And I felt I had a better right than anyone to rest on the beach.

Near the, water's edge I found a little vacant bench. Somebody's clothes lay at one end, covered with a folded blanket. I undressed slowly and, pushing my working clothes under the bench, walked down to the water.

During the night the sea had fallen back, leaving a stretch of smooth sand at the water's edge. The beach sloped evenly into the water, as if it had been rolled specially for the convenience of bathers. Faint, clear ripples lapped the shore—the last sighs of the storm-tossed Azov Sea.

I swam about for a bit near the shore, then came out on to the sand and flopped down on it. And only then, as I lay with closed eyes on the soft sand and listened to the soft lapping of the waves, did I realize how tired the day's work had made me. And although I lay completely relaxed, letting my whole body rest, I still felt as if I had a tamping iron in my hand and was plunging it up and down in the black moulding sand that still steamed from the previous night. "Faster, faster! Keep going! You mustn't get behind Naumenko!" I muttered to myself. A shovel jumped into my hands. Then the signal bell rang in the distance. "Our turn!" Naumenko's stern voice seemed to come from the sky. "Drop everything. Come and get the iron!"

... We plod through the dry sand of the main alley. Strong hands behind him, gripping the ring of the ladle, Naumenko leads the way. His wrinkled neck is red with exertion. His sweat-soaked shirt clings to his back. I plod along behind, gripping the handles of the ladle and feeling that I shall fall at any moment. My strength is ebbing. I can hardly drag one foot after the other. My eyes are fixed on a blob of sticky brown slag. It floats gently in the ladle, surrounded by a wreath of glaring molten metal.

I can't go on. It's still a long way to the machines. If only we could get there soon! If only we could put the heavy ladle down on the dry sand, rest a little, wipe away the salty sweat that is streaming down our foreheads into the corners of our eyes! Relax our grip, if only for a minute!

"Faster! Faster!" I think, but I feel the ground giving way under my feet. . . A hole! The hole dug in the centre of the moulding floor where the foundry men pour the metal that's left over!...

I try to stop, but Naumenko strides on ahead. I fall. The ladle slips out of the handle. Molten metal flows over my chest, over my legs. I'm so hot...

Losing consciousness, I utter a deep groan, and just at that moment there is laughter above me and the touch of something cold. . .

Heavy drops of cold water were falling on my chest. They quickly scattered the remnants of my short but terrible dream.

Without opening my eyes, I tried to remember where I was. I had quite forgotten that I had fallen asleep on the beach. It seemed to me that I had dozed off while waiting for my friends in our room, and that Sasha, finding me asleep, was playing the fool as usual and pouring cold water on my chest.

"Stop playing about like a kid!" I grunted peevishly, and rubbing my eyes, blinked up at someone who was not Sasha at all.

The girl from next door stood over me holding my towel. She was glistening wet from head to foot.

"It's bad to sleep in the sun, specially for fair-skinned people. You'll get burnt!" she said.

Still in a daze, I leapt to my feet. The people lying round me looked like a lot of ghosts.

"I didn't mean to make you wet, I was going to cover you with the towel. I'm sorry."

"It's all right. Thanks!" I muttered, and ashamed of being found asleep by this smiling girl, I staggered away and plunged into the sea.

Burrowing into the rippling waves, I swam away as fast as I could. But the water seemed icy. Soon I turned and swam back to the shore.

The girl was sitting on the bench. Now, since she had made the first advance, I had every right to talk to her, but I hadn't the faintest idea what to say. Should I ask her where she had learnt to swim so well? No, that would sound silly. My mind was a blank. It was even hard to cough. But as if anxious to help me out, the girl spoke first:

"And it's not very good to run into the sea like that all of a sudden either. The water's still cold, and you're overheated. You'll catch a chill."

"Oh, come..." I murmured.

"Yes, you will. I've been living at the seaside for a long time. You've only just arrived, there's a lot you don't know yet. You ought to listen to people who know better."

"What makes you think I've only just arrived?"

"Nothing. I know you have."

"That's queer, how do you know?" And seizing the chance of prolonging the conversation, I went on: "Well, you're quite wrong, as it happens. I've been living here a long time, in Matrosskaya Settlement."

"You can't fool me. I know all about you."

"Well, what do you know?"

"That you've just come here."

"Who's been telling you that?"

"A magpie told me. The bird with a tail, you know." ": "There aren't any magpies here. Magpies live in woods; here it's all sea and steppe."

"Well, a cormorant then... Stop beating about the bush. I'm your neighbour and I saw you cleaning your teeth by the well only yesterday evening. Besides, Maria Trofimovna told us that she had some new lodgers, very nice young men."

"You don't mean to tell me you know Maria Trofimovna!" I exclaimed. It was the first thing that came into my head.

"But of course! We've been buying goat's milk off her for the last two years or more. Daddy has trouble with his lungs and the doctor makes him drink goat's milk."

"Goat's milk does a lot of good," I declared. "A friend of mine, Sasha Bobir, who's living with me now, was a real consumptive. His mother made him drink a mixture the doctor made up of goat's milk and melted fat..."

"Did he get better?"

"Strong as a horse. Only grinds his teeth a bit when he's asleep."

The girl laughed and, after a pause, asked: "Why did you come here?"

"To work."

"But where?"

"At the Lieutenant Schmidt Works."

"And what are you doing there, if it's not a secret?"

"Working in the shops. I'm in the foundry, for instance, and my pals are working in other shops—Maremkha in the joiners' shop, and Bobir in..."

"Technicians, I suppose?" the girl interrupted me.

"Why technicians? Workers!"

"Workers? Just ordinary workers?"

"Yes. What's so surprising about it?"

"Oh, nothing. I was just asking... And afterwards you'll be going to the institute, will you? I suppose you haven't been working long enough yet to qualify for entry?"

Now I could see quite plainly that the girl thought we were the sons of profiteers or something. "Come to another town, to make up their working record," she must be thinking. I should have been offended at the mere suggestion, but keeping my feelings to myself, I said stolidly:

"We'll see about that later on, when we've done some work. It's too early to make plans yet."

"You must have the worst time of the lot, in the foundry?"

"Why? Nothing unusual about it."

"It's the most unhealthy shop in the whole works. There's always that stinging smoke. And it smells of sulphur. The roof is so low!"

"They're going to make the roof higher soon. The supports have been put up outside already."

"But when will that be? I'm very sorry for you."

"How do you come to know all about the foundry?"

"Daddy took me round once. To show me how iron was made. H had to shampoo my hair for ages afterwards, to get the dust out."

"Fancy them letting you in. . . No outsiders are admitted to the works usually."

"They let me in," the girl said carelessly. "And I'm not an outsider anyway. My father is chief engineer there. You must have seen him about."

"I haven't yet," I admitted. "It's only our first day."

"Oh yes, I forgot.. . What's your name?"

"Vasil."

"Well, let's introduce ourselves. My name is Angelika. My friends call me Lika." "Good," I grunted.

"Oh, but how strange you are!" the girl burst out laughing. "A real crusty character! What do you mean 'good'? When people are introduced, they shake hands. Now then?"

"Why am I crusty? Talking to each other's the same as being introduced, if you ask me. But it's up to you, if you want to!" And I awkwardly offered Lika my wet hand.

She pressed it with her slim fingers, and just at that moment I heard Sasha's indignant voice behind me:

"Blow you, Vasil! We've been calling you and calling you, Petka even climbed out on the roof, and you..."

It jerked my hand away, as if it had been scalded.

Before us stood Sasha and Petka. They seemed to have been running. Sasha gazed in astonishment, now at me, now at Lika.

Our neighbour, without a trace of confusion, surveyed my friends.

"Come and have dinner!" Petka blurted out.

"These are your friends, are they, Vasil?" Lika asked. "Why don't you introduce us?"

"Get to know each other, chaps..." I mumbled, utterly embarrassed. "This is ... this is..."

Taking matters into her own hands, our neighbour got up from the bench and, stepping towards my friends, said:

"Angelika!"

That took them properly by surprise. Petka clutched the girl's right hand, Bobir, her left, and both pronounced their names.

"So you are Bobir!" Angelika said curiously, looking the subdued Sasha straight in the eye. "It's you who grinds his teeth at night, is it?"

Nothing could have wounded Sasha more. He stared at me indignantly. What scorn and reproach were in that glance! It sounded as if H had been telling tales to this girl about Sasha in order to shame him and raise myself in her eyes. But I had never intended to humiliate my friend. It had just slipped out...

Conversation between the four of us was obviously a failure, so we left Angelika on the beach and walked home.

"Look at that... indualist!" Sasha exclaimed, tripping up again over that difficult word. "There were we shouting ourselves hoarse, and what was he doing—holding hands with his beautiful damsel beside the Azov waves! And only yesterday he made all that fuss just because I offered to mind her clothes. . ."

Should I tell them how it had really happened? They would never believe me. No matter how I tried, they would never believe me! And I decided to say nothing.

THE CABMAN TELLS HIS STORY

In the centre of the town, near the market, several buildings stood jammed together in a small square. This was the place where every evening the youth of the town took their walks. And although all four pavements belonged to different streets, the aimless wandering round and round the square was known as "strolling down the avenue." The strollers dawdled along past the lighted shop-windows, just as they did back home, down Post Street! And as soon as we mingled with the idle stream, I realized that every town has its Post Street. True, the evenings in this seaside town were much warmer than back home, in Podolia. Bronzed young men sauntered along the pavements in white, loose-fitting "apache" shirts, light trousers, and with sandals on their bare feet.

It was very stuffy, and Bobir, who had decided to cut a dash in his Cheviot tweed, soon discarded his jacket and carried it on his arm.

Several times we stopped by the brightly-lighted entrance to the watermen's club, where a comic film The Cigarette Girl, starring Yulia Solntseva and Igor Ilyinsky, was being shown. But every time we talked each other out of it and turned back. We considered that we could not afford to spend money on the cinema yet.

Today Petka had earned three rubles forty kopeks, I, two ninety, and Sasha, though his boasts reached the five-ruble figure, seemed uncertain just how much was due to him. But in any case we should not get the money until pay-day. .

We had finally decided to take the cheapest seats, when I overheard someone near the box-office

say that the film would be shown next week in the open-air cinema in the town park. And that put our minds at rest. Fine! We would go out on the roof and see it free.

"Hi, lads, come over here!" a familiar voice shouted from the boulevard that ran along the other side of the street, in front of the watermen's club.

We crossed the street and caught sight of Volodya the cabman. He was sitting on a bench with two other people, smoking. Volodya was wearing a worn pea-jacket and a broad-brimmed straw hat. When we drew nearer, I saw that his companions were the men who worked on the machine next to me—Luka Turunda and Gladyshev.

"Move up!" Volodya ordered his companions and they made room for us on the bench. "Sit down and tell us all about it. Well, did they take you on at the works?"

"You're behind the times, old man," Luka remarked, as he moved down the bench. "Vasil is our next-door neighbour on the machines, so to speak."

"Which of you is called Vasil?" Volodya asked. I pointed at my chest.

"Were the others taken on as well?" the driver inquired. "Of course!" Petka said, for all the world as if the question had never been in doubt.

"So I'm in luck, eh!" Volodya exclaimed cheerfully. "Come on, lads, get ready to wet that bargain of ours!"

"Wetting the bargain can wait," Sasha cut in firmly. "Where did you get to yesterday? Why didn't you turn up at the station as you said you would?"

"I went to Mariupol," said Volodya, "an engineer asked me to take him there. I went off with him straightaway after I introduced you to Auntie."

"Can't you go there by train?" I said in surprise. "You can, but there's an awkward change at Volnovakh. You have to wait all day for the train. This engineer had to get to Mariupol quick, so off we went for a long ride."

"And empty all the way back?" Petka asked.

"Very nearly," Volodya replied, warming to his tale. "I'd just fed Sultan and had a bite to eat myself in the inn there. 'Well,' I thought to myself, 'we'll take it easy on the way back.' Suddenly up pops a cove with a suit-case and says: 'Won't you take me with you?' 'Why not?' I says. 'I'll take you anywhere for a couple of tens.' I thought he'd start bargaining, but no, he didn't—fishes out the money without a murmur! 'That's all right,' he says, 'but make it quick.' Well, for a sum like that I didn't mind raising the dust."

"Did you really get twenty rubles?" Gladyshev inquired.

"Think I'm having you on? Two crisp and crackly tens, here they are, the darlings." And Volodya tapped his breast pocket tenderly. "Lovely journey! Sang songs all the way."

"Profitable job you've got, Volodya," Luka said. "Money and songs at the same time!"

"Oh yes, to be sure!" Volodya retorted. "I've got more money than a frog's got feathers. Comes in one pocket and goes out the other... I shouldn't feel envious if I were you though. That was just a bit of luck today. Sometimes you stand about outside that station and feel as if you'd do anything to get a passenger."

"But you are out in the fresh air," Gladyshev said. "You don't swallow dust all the time, like us in the foundry."

"Never mind, Artem, when they make our roof higher, we won't have so much trouble from dust," Luka remarked, and I realized that everyone in the foundry was looking forward to the day when the roof would be raised.

"You talk about fresh air, Artem," Volodya murmured, half to himself, "but I'd give up all my fresh air for a job at the works any day, if it wasn't for my hand."

"Did you work at the plant too?" I said in such a frank tone of surprise that Luka and Artem burst out laughing.

"What do you think!" Volodya said hotly, and I saw that my incredulity had touched him on the raw. "I haven't always been a cabman, my lad. I did twelve years at the works, starting as a boy. The foreign owners squeezed what they could out of me. If it wasn't for my hand, who knows, I might be a foreman by now."

"What's wrong with your hand?" Sasha asked quickly, staring at Volodya's sunburnt hands resting on his knees. They looked sound enough at first glance.

"Well, it was a silly business really," Volodya said. "My friends here know it (he nodded at Luka and Gladyshev). Perhaps it might do you, new lads, a bit of good to know it too. Just as a bit of instruction for you."

"In 1922, when that bandit Makhno pushed off to Rumania, quite a few of his cronies were left behind here, in this town, I don't know whether it was because they were afraid to run away to strange parts with that shaggy blighter they had for a leader, or whether he left them here, in Tavria, to stir up trouble—but the fact remains, the place was swarming with them, specially in the colony behind the station. There was hardly a house in that colony that wasn't owned by kulaks. Well off they were too—good, brick houses, big vineyards, private boats in the harbour, and nets drying on the shore all the way from the lighthouse to Matrosskaya Settlement. If it was a bad year for the grapes, they made their money out of fishing. Well, when the famine started, we, armed workers, were off right-away to have a look in those kulaks' cellars and see if they were hiding any grain. And quite right we were too. There was real famine in the town. The children were all swollen, every nettle from the streets, every bit of grass from the cemetery had been plucked for food. But when you crossed the railway line—it was another world. Plenty of everything in the colony, even smoked ham and vodka on holidays. You'd walk along the street, ready to drop from hunger, and when you got a whiff from their kitchens in your nostrils, it'd make you feel like tearing those bloodsuckers to pieces! The whole people stricken with hunger while they made merry with their gramophones blaring out 'two-steps' for them to dance to!

"Of course, those kulaks didn't like us coming round searching their cellars and taking over their stores. They started shooting at us. And on top of that there were still some foreigners left at the works. John Caiworth and his family had hopped it straightaway, but he'd left his overseers behind. They were still in his pay and they used to get arms from somewhere and smuggle them into the colony secretly at night."

"Well, one evening we went to the house of a local merchant. Buchilo, his name was. No sooner had we shut the door behind us than we heard footsteps and two of his neighbours came in after us. The Varfolomeyev brothers—kulaks 'from the colony too. Both of 'em were wearing leather jerkins, Kuban hats, purple velvet trousers. And they were both keeping their hands in their pockets. 'Well,' I thinks to myself, 'we're going to have a hot time of it!' I knew almost for certain that both brothers had served under Makhno. Then another came in, one of their servants, by the look of him. Kashket they used to call him, he. . ."

"Just a sec', Volodya," I interrupted the cabman, "doesn't he work in the foundry now? Wears a red kerchief on his head?"

"That's the fellow!" Volodya affirmed readily. "Well... I looked round and there's the merchant himself standing by his bed, grinning. He wasn't afraid of a search now that he'd got a body-guard. Well, those Varfolomeyev brothers, his neighbours, stationed Kashket at the door and came up to me. And I was alone, or very nearly. My mate, Kolya Smorgunov, was a smart lad and he knew how to use a carbine,

but the famine had drained all the strength out of his body. He couldn't even have handled the younger brother. It looked as if I'd have to face the music on my own.

"Big Varfolomeyev comes up to me and says: 'Well, Volodya, you dirty rat, if you've come to see us, you might as well sit down.'

" 'Thanks,' I says, 'I think I will.' And I sat down on the edge of a chair.

" 'Well, give the honoured guests something to eat,' says the older Varfolomeyev to the merchant.

"And Buchilo comes forward carrying glasses and vodka and boiled bacon. And there are his daughters sitting in the corner, as if they're going to be betrothed. Both of 'em were engaged to the Varfolomeyevs. They were looking very pale—they must have known something was brewing.

"I looked Varfolomeyev straight in the eye. I felt scared, but I didn't show it, I knew I'd got Soviet power to back me up. Young Varfolomeyev whispered something to Buchilo and I tried to hear what he was saying.

"And meanwhile, Luska Varfolomeyev pours me out a glass of vodka and says: 'Have a drink, old man!'

" 'Why should I drink first?' I says. 'Perhaps it's poisoned. Drink it yourself.'

" 'What do you mean!' Luska hisses. 'Are you scared? And you dare to insult the master of the house! We make you welcome, you dirty tramp, and you...' And he whipped out a knife.

"I saw what was coming, so I gave Kolya Smorgunov a wink. But instead of taking a pot at him, he smashes the lamp with the butt of his gun! Well, when that happened, I knocked big Varfolomeyev backwards over the table and heard him crash to the floor. The glasses rolled off the table, the girls screamed, and it was black as pitch all round. 'If only the others come soon!' I thought. And I pulled out my Browning to fire at the window. But just then a stool whizzed past my ear. 'Aha,' I think, 'the heavy artillery's gone into action!' And I started crawling towards the door. I could hear someone breathing close by and then I got a whiff of leather. So it was someone in a leather jerkin beside me. 'Here, take that!' I thought to myself. And I lashed out with the butt of my Browning. It landed right on the back of his head. There was a groan from one of the brothers. 'Hold the door, Kashket,' someone shouts. 'We'll show him!' And he lets fly at the ceiling. Then he stopped being shy too and let 'em have it with the Browning, into the corner where the shot had come from... Then there was screaming and firing and a smell of kerosene from somewhere. And Smorgunov shouts out from the door: 'Go it, Volodya, get their guns off 'em! I won't let 'em out!' It was all right for him to say 'get their guns!' There were four of them, not counting the daughters, and I was alone! I went on crawling towards the door. Suddenly I heard someone coming at me and caught the smell of vodka. I crouched down and covered my head with my hand. And just as I did so—zip! Something smacked into my hand!

"At first I didn't feel any pain, you know. Even though the knife had cut right through the sinews and touched my skull! I pulled my hand away and tried to find a handkerchief! But I knew I was in a bad way—my fingers wouldn't 'work. I covered the wound with my other hand and felt the sweat breaking out on my forehead. I began to feel very weak.

"With the last strength I could muster I yelled out to Kolya Smorgunov: 'Let 'em have it, the kulak blood-suckers, I'm wounded!' And just then Kashket swept the vases off the window-sill, smashed the window with his head and jumped out into the snow. Kolya saw him off with a blast from his carbine. Then our mates arrived. They'd heard the shots and they arrested both the Varfolomeyevs and the merchant. But as for me, I was crippled. I can hardly lift a glass of water. The food was bad in those days and the sinews didn't heal up properly. Even now my hand's sort of paralysed..."

"Look here, Volodya," Gladyshev asked. "Why does Kashket swank that he got wounded at the front when he was defending Yekaterinoslav from the Whites?"

"At the front?" Volodya laughed. "Haven't you ever been swimming with him? No? Well, try it when you get the chance. You'll see where the bullet hit him. People don't get wounds like that at the front, except the deserters who try to run away when no one's looking..."

The dandy we had met in the personnel department strolled past our bench in his long sharp-pointed shoes.

"Why, there's Zuzya!" Volodya said loudly.

"Hullo there!" The dandy turned and waved to the driver as he passed.

"That Zuzya didn't want to take us on at the works!" Petka remarked grimly.

"Is that so!" Volodya exclaimed.

"Yes, it is," I said, supporting Petka.

"Queer!" Gladyshev said. "Surely Zuzya isn't getting uppish? I've been told he's pretty decent towards the working class."

"Decent!" Sasha cried indignantly. "Why, if it hadn't been for the director of the works... Just listen to this..." And he recounted how Zuzya had spoken to us in his office.

"A real bureaucrat, lives on red tape!" I put in.

"And was thinking of asking him for a job in the transport department!" Volodya said.

"If he'd only explained things, advised us a bit! 'Allez!' he says. 'Go to Kharkov,' " Sasha went on indignantly. "Not like the director! He asked about everything like a human being, tested us on how much we knew..."

"No flies on our director," Luka said. "You won't find a director like him all the way along the coast, from Sevastopol to Rostov! He's been asked to take over the Ilyich Works and the Ukrainian Trust, but he wouldn't go. 'Let me get this works into shape,' he says. 'I want to introduce proper working methods here and get rid of the legacy the foreigners left us.' It was his idea to raise the foundry roof. 'Let the most harmful shop have the most fresh air,' he says. Haven't you seen the fettling shop we've built since he's been director? It's a lovely sight! In the old days, under Caiworth, people working in that fettling shop used to die of consumption by the hundred. They used to clean the castings in little huts, all the dust used to get in their lungs. But now it's a pleasure to look at. It's light, it's clean, and all the dust is sucked out by pipes... And the pasting he gave those Trotskyites last year! He made their feathers fly all right! Don't try to compare Ivan Fyodorovich with Zuzya, lad."

"What is he, does he come from the working class?"

"Ivan Fyodorovich?"

"No, Zuzya!"

"He's a footballer," Luka said calmly.

"What's football got to do with it?" Petka put in.

"Just this," said Luka. "Zuzya was the best centre forward in the whole of Zaporozhye, but at the Communard Works they didn't think much of him—used to work as a stoker, or something. But our chief engineer, he's crackers on football. He went to Zaporozhye once and watched Zuzya playing. When he saw Zuzya was a nippy fellow, he got him to come here. Of course, as soon as Zuzya arrives, he gets promoted—assistant manager of the personnel department. Now he draws a decent salary, enough to feed himself up for kicking that ball about..."

"The chief engineer—he's a grey-haired man, isn't he?" I asked cautiously, remembering what Angelika had said about her father.

"That's him," Volodya affirmed, "your neighbour. Rather a queer chap, but he likes football."

"His daughter's a good-looker," Petka put in with some satisfaction. "Vasil knows her already. They've been holding hands on the beach."

"Well, I'm blown!" Volodya looked at me with surprise and respect. "You're a fast-worker, I see, don't let the grass grow under your feet! But watch your step—if Zuzya gets to know about, he'll break your shins for you. His kick's like a cannon-ball, lad. He can break a cross-bar with one of his shots..."

Not far away, in the harbour, a ship gave a sharp blast on its siren. Then another, and a third.

"The Dzerzhinsky's off to Yalta," Luka said.

We had never seen a real steamer in our lives, only in pictures. I very much wanted to run down to the harbour and watch the ship leave, but Petka would go on trying to take the rise out of me. Nudging Bobir, he asked Volodya: "Is Zuzya a friend of the engineer's daughter?"

"Sure he is! He's always going round there taking her out on his bicycle. One of the family."

"I think they must like him because he's a footballer," Luka remarked.

"You don't mean to say the engineer's daughter plays football?" Petka gasped.

"She's a football fan! If you ever go to a match, don't sit in front of her," Luka advised, "she'll punch your back till it's black and blue. Football's the only thing she cares about, like her old man."

"Now, now you're going a bit too far. . ." Gladyshev, who had been silent until now, came to the defence of my acquaintance. "If you ask me, she knows her own mind all right, that girl does. She's read a lot of books. As for being keen on football, what's wrong with that? Who of us isn't! Some go in for pigeons, others prefer football. The chief doctor down at the sanatorium, is he a fan? Of course, he is! The harbour master, Captain Sabadash? Of course! Madame Kozulya? Not half! That one from the dancing-school... what's her name.. . Madame Rogale-Piontkovskaya? Nuts on the game! Even Lisovsky the priest, as soon as there's a match, he shuts up his church and goes off to the ground with his old woman.. . Our town's such a crazy place!"

Gladyshev had mentioned a name that took me back at once to the old days, in far-off Podolia.

"That Rogale-Piontkovskaya you mentioned, she isn't a countess by any chance, is she?" I asked.

"Goodness knows whether she's a countess or not, but she's certainly the queerest fish in this part of the world," Gladyshev replied.

"Rules the roost up at the dancing-school," Luka added.

"Well, why are we sitting here, friends, talking ourselves dry?" Volodya exclaimed suddenly. "What about going to Chelidze and having a glass of beer, eh?"

"We'd better go, hadn't we, Vasil?" Sasha whispered to me. "They'll be offended if we don't."

"Komsomol members going to a pub?" I thought. "Is that right? On the other hand, our new friends may really think we're too soft for their company, or too tight-fisted! And after all, what's a glass of beer!"

But my tired limbs had the last say, and remembering that I had to be at work again in the morning, I replied: "We're not sure... Tomorrow..."

"Don't bother the lads, Volodya," Luka intervened unexpectedly. "They're young, they haven't got used to the work yet. If they aren't careful, they really will oversleep. Let 'em go home! And you, lad," Luka turned to me, "don't be too scared of your mate. He grumbles and barks, but on the whole he's a fair old chap, he's not chasing you for nothing. You'll be all the better for it, tougher!... Well, so long till tomorrow!"

We parted, and Volodya, who was the first to go out of the garden into the street, struck up a song.

A few paces from the crowded "Avenue," the town was as deserted and quiet as a village in the middle of the night. The flowers were smelling sweetly, and in one of the garden hedges, just by the road, a quail began to twitter. *

"Does your sweetheart know you used to play football for the factory-school team, Vasil?" Petka asked slyly.

"Who are you talking about?"

"None of that!" Petka chortled. "As if you didn't know!"

"What's her name, Vasil?" Sasha asked.

"I've forgotten."

"He's forgotten already, hear that, Petka?" Sasha mocked. "I think I'd better remind you, as you're so forgetful. An-ge-li-ka! Make a note of it, please."

"What kind of name is it—An-ge-li-ka?" Petka drawled, revelling in my confusion. "Never heard of it before. Very queer name! Must be foreign."

"Of course, it's foreign," Sasha said, taking his cue from Petka. "Why do you think she said 'merci' to us?"

"Yes, all bourgeois types say 'merci' and 'pardon,'"

Petka agreed.

I walked on in silence, listening patiently while my friends ripped my reputation to bits.

Far out at sea, the red and green running lights of the Felix Dzerzhinsky rose and fell as the ship steamed away round the breakwater. If only I had known then whom that ship was taking across the dark Azov Sea to Yalta!... Had I but known, I should have dashed off to the harbour long ago...

AT TURUNDA'S

The more I was drawn into the life of the works, the less I worried about that phrase "you'll catch on." Time flew past quickly and something new happened every day. Today, a few minutes before dinner-time, Golovatsky had come up to my machine. It was strange to see him amid the dust and noise of the foundry in a well-fitting suit—not to mention that tie of his. If I had been secretary of the works' Komsomol organization, I should have thought twice about appearing in the foundry in such a get-up. Here were men doing physical work, and he turned up looking like a tailor's dummy! But Golovatsky seemed quite at ease as he shook hands with Naumenko and nodded a greeting to Luka and Gladyshev.

"Come to see your charge, Tolya?" Luka asked.

"How's he taking to things? Facing up to the job?" Golovatsky replied, and gave me a searching look with his keen grey eyes.

"Hot stuff! Soon be catching up with Uncle Vasya!" Luka said hurriedly, and picking up a finished mould, darted off with it to the moulding floor.

Turning to Gladyshev and Naumenko, Golovatsky said: "I told him he'd catch on, but he looked a bit put out when he heard we did our moulding by machine." And with another glance at me, he said confidently: "Come in and see me at dinner-time, Mandzhura..."

"You seem to know Golovatsky very well," I said to Luka when the secretary disappeared behind the

piled mould-boxes.

"He's one of us. We brought him up here in the foundry. We accepted him for the Party here, when Lenin died in 1924," Luka said, and I realized that my neighbour was a Communist.

"You mean Golovatsky used to work in the foundry?"

"He did that! What are you surprised at? On the cementation furnaces. Until he came, there wasn't a dirtier-looking crowd in the whole works than those cement boys. The rust from the ore even used to get in their hair. You could tell a lad from the cement furnaces a mile away. But now, why, they come away from work clean as you could wish! And why? On Party Committee instructions Golovatsky got the Komsomol members together for voluntary work and they fitted the place up with hot showers and two cupboards for every worker to keep his clean and dirty clothes in. Now, as soon as it's knocking-off time, they're under those showers. To see them going home, when they've washed and put on clean clothes, you'd think they'd been reading books all day instead of casting metal in those furnaces..."

Luka's words made a deep impression on me. I went to see Golovatsky at the Komsomol office in a friendly mood, not at all expecting him to greet me with a reproach.

"It's a very good thing that you've caught on to things and got to know all about machine-moulding so quickly, but why hold yourself aloof from the other young workers?"

"How do you mean—aloof?" I asked, sitting down on a creaky chair.

"Well, it's as plain as daylight. Half the chaps simply don't know you yet, they just haven't any idea what sort of a fellow you are. And I don't mean chaps outside the Komsomol. Even the Komsomol members don't know you've got a Komsomol membership card in your pocket. Last time you were in here, you gave me a glowing account of your social work at school and I was very pleased. 'Here's a smart lad come to give us a hand,' I thought..."

"But I had to get the run of things," I said guiltily, feeling that there was a lot in what the secretary said.

"You've got the run of things now, I hope?"

"Yes, I have now..."

"Well, that's something," Golovatsky said more gently. "And now I'd advise you to set about getting to know all the young workers in the foundry as soon as possible. Find out their likes and dislikes, what they're interested in. . . You see, because of its casting, the foundry is the only shop in the works that often finishes work long before the general knocking-off time. What does that mean? It means that the young fellows in the foundry get more free time than anyone else. But do you find many of them at the metal workers' club of an evening? Very few! It's a disgrace, but unfortunately it's a fact. But at Madame Rogale-Piontkovskaya's hops there are masses of them..."

It was the second time recently that I had heard that familiar name and I could not help interrupting the secretary.

"Who is this Madame Piontkovskaya?"

"A chip off something that's been smashed for ever," Golovatsky said, drumming his long fingers on the top of his desk. "A few years ago she used to run a cafe called 'The Little Nook.' Then when Madame got tired of paying taxes, she started her own dancing-class. Madame's daughter got married to an Englishman, one of the shop foremen, in the time of the Whites, and went off to London. But her mother's stayed behind, and now she's luring our youth into her net."

Straining my memory, I asked: "Has this Madame Rogale-Piontkovskaya been living here long?"

"Ever since the Revolution. She came here with her daughter. From somewhere near Uman."

"What about her husband?"

"No one's ever seen her husband. She must have buried him back there in Uman, or else he's run away."

"And the chaps from the foundry go to her classes?"

"I wish it was only the foundry chaps! They go there from the other shops too. Our Komsomol organization hasn't succeeded in organizing any recreation for them and Madame takes advantage of it. And bear this in mind, Mandzhura, some of the chaps in your shop have very little education. No more of this standing aloof! It's time you made friends with some good chaps and got into harness with them. Grisha Kanyuk, for instance, or Kolya Ziakabluk..."

"I'll do everything, Tolya," I promised.

"Everything's about half what you've got to do," Golovatsky said with a grin, and gripping my hand he said: "Off you go, you've only got three minutes before the hooter..."

Back in the days of the tsar, when we lived in Zarechye, under the walls of the Old Fortress, the estate of the Countess Rogale-Piontkovskaya had covered a whole district on the outskirts of the town. The yellow mansion with its columned portico lay half-hidden among trees in a large, shady garden. A gravel drive bordered with flowers led up to the house from tall wrought-iron gates, on which hung a heavy, rusty padlock that was hardly ever opened.

One day, however, the gates of the mansion were flung open with the willing consent of its owner. That was in 1919, when Ataman Petlura and his men seized our town. The remnants of his forces were clinging to the railway. Only a few small towns and villages of Podolia and Volyn remained in their hands. But although the Petlura front was crumbling on all sides, the ataman ceremonially declared our town the capital of "Petluria," and chose as his residence the half-empty mansion of the Countess Rogale-Piontkovskaya.

Petlura's car was greeted at the gates by the countess herself, a gaunt woman in a black flounced dress who held a lorgnette to her eyes all the time. Peeping over the wall of the neighbouring churchyard, we, youngsters, saw the blue-uniformed Petlura alight from his car, kiss the countess's thin, bejewelled fingers and walk up the drive with her to the yellow mansion.

While he lived at the mansion Petlura held conferences with officers from Konovalts's Galician rifle corps and from Denikin's forces. Later, foreign military missions took up their residence with the countess. These officers of the Entente, which was helping Petlura, paced the shady avenues of the countess's garden in uniforms we had never seen before. We never had a chance to look at them very closely, however, for the gaiduks who guarded Petlura and his suite drove all passers-by away from the gates.

Only once my friends and I climbed on to the stone coping of the railings and tried to see what was going on round the mansion. As we stood barefoot on the rough sun-warmed granite, pressing our faces against the iron railings, a tall, gaunt man in a long grey jacket popped up out of the garden and lashed at me with a black silver-embossed walking-stick.

We scattered like frightened sparrows, afraid that the tall man might call up the Petlura guards to deal with us. They would give us a taste of something worse than a walking-stick—their long whips tipped with bits, of lead.

I well remembered the face of the stranger—cruel and scraggy and covered with yellow wrinkles. He was said to be the brother of the countess, who had fled from somewhere near Kiev, to escape the Bolsheviks.

So it was not for nothing that the Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolutionary Activities had arrested the countess when Petlura was driven out of the town. What happened to her after that, I did not know.

Perhaps her brother was the husband of the local Rogale-Piontkovskaya, who, as Golovatsky put it, was "luring the youth into her net..."

The day was still sultry, but there were many people about on the avenue. Holiday-makers in skull-caps, broad-brimmed straw hats, or simply with wet towels wound round their heads, were wandering home from the beach, bemused and exhausted by the heat. Some of them clustered round the kiosks to buy cool buza, iced lemonade, and mineral waters. Others, mostly men, slipped into the co-operative wine-shop on the corner, where they quenched their thirst with glasses of Azov wine.

Peering into the shops and lingering in front of their smart windows, I walked down the avenue, my heels sinking into the soft asphalt. Before knocking-off time I had found out from Gladyshev that Rogale-Piontkovskaya's saloon was at 25, Genoa Street.

Suddenly I lost interest in all other passers-by except one who had popped up in front of me, as if from nowhere. The soldierly bearing of the man in front struck me as being very familiar. But for his light summer suit and soft panama hat with a broad blue ribbon, I should have rushed up to him at once and greeted him as an old friend.

"But I've never seen him in civilian clothes before... His walk's the same though, and the way he holds his head up!... He must have come here for a holiday! Yes, that's it! Why didn't I think of it before!"

Overtaking the man in the light suit, who had stopped in front of a chemist's shop-window stacked with bottles and jars, I peered into his face.

Yes, it was him!

I stepped forward and touching his elbow said: "Hullo, Comrade Vukovich! How did you get here?"

With surprising coolness, as if he had been expecting me to approach him, the man with the face of Vukovich turned round and said: "You must be mistaken, young man. . ." And he gave me a mocking glance, as if pitying me for my foolish error.

I don't remember what I muttered in reply. It was not an apology. I must have said "Gosh!" or something like that. And utterly confused, I walked quickly away, so as not to attract the attention of bystanders. "Well, some people are alike, aren't they!" I thought. That man was just like Vukovich... If it had been Vukovich, he would have been sure to say "hullo" to me. Specially after that long talk we had in his office, when Nikita and I went to see him. Coming home, I decided not to tell the boys about my blunder.

25, Genoa Street turned out to be quite an ordinary-looking house. From the ticket-seller in a plaid frock who was laying out little books of tickets on her table I learnt that the dancing would begin in an hour. Well, I wasn't going to hang about here all that time just to see their capers! I wandered slowly down Genoa Street, towards the outskirts.

The street led me to a district of little cottages, known as the Liski. All round me there were allotments. I made my way along the edge of the settlement to the beach.

Tarred fishing smacks with lowered sails heaved at anchor near the shore. Nets were drying on the seaweed-strewn sand. I felt the breeze from the open sea on my face mingled with the smells of smoked fish, seaweed, and tar.

The deserted sandy beach stretched away towards Nogaïsk. At the mouth of a ravine that ran down to the sea stood a large villa with a red-tiled roof. The purple glow of the setting sun was reflected in the windows that looked on to the Liski and the glass seemed to flame in the sun's rays. It was as if a fire were raging inside the villa. I remembered the foundry men's tales about the former owner of the works, John Caiworth, who had gone back to his home abroad, and decided that it must be his villa I could see in the distance. You had only to compare it with the little white cottages scattered along the sea shore to realize that it had once been the home of a rich man.

Crossing the soft sand, I went down to the sea and, scooping up the clear water in my hands, washed my perspiring forehead and wetted my hair.

"Hey, lad, come over here!" I heard a voice in the distance.

"That's not for me," I thought without turning round. "Who would know me here?" And I started walking back towards Genoa Street. But the voice went on shouting:

"Vasily Stepanovich! Comrade Mandzhura!"

Luka Turunda, my neighbour on the machines, was walking quickly towards me from one of the little cottages. He had changed into blue sun-bleached overalls.

"You are getting high and mighty," Luka said as he ran up. "I might as well be shouting at a brick wall. I saw you as you were going down to the sea. Surely, I thought, the lad isn't going to drown himself because Naumenko gives him such a hot time!"

"Hullo."

"Let's go to my cottage," Turunda suggested.

I hesitated.

"I ought to be getting back to town," I said. "Perhaps we could make it another time."

"Well, I'm not inviting you to a wedding, you know. We'll just sit down for a bit, then go off together."

Turunda's cottage stood right by the sea.

"Don't you get flooded, when there's a storm?" I asked as we walked into the yard.

"Sometimes. Last autumn the maistra started blowing and the waves were so big they knocked out one of the window-panes. My wife had to put the chickens up in the attic."

It was cool in the low-ceilinged parlour. All the windows except one that stood wide open were hung with muslin to keep the flies out. Pots of geraniums and fig-plants and bottles of cherry-wine stood on the window-sills.

"Make yourself at home," Luka said. "This is my father and this is my wife. This is Vasily Stepanovich. He's come to help us in the foundry... Where are you from, Vasil?"

"From Podolia," I said, shaking hands with Luka's father and his wife. "But I'm not Stepanovich, I'm Mironovich."

"Is that so?" Luka said in surprise. "I must have got you mixed up with your mate; he's a Stepanovich. Now sit down here, by the window; it looks as if we're going to get a breeze from the sea."

I squeezed behind the spotless table and sat down by the window. Luka's father, a sunburnt old man, just as lean as his son, sat down facing me, while my host's wife, a pleasant-looking woman of about twenty-five, bustled about round the stove, which could be seen on the other side of the passage. Dark and sturdy, with her plaits arranged in a crown on the top of her head, she moved silently about the kitchen, now appearing at the stove, now vanishing behind the partition.

"Dad and I have been talking about a little family matter," Luka said. "As you probably know, for over two months now one per cent of our pay has been deducted for the workers of Britain, who're on strike. Well, whenever I bring my pay-book home, my family here makes a fuss. 'What,' they say, 'those B.W.s, again! What are they, your own kith and kin? You'd do better to buy a dress for the wife, or something that's needed in the house, than waste your money on them...' "

"What have dresses got to do with it!" Old Turunda interrupted his son, and as he spoke I noticed his sparse yellow teeth stained dark with tobacco. "Those B.W.s, did they help us in 1905, when the Potemkin blew the red flag? Not a bit of it! Old Caiworth called in a regiment of Cossacks from

Melitopol to put down the strikers. Do you think anyone abroad helped us then? Never on your life! We had to live on whiting all the summer. Why should we help their strikers now?"

"Because we're the Motherland of all the workers of the world," I said cautiously, reluctant to anger the grumpy old man. "We've got the Soviets in power, but they haven't..."

"That's no answer," the old man grunted. "Don't you try to talk politics to me. You go to the root of things."

Old Turunda's words touched me on the raw. I remembered our discussions on international affairs at the factory-training school, and just as fiercely as I used to then, I said: "Why isn't it an answer? Anybody can see that we're in a better position than the British miners, who have to swallow coal dust so that the capitalists can make their profits."

"We swallowed plenty o' dust under tsarism to give that British capitalist a mansion to live in and a yacht of his own to cruise around in, didn't we?" The old man jerked his thumb in the direction of the villa that I had seen from the shore. "He could afford to hold garden parties in the fresh air, but all we had was a dingy little pub to amuse ourselves in, and even that ran us into debt!"

"It's no good trying to argue with my old man," Luka said. "He's just like one of those high-ups in the church. You talk about one thing and he talks about another. All at cross purposes. I've been telling him the same thing: since we've got a workers' government we ought to help every worker that's in need."

At that moment Luka's wife entered the room, making no sound on the clay floor with her bare sunburnt feet. She was carrying a blackened baking-pan. When she set it down on two wooden blocks, I saw that it contained four large, fat fish. The strong scent of garlic struck my nostrils.

"Ever eaten this before?" Luka asked.

I shook my head.

"Fisherman's chebak!" Luka announced. "Fresh from the morning's catch. Dad collared 'em and now we're going to taste 'em." And pronging a large fish with his fork, he placed it on a plate in front of me.

Then I noticed that the chebak had not even been cleaned of its scales. Curled by the heat of the oven, they were standing up as if someone had stroked them the wrong way.

As I followed my host's example and took the skin off the fish, I soon realized the simple method of cooking this tasty dish. Before putting the fish in the hot oven, you had to stuff it with lumps of garlic. The fish were baked whole, in their own fat. Their white flesh came away from the bones easily and gave off a smell that made your mouth water. "But fish can't swim on dry land, can they, Vasil?" And winking at me, Luka fetched a heavy jug from a dark corner and poured us glasses of wonderfully clear wine.

"That's enough!" I said to Luka when my glass was only half full.

"What's the matter?" Luka's quick eyes glanced up sharply. "Do you think it's strong? It's only 'beryoзка.' Weak stuff. Little children round here drink it instead of water."

"All the same, that's enough. I'm not used to it." "You'll have to get used to it," Luka's father remarked. "If you live by the Azov Sea, a 'beryoзка'-drinker you must be!"

"Well, here's to your success, Vasil!" Luka said. "To your becoming a good foundry man. Good luck to you in your young life!" And we clinked glasses.

Pushing her dark crown of hair into place with a plump hand, his wife raised her glass too. Her kind deep-set eyes, dark as olives, seemed to radiate good feeling. I felt as if I had known the kindly owners of this little cottage, perched on the sandy shore of the Azov Sea, for a very long time. The wine was cool and fragrant, with a faint bitterish tang in it. And it wasn't strong at all.

I put down my empty glass and shot a glance at the clock hanging on the wall, by the stove. Luka

noticed it and said reassuringly: "Don't worry, lad, I've got to go out too, to the university."

"What university?" I asked in surprise.

"He's a student," Luka's wife answered for him, and glancing at Luka very affectionately, put her brown arm round his shoulders.

"I've been attending since last year. In the evenings," Luka said. "When Katya and I got married I thought to myself, 'I'd better do some studying, I've been wasting my leisure time long enough.' So I started on the preliminary courses. I remembered all they'd taught me at the parish school and mastered algebra, and then the workers' evening university opened. That was a chance that was too good to miss!"

"Do you like it?" I asked, feeling a warm glow from the wine spread through me.

Luka nodded cheerfully.

"No question about it! A lot better than before. You'd knock off and spruce yourself up a bit, then off to the avenue. And from the avenue where would you go? To The Little Nook.' And after that you'd stagger home with your knees sagging. Sometimes you'd give yourself such a sousing that you'd just plunk into bed in your cap and boots. And as soon as you shut your eyes—the hooter was going. Well, what sort of work can you do with a hang-over? You'd crawl about like a fly in autumn, and your mate would curse you up hill and down dale because you were holding him up. I'm real thankful to Ivan Fyodorovich, it was him got the university started."

"The director?"

"Yes, the director. He twigged there were a lot of teachers knocking about the town—chemistry teachers, astronomy teachers... So he got them all together and says: 'Here, you fellows, what about teaching the lads of an evening, I'll find the money to pay you!' And that started the ball rolling. Since I've been attending those evening classes, I've felt myself a different man. While the furnace hums away up at the end of the shop, there am I going over the formulas that our instructor has explained to us, and thinking out the reasons for everything—why the iron melts, how steel is made, what the temperature ought to be... And the result is that instead of looking at the world out of a little window, you start looking out of a great big one..

"But you're going to be late for your classes today," his wife said very softly, almost in a whisper.

"Late for classes? No fear!" Luka jumped up and, running over to the bookshelf, started gathering up his books.

"Just call on us when you feel like it," Katerina said when I was leaving. "And if you feel like going out in a boat, the old man will take you fishing."

I thanked my hosts for their hospitality and said that next time I came I would bring my friends.

Luka and I walked down Genoa Street together.

"Prickly old chap, my Dad, isn't he? He'll snap your head off if you give him half a chance. He used to work in the foundry too, before the Revolution."

"Why doesn't he go back there now?"

"When the Civil War started and the works closed down, he took to fishing. Got real keen on it, he did. One day, near the end of winter, he went out to sea with his crew to fish under the ice for big fish. The wind had been blowing from the west all the time, then suddenly a levant sprung up from the east. The ice broke away from the shore and was carried out to sea. That levant took my Dad well nigh over to the Kuban shore. Half the crew were drowned, and the rest just managed to escape by wading through the shallows. And the water was icy, you know. It froze Dad's legs right to the bone. Now, when there's a change in the weather, Dad's properly crocked up. It's a good thing the sanatorium's near by.

The wife goes down there and brings him back that stinking mud from the estuary. She warms it up on the stove and then puts the old man in a tub and plasters him with it. The pain lets up a bit, and again Dad puts his nets in the boat and off he goes to sea. Sometimes for rybets, sometimes for puzanok, sometimes for taran.

"There's tons of fish in this little puddle!" And Luka nodded towards the sea.

"I say, Luka, who are the people that go for treatment in those sanatoriums?"

"People come here from all over the place. Suppose you were still living in your Podolia, or perhaps even further away. One night you wake up and feel your legs aching fit to drive you crackers. Off you go to the polyclinic. The doctor gives you the once over and tells you you've got chronic rheumatism. They give you a free pass at work and you're here..."

"Then perhaps it was Vukovich I met in the avenue?" I thought to myself when we parted. "Now he's on holiday and out of uniform, he doesn't want to have anything to do with me." But the idea seemed absurd.

ALL RIGHT, MADAME!

Even from a distance young people could be seen crowding round Madame Rogale-Piontkovskaya's establishment. Some lazily nibbled sunflower seeds as they watched the lucky ones who strode in through the open doors without bothering about the price. Others, more impatient, stepped, back to the fence on the other side of the road and stood on tip-toe to see through the high windows into the hall, whence came the sound of music and the shuffle of dancing feet.

After paying the ticket-seller in the plaid frock a whole fifty kopeks, I entered a long hall with cracked papier mache columns. The air was stuffy and reeked of powder and cheap scent.

A few couples were moving stiffly up and down the middle of the hall in a sort of march, which I afterwards discovered was called a "fox-trot."

Young men with blank, pompous faces, now rising on their toes and stepping forward, now taking two steps back piloted their wilting girl friends round the stuffy hall. They seemed very proud of being able to walk round like this, keeping up the monotonous rhythm and performing a few simple steps before an audience of resting dancers and people like myself who had merely come to look on. I could not see anyone who looked like the owner of the establishment and I waited impatiently for Madame Rogale-Piontkovskaya to appear.

As I watched Madame Rogale-Piontkovskaya's clients amusing themselves, I could not help remembering the dances that used to be held at the Party School in our town. I often used to go to them before I joined the factory-training school. They were quite different.

The student musicians would take their places on the platform and their brass band would rock the lofty ceiling of the former convent chapel, which had now been made into a club. Everything was so jolly and gay that even the saints whose faces still adorned the walls seemed to enjoy the blaring music, while the Lord of Sabaoth, standing in his sandaled feet above the slogan "Peace to the cottage, war to the palace!" looked ready to bound into the dance himself, together with his winged angels and Moses the Prophet.

The students and their girl friends from the suburbs danced the mazurka in proper ballroom style and no one, of course, paid any particular attention to the patched, down-at-heel boots of the men and the wooden clogs that some of the girls were wearing.

There were swift Hungarian dances and smooth graceful waltzes. Gay Cracoviennes followed the Pas

d'Espagne, and if Boiko, the natural history lecturer, asked the band to play his favourite "Chinese polka," with its crouching down and other antics, there was not a person in the hall who would not join the line of dancers.

I, too, joined in that dance, bending my knees and waddling across the hall, with my fingers pointing now to the right, now to the left.

Once I found myself paired up with the old cook Makhteich. He had come to ask the duty man when to ring the bell for supper and Boiko had dragged him into the dance. To the tap of the kettle-drums, Makhteich and I whirled round the hall, nearly cannoning into the platform with its glittering array of brass trumpets. I noticed the smell of buckwheat porridge, fried meat and onions coming from my "lady" and guessed for certain what the students were going to have for supper.

There was much fun and Laughter at those student dances. Friendly land unrestrained, they made you feel gay. They bubbled with youth. They were the dances of a brave, active body of men who wanted to relax and have a good time.

But what was it here? Could you call this a dance? These people were like a lot of statues walking about! No one had anything to do with his neighbour and they all seemed to think they were dancing better than anyone else. But there wasn't any real dancing at all!

Suddenly I burst out laughing. One of the dancers—a sallow-faced man with a pointed black moustache—seemed to think I was laughing at him and glanced threateningly in my direction.

"My dear neighbour, can it be you? What progress you're making!" exclaimed a voice at my elbow.

I turned round. It was Angelika. She stood before me in a spotted green dress, her white even teeth gleaming in a smile. Now I was cornered.

"Good evening!" I said holding out my hand.

"Do you dance? I'd never have thought it! A quiet boy like you..."

"I just came to have a look," I grunted, glancing round to see if there was anyone else who knew me in the hall.

"Now, now!" Angelika wagged her finger at me. "You can't fool me... Oh, good, here's Madame Rogale-Piontkovskaya. She'll play now instead of that awful pianist." And standing on her toes she cupped her hands round her mouth and called out: "Glafora Pavlovna, we should like a Charleston!"

A stout, grey-haired woman in a black dress with very pink cheeks looked round at the shout. No, she was not a bit like the skinny countess of Zarechye! This "Madame" looked more like the owner of a butcher's stall.

"That little fellow is your Madame Piontkovskaya's husband, I suppose?" I whispered to Lika, nodding towards the pianist.

"Goodness, no!" Lika exclaimed indignantly. "She used to be married to an engineer who got killed by a stray bullet at Uman. Uman's somewhere in your part of the country, isn't it?"

"Nowhere near! It's another day's journey to Uman from us," I said and noted mentally that Golovatsky's story and what Lika had told me partially coincided.

The little pianist in a long greasy dress-coat reaching to his knees looked like a grasshopper perched on its hind legs. He obsequiously offered Madame Rogale-Piontkovskaya the piano stool. Madame gathered up her skirts and sat down. The stool groaned under her weight. Madame paused with her plump bejewelled fingers raised above the keys. "Do you Charleston?" Angelika whispered to me, but my reply was drowned by a thunderous chord. For a moment I could not decide whether this was the new dance or whether Madame had suddenly decided to break up her piano. "Come on, it's a

Charleston!" Lika cried. "But I don't know how..."

"Nonsense! It's a very easy dance. Just look at my feet and you'll soon learn."

Lika dragged me out into the middle of the hall and planted her hand on my shoulder.

Several couples were already jerking to and fro around us. Bright-coloured dresses whirled before my eyes.

I looked down and watched the long brown legs of my partner intently. It was as if Angelika had got tired of having any feet at all and was trying to kick them off. Her legs seemed to be hinged in two or three places; she kept throwing a leg up, waggling it and then stepping towards me.

"Saint Vitus's dance!" I thought, waggling my legs at the knees until the bones cracked. Then an idea occurred to me. Remembering the student dances back home, I grasped Angelika wildly round the waist and started whirling her across the floor, bobbing up and down, as we used to in the "Chinese polka." She looked at me with startled and rather angry eyes. But just as I was going to take a sharp turn, my right foot trod on something soft and slippery. I staggered into Madame Rogale-Piontkovskaya, giving her a violent jab in the back with my elbow.

The tune of the Charleston broke off for a moment and in the silence that followed a word reached me which, though not very loud, stung me like a whip-lash.

"Lout!"

Jumping away from the piano, I saw the dancing mistress's rouged face twisted with annoyance. It must have been she who had flung that insulting word at me. But the anger on Madame's face was soon replaced by a set smile, and as if to make up for lost time, she strummed even louder and faster on the piano. Perhaps Angelika did not hear the insult directed at me, perhaps she simply pretended not to have heard it. I swung my partner to the right, towards the stream of fresh air flowing from the entrance, and led her off the floor.

"Well, you are a clod-hopper!" Lika said, half joking, half contemptuous. "The music plays one thing, and you just ignore the tune completely and start dancing some sort of barn dance. You've got no ear for music at all! No idea of rhythm!"

"I don't know about that, all I know is that people who like pushing round in heat like this must be mad!"

"They can do the Charleston, and you can't. But why get angry about it?" Lika said soothingly.

"Wouldn't it be better to go out in a boat on an evening like this?"

And as I spoke, my eye rested on an apple core squashed on the floor. So that was what had earned me the title of "lout!" All right, Madame! We'll see who's the loud. You charge fifty kopeks for admission, you old screw, and you can't even keep the place tidy!

"Do you like boating?" Lika asked, waving her scented handkerchief.

"Who doesn't?" I said unguardedly.

"Then you know what? Let's get away from here and go down to the sea!" And again Angelika seized my arm.

We had not walked five steps down Genoa Street when we ran into Zuzya.

"Where to, Lika?" the dandy asked spreading his arms.

"Down to the sea with a young man!" she flung out coquettishly. "By the way, do you know each other?"

"Trituzny!" the dandy drawled and without so much as a glance at me held out his big paw.

I shook it without pleasure and said my name.

"A thousand pardons, my dear! Ivan Fyodorovich detained me. Temper justice with mercy and come back. Today they'll be playing that tango My Heart's in Rags. We'll learn it together. The words..."

But I had had enough. The dandy was simply refusing to acknowledge my existence.

"Come on, Angelika, let's get going, or we'll be bitten all over by the mosquitoes later on!" I said gruffly, and she went with me.

AT THE ENGINEER'S

Boats were moored along both sides of the wooden pier. Lika bent down and unlocked a chain.

"Jump!" she commanded, hauling the boat up to the pier.

I jumped without hesitating. As my feet struck the bottom of the boat it pitched so violently that I nearly fell overboard.

"Take a life-belt, Lika!" came a voice from above.

It was the Life-Saving Society man. He was standing on the pier in shorts and a yachting cap with a white flag on the band. A whistle dangled on his muscular chest.

"What for, Kolya?" said Lika, pushing off with an oar. "I think my hidalgo can swim. But if anything goes wrong, I'll save him myself without a life-belt."

"Up to you!" the sailor replied with a chuckle. "Wave if you're in trouble." And he tossed the life-belt back on to the pier.

I listened to them with a frown. My companion seemed determined to appear better than me in everything! Even in this phrase to the sailor there had been a scornful hint that I couldn't swim and would go to bottom like a kitten, if she didn't save me.

Angelika plied the oars easily and we drew away from the shore. Already the pier looked quite small, like two matches stuck to the shore in the shape of a "T."

"Let me take over for a bit."

"You can try," Lika consented, and we changed places.

The purple ball of the sun sinking somewhere beyond Kerch blinded me and stained the calm waters of the bay a reddish brown. I plunged my oars deep into the water and yanked at them with all my strength. One of the rowlocks jumped out of its socket and nearly fell into the sea.

"I know you're strong, Vasil, but why break the boat? Take it easy, as if you didn't care. The boat will go faster."

And indeed, as soon as I relaxed and stopped digging my oars in so deeply, the boat skated across the water like a flat pebble thrown from the shore, leaving a faint, trembling wake at its stern.

"Turn a bit to the left, towards the breakwater!"

"You want to go there?"

"Don't you?"

"It's a long way."

"You don't know what 'a long way' means! If we were making for the sand-bank at this time in the

evening, it'd be different. But the breakwater's only a paddle."

The harbour with its hump-backed warehouses was far away by now and the high granite walls of the breakwater rose above us almost as soon as we passed the signal bell.

"Yes, quite near really," I agreed. "Is it two versts?"

"One and a half."

I was not used to rowing and at each pull I bunched my muscles and pressed my lips tightly together. My expression must have been rather unnatural. Angelika was now surveying me quite openly.

"You know, Vasil, your glance is like a touch. Like Lieutenant Glan's!" she said suddenly.

"What do you mean?" I grunted.

"Lieutenant Glan was the favourite hero of a Scandinavian writer. He was unlucky in love, so he went away and lived in a little hut in the forest, and to hurt the girl he loved sent her the head of his dog as a present..."

"Sounds like a savage!" I remarked. "Real men don't run away from people."

"Not from people, but from misfortune in love! He was tired of civilization."

"It's the same thing," I said, already deeply prejudiced against the hermit. "And what sort of glance has your Trituzny got? Like a touch, too?"

Missing the sarcasm in my question, Angelika replied eagerly:

"Oh, quite an ordinary glance, but a terrific kick! What a pity you missed the match with Enika!. That was a game! Zuzya made a break-through from the centre of the field and knocked the goal-keeper over with the ball. Our supporters simply screamed with delight!"

"What of it!" I said rudely, tugging at the oars. "We played the Berdichev youth team once with Bobir as goalkeeper. Both our backs were knocked out and three of their players came down on Sasha who was all alone. Do you think Sasha let the ball through?... Not him! Of course, I had to give one of their insides a smack on the jaw for trying to trip me. The ref stopped the game and gave Berdichev a penalty: Right in front of the goal. And Sasha stopped it again, and that dirty dog went off the field with a crease in his mug!"

"Oh, Vasil, Vasil, you must learn how to talk properly. . ." Lika said reprovingly. "If only you knew how those slang expressions of yours appal me! You're a nice boy, but sometimes you sound so unpolished."

For a start I didn't know what she meant by that fancy word "appal." But even without that, her cold, edifying tone would have made me furious.

I said sharply: "It was unpolished men that made the Revolution, you ought to remember that sometimes!"

Angelika could not find an answer to this or perhaps she did not want to continue the conversation.

Only the purple crown of the dying sun showed above the horizon, tinting the water with an ominous fiery glow. Behind us the sea was already an oily black. The faint swell caught the last pink reflections of the sunset and the shadow of the breakwater running back to the harbour wall.

Patting her hair carelessly, Lika said: "How calm it is! I like the sea best of all as it is now."

"I thought you liked storms best. The sea was very rough when you dived into it that time."

"I was brought up by the sea and I can't live a day without bathing. It's a habit. But to me the best thing in the world is calm, stillness. And to have a cat purring beside me... To sit on a swing and just

stroke a little cat. With electricity crackling in its fur... What could be better!"

How could I listen calmly to such talk!

I said: "But that's bourgeois petty-mindedness! You haven't started life yet, and you want peace and quiet already."

"Oho!" Lika puckered her eyes. "The quiet boy starts to show his little claws. How interesting! I didn't know you were so fond of arguing. My admirers usually listen to me without a word of objection."

What cheek! Who said she could count me as one of her admirers!

"No, seriously, Vasil, I'm naughty. I like to mope on my own, to get away from the cares of the world. I love to dream. . ."

And quite unexpectedly Lika began singing in a soft, pleasant voice:

In a little grey house on the edge of the town,

In a little grey house where sadness abides. . .

"Specially in winter," she went on. "When twilight comes and day still lingers among the purple shadows, I like to be alone and talk to yearning. . . She comes out from behind the curtain over the door—a kind, sad fairy, with ash-grey hair, just like the colour of the sea now, and she soothes me.. ."

"It's the life of luxury her father gives her that makes her have all these daft ideas!" I thought. This was the first time I had met such an outspoken philistine at close quarters.

"What do you live for then?"

"By inertia. I'm waiting for a lucky chance. Perhaps some strong man will turn up and change everything for me."

"Why not do it yourself, without a nurse?"

"I've never tried."

"You ought to."

"Oh, I'm too bored!"

"What's the sense in living then? If you just wait for someone strong to turn up and moan: 'I'm bored, I'm bored. . .'"

I could see my words had stung Angelika sharply. Again an angry little spark leapt into her eyes, as it had done a short while ago, in Rogale-Piontkovskaya's saloon.

"And what do you live for, my dear sir? Do you enjoy your monotonous work in the foundry?"

"Monotonous?" I exclaimed indignantly. "That's just what it isn't! Today I make one kind of mould, tomorrow another. I turn out thousands of new parts. It makes me glad to think that I'm working for my people and not swindling anyone. Isn't that worth doing? Monotonous, my foot! There aren't any boring jobs, but there are boring, hopeless people."

"All right, suppose you've found out everything, experienced everything, what then?"

"Study!"

"But it's so difficult to study. Never any time to rest after dinner, always having to jump up and rush off to lectures."

"Who will study if we don't? Your grey fairy?"

"There's another way out. If you like, I'll ask Daddy and he'll give you an easy job. In the office, for instance?"

"What good is that to me? I don't want to be an office worker."

"You are funny, Vasil! I want to help you, and you bristle up like a hedgehog."

"Your Zuzya can go out for the easy jobs, I don't want them."

"Why are you so much against Zuzya? He's quite a nice, harmless boy..."

"Boy? Strong as a bull, and messing about with papers all day! It makes you sick to look at him!"

"What makes you so intolerant towards people, Vasil? Such a terrible temper!"

"When people are on the wrong path, what are you supposed to do—praise them for it? How can we remake the world with such people?" I said, getting really angry.

"Who's asking you to remake the world? Let it stay as it is."

"Who's asking! '... Perhaps you like the old world? Perhaps you'd like to live under the tsar or old man Makhno?"

I thought Angelika would either deny my accusation or change the subject. But she said with surprising calm:

"My father lived very well under the tsar too. Caiworth had a great respect for Daddy. He said himself such engineers were hard to come by."

"And how did the workers live?"

"That's nothing to do with me... And it's all such a bore anyway... Look how quickly the moon has risen! Isn't it beautiful?"

A shimmering bar of moonlight stretched across the calm bay almost to the sand-bank, where the lighthouse was already blinking. The water was silver.

"When the moon shines on a strip of water like that, people call it 'the path to happiness,' " Angelika said. "Two years ago I believed in that saying, so I took a boat out and followed the moonlight across the sea. I got as far as the sand-bank, then a north-easter sprang up and the sea got rough and I couldn't go back. I pulled the boat up on the sand, spread out some seaweed and made a place to sleep in under the boat. How frightened I was!"

"Fancy being frightened of the wind!" As I spoke, I unconsciously drew my hand across my forehead.

Lika noticed my gesture and asked quickly:

"What's that scar on your forehead?"

"Oh, nothing."

"Tell me."

"A scratch from a grenade splinter."

"A grenade splinter? Who did that to you?"

I had to tell the story of my encounter with the bandits at the state farm on the bank of the Dniester.

"How terrible and thrilling it all sounds!" Lika said. "Only I don't like politics," she pouted. "Politics are so boring. But what you've just been telling me is very interesting."

"You can't remake the world without politics." "Now you're at it again, Vasil! You're simply

unbearable! ... Let's go home, or we'll have a real row."

Only when we tied up at the pier did I feel how tired I was. My hands were sore from the rub of the oars. At the gate I wanted to say good-bye and get away, but Angelika put her hands behind her back and said: "You'll do no such thing... Today you're going to spend the whole evening with me. Come to our house. I'll introduce you to Daddy."

Angelika's father was sitting in the big dining-room laying out cards on the dinner table. He was so absorbed that he did not even turn round when we entered.

"Daddy! We have a guest!" Angelika cried and touched his shoulder.

Andrykhevich turned round. Tossing the pack of cards on the table he rose to greet us. He was tall and big-boned. His head nearly reached the heavy chandelier that hung from the ceiling. I was struck at once by his bushy, knitted eyebrows and curved, hawk-like, nose.

"With whom have I the honour?" he said, offering me a big wrinkled hand.

"Vasily Mandzhura," I said.

"He's our new neighbour, Daddy. I told you Maria Trofimovna had some new lodgers. Vasily's one of them. I hope you'll like him. He's a tremendous arguer."

"I like to meet young people thirsting for argument. It was the great art of argument that gave ancient Greece her culture. Those arguments revealed many truths that are still alive today." And motioning to a chair: "Sit down, Vasily."

"Mironovich," I said, giving him my patronymic, and pulled my chair up to the massive table.

"Do you know what we have for supper, my dear? Crayfish! Just think of it, Kuzma brought me a whole pailful from Alekseyevka! I've just sent Dasha for beer."

"Daddy's a devoted crayfish-eater," Lika explained. "He often gets the train attendants to bring him crayfish all the way from Ekaterinoslav."

The engineer glanced at me very keenly and said: "You entertain our guest, Lika, and I'll go and cook these creatures." And he went out to the kitchen.

"Now Daddy will perform his rites! He boils the crayfish in a special way—with caraway and laurel leaves and parsley. He loves cooking them. Even when Mummy's at home, he doesn't let her have anything to do with it. Mummy's still away at Uncle's. She hasn't come back since she went at Easter... Would you like me to show you my little nest?"

Once you let yourself in for a thing, you have to go through with it. Now that I had consented to come in, I had to agree to the wishes of my hostess.

Lika and I went into a small room with windows looking out into the garden. The room was draped from floor to ceiling with Persian carpets. On one of the carpets hung a little icon and before it, suspended in a brass holder, burned a red-glass lamp. "Oho! Religious into the bargain!" I thought.

Angelika touched a switch and turned on the ceiling lamp, flooding the room with light. The dazzling shafts from the windows shone on a piece of flower-bed and a sandy path edged with broken tiles.

"Is this where you talk to your fairies?" I asked with a grin.

"Yes. This is where I tell my secrets to my kind grey princess, and study the horoscopes of great people... By the way, Vasil, which month were you born in?"

"April. What about it?"

"In April? Under the Ram?"

"What Ram? . . ." I exclaimed, not troubling to hide my impatience.

"No need to get offended! The 'Ram is the first zodiacal constellation. Sit down here and listen. I'll tell you everything about your personality."

She rustled the pages of a book and sweeping back her long chestnut hair, began to read.

"The sign of the Ram endows people with many talents: perseverance, courage, an unquenchable thirst for action, bordering sometimes on madness. People born under the Ram are always ready to fight fanatically for the cause to which they have devoted themselves, even in the after-life and in the service of Beelzebub. It is to be regretted, however, that owing to their immense impulsiveness they sometimes dedicate themselves to causes unworthy of such zealous devotion. It is this heightened impulsiveness and lack of forethought that makes them rash at times and leads them to deeds of madness. A man born under the Ram may show a tendency to martyrdom, thus becoming a Lamb of Sacrifice. . . ." "Well!" said Angelika, drawing a deep breath. "And that's you! Amazing, isn't it? Your whole character spread out before you. What have you got to say to that, Vasil?"

"It's all a lot of superstition."

"Why superstition, Vasil? Don't be silly! Listen to what it says now: 'The Ram endows people with a leaning for technical matters and industry. It gives birth to people for professions connected with fire and iron, it develops a talent for organization and leadership...' Isn't that exactly about you and your ideals?"

"Prophecies like that can be made to fit anyone... And what's this after-life got to do with it?"

"But not everyone is born in April. And just listen to this: 'He should seek friends born between twenty-fourth of July and the twenty-fourth of August, under the Lion.' And did you know, my birthday's on the twenty-fifth of July? We were made for each other by Providence!"

"What's she getting at with all her cunning flattery?" I thought in alarm. "That would be a fine thing! To get tied up with this mademoiselle with her carpets and fairies!"

Br-r-r! That'd just about finish a fellow off!" I shuddered at the thought.

"Why don't you say something, Vasil?... Don't look at me in that awful way, you'll make me faint."

"It's all rubbish ... superstition, drivel!" I said with conviction. "Only people who haven't got anything left in this life invent another world."

"Why is it drivel? Oh, you are so intolerant! My father has engineers round for spiritualist seances. They turn a little table in the dark and call up spirits. They've already had messages from the spirit of Napoleon, and even Navuchodonosor has spoken to them!"

"I know all about those tricks!" I said and began to laugh heartily. "Back home in Podolia, not far from our town, people suddenly started talking about the Kalinovskoe miracle. The local women thought they had seen blood flowing out of the wounds of a figure of Christ on a roadside cross. Crowds of people came to see it, like at a fair. And what do you think? A special commission came down and checked up on everything and found out that it was some priests who had faked the whole thing to stir the people up against Soviet power. They made a lot of money out of it too!"

"Oh you disbelieving Thomas!" she said vexedly. "I don't know anything about your miracle, but we all heard the voice of Navuchodonosor quite distinctly."

"He didn't give you a message of greetings from Rogale-Piontkovskaya's daughter in London, did he, by any chance?" I jeered. "Or from her husband in the other world? What did he say, is the Charleston in fashion up there?"

At that moment Andrykhevich appeared at the door of Angelika's "nest."

"Be so kind!" he said and waved us into the dining-room with a sweeping gesture.

The table was laid. Thick dark beer foamed in delicate jugs that stood on an embroidered table-cloth. For every person there was a slender cut-glass goblet and a serviette. A little pot-bellied decanter of the same thick red glass as the icon-lamp that burnt in Lika's room nestled beside one of the beer jugs. And in the middle of the table rose a heaped dish of crimson steaming crayfish with long, drooping whiskers.

"There are crayfish for you!" I thought, sitting down. "Not like the little midgets we used to catch by the candle factory."

"While these creatures cool off, I suggest we have some sturgeon," Andrykhevich said, seating himself opposite me.

I noticed another dish with a long slab of white fish on it bathed in thick yellow sauce and trimmed with slices of lemon.

Spearing a piece of fish with a fork, I began to cut it with my knife. Suddenly I noticed Andrykhevich and his daughter exchange glances. I must have done something wrong.. Looking at her father, Angelika put her finger quickly to her lips. He smirked silently and raised his eyebrows. The appetite that I had begun to feel after rowing vanished at once. What had I done?

"A little vodka with your sturgeon, young man?" the engineer suggested, holding up the decanter.

"No, thanks. I don't drink vodka," I said, and feeling that this would lead to no good, put my fork down on the table-cloth.

"Praiseworthy!" said Andrykhevich. "Young people should not drink vodka, it's poison!" Whereupon, bunching his shaggy eyebrows, he poured himself a full glass of "poison" and drank it down in one gulp.

Recovering his breath, the engineer noticed my hesitation.

"People eat crayfish with their fingers, young man," he advised. "Drop your knife and fork and tackle the job boldly. Don't be afraid of them."

Now for it! I reached out and took the biggest crayfish out of the dish, but before I could put it on my plate, a maid appeared from nowhere and changed my plate for a clean one. "Is she in the foodworkers' trade union, or do they exploit her on the quiet, without a contract?" I wondered.

Before me lay a huge crayfish, but how I was supposed to eat it in "polite society" I had not the faintest idea. It had been a different matter feasting on crayfish in the field by the candle factory. You would just flick one of those crayfish out of the boiling water with a couple of twigs and sit there breaking bits off it and throwing the red scales into the fire.

Andrykhevich ate with a kind of solemn triumph, as if he really were performing some sort of holy rite, as Lika had suggested. Anyone could see that food held a prominent place in his life.

"Crayfish are a weakness of mine!" Andrykhevich said, cracking a claw. "Good beer and crayfish make a perfect combination." And he filled my glass with beer that was black as tar. "What have you been arguing about with the young man, my dear?" he asked.

"Vasil wants to remake the world and I've been persuading him against it."

"Indeed! That is interesting. He who was nothing shall become everything? From pauper to prince? Is that the idea?" And Andrykhevich glanced at me, screwing up his eyes.

"Yes!" I said, pushing the crayfish aside and trying to appear calm. "And I suppose you'd like to have everything as it was of old—a hundred capitalists enriching themselves on the labour of millions ... Is that it?"

"Those who have become everything are completely lacking in two things—ability and knowledge."

"No need to worry yourself about that! We'll learn. We'll fight for the knowledge we need."

"But ability is a gift from God. Ability is given to a man at birth and passed on from generation to generation!" the engineer retorted sharply.

"Do you think the working class hasn't any ability?"

Lika burst out laughing. "I told you he was a terrible arguer, Daddy. Our guest's sense of contradiction is developed to an extraordinary degree."

"Just a moment, dear! That is really quite interesting. So you asked me, sir, whether the working class has any ability? Not the slightest doubt of it! If 'Russian craftsmen had no ability, I should have chosen a different profession. What would be the use of working as an engineer, if there were no one capable of putting your ideas into practice! But try and understand this: for the natural, original talent of the working class to develop, the working class must have a technical intelligentsia. And where are you going to get it from?"

"Where from? What about the working class itself? The class that made the Revolution?"

"Don't tell me those fairy-tales!" Andrykhevich exclaimed with visible annoyance. "It's the easiest thing in the world to destroy everything that generations have built up before you. But just try to raise the ruins, to build it all up again. Where can you find the educated people to carry out all these fantastic plans of remaking, the world? Especially when all the countries are against us!"

"We're doing it now ourselves and we'll go on doing it! We're not afraid! With a leader like our Party, the working class needn't be afraid of any difficulties," I said with growing inspiration, looking at Andrykhevich fiercely.

"By yourselves? 'One, two—heave! See how she goes!' Like that, eh?"

"Never mind that old song, we'll manage without that," I answered, feeling a great truth on my side. "In a few years' time we'll have thousands of our own, Soviet experts. They'll work not just for their own gain, but for the general good, to build communism with all the working people. And then those who aren't backing us up now will be sorry for themselves."

"Whom do you have in mind, young man?" Andrykhevich asked and gave me an angry look.

"Who do you think? Don't you know yourself that any man who goes against the will of the whole people is bound sooner or later to be brought out into the open and thrown overboard? Do you think the working class will let people sneer at it and doubt its strength, and at the same time eat its bread? We don't need spongers. We need friends. You sit here laughing at what we are doing now. And what were you saying, I wonder, when the old owners ran away abroad? Thought everything would go smash, I expect. But look how things are going now—the works is turning out more reapers than it was before the war. Isn't that a fact? And how many other factories in our country are doing the same! And how many more shall we build in time!"

"Time will tell..." the engineer grunted meaningfully.

And much was the distrust and hidden resentment in those laconic words ...

THE ROLLERS

I was to remember that conversation at the big table in the soft light of the heavy chandelier all my life. As if it were yesterday, I can see the engineer's contemptuous glance, his puckered slanting eyes, and

hear his ironical, condescending voice. It was not the voice of an older man with far more knowledge and experience than myself. Had it been that, I should, perhaps, have felt differently when I left the Andrykheviches' house amid its ivy and sweet-scented roses that evening. But no, there had been something quite different concealed beneath the contempt he had shown towards me. I had argued with a man of that old decaying world of which Polevoi, the director of our factory-training school, had talked so much. The engineer was sneering quietly to himself at my fieriness, at my sincere belief in the future. He did not throw words away, he used them sparingly, thoughtfully, concealing his real intention. He did not put all his cards on the table, so that I could say to his face: "You're a traitor to the Revolution and a servant to exploiters like Caiworth who've run away abroad. Go and follow them, get out of this country whose people you don't believe in!"

No, he talked very cunningly and sometimes, to find out what I was thinking, even seemed to ask my advice. My advice! The advice of a pupil from a factory-training school who had not been at the plant even a month. . . and he an old, grey-haired chief engineer!

He was still talking when we left the table with the crayfish lying unfinished in their dish.

"Where do you intend building these new factories? I wonder."

"Wherever they're needed!" I replied boldly, remembering the words the Secretary of the Central Committee had used in his conversation with me in Kharkov.

"Just a little hasty, aren't you, young man? You plan to build factories here, there and everywhere, but you haven't yet learnt how to hold a knife properly. It's little things you ought to start with, tiny little things."

I twisted and turned for a long time that night on my prickly mattress by the open window. As I listened to the snores of the other chaps, I remembered the cutting remarks of the tall, bony engineer, and particularly that last dig about the knife I had used to cut the sturgeon.

How simple and good and warm-hearted it had been at Luka Turunda's, in his little cottage on the sea shore! And Luka himself and his father and Katerina—what real, hospitable people they were!

I went to sleep with a warm feeling of gratitude towards the Turunda family and a convinced hatred of my neighbours in the house with the ivy, a hatred born of the knowledge that they harboured the bad old past against which both Polevoi and Nikita Kolomeyets had so often warned me. And then I had the devil's own nightmare.. .

I dreamed I was wearing a long dress-coat like the pianist at Madame Piontkovskaya's and dancing the Charleston. I danced tirelessly, jerking my arms and legs about, like the beggar with St. Vitus's Dance who used to stand outside the Catholic church at home. I was dancing and looking at myself in a mirror. And I could see my face changing. It was becoming lined and bad-tempered and gradually acquiring a grey beard and shaggy eyebrows. But I still went on dancing and getting as thin as a lath. Great big crayfish were crawling towards me across the dirty parquet floor, hissing at me, and opening and closing their long claws: "Lout! Lout! Dirty lout! Where are you trying to get to? From pauper to prince, eh? Get out of here!" And then Sasha and Petka, still very young, popped up beside one of the columns and stared at me with contempt. And I heard Sasha whisper: "See that, Petka? There he is! Danced all his life away and never learnt anything!"

Breaking into a cold sweat, I opened my lips to make an excuse, but my voice was drowned by the hissing of the crayfish, which grew louder and louder until I wanted to stuff my fingers in my ears...

I turned over on to my other side—and woke up.

The alarm was clattering beside me.

Although the young, yellow moon was still looking in at the window, it was time to get up. The foundry started work much earlier than any of the other shops.

"What rubbish you dream sometimes!" I thought and stepped carefully over my sleeping friends. "I mustn't forget to wind up the alarm, in case they oversleep. . ."

Anyone who has lived for long in seaside towns knows that they are always beautiful.

In our town, the quiet, cloudless sunsets when the pink-tinted sun sank unhurriedly into the sea were wonderful.

And no less wonderful were the times when the sun set behind a bank of clouds and the raging sea battered the wall with mighty waves that sent clouds of spray flying over the near-by railway line. The bora whirled in from the steppes, bringing with it dust and the scent of wormwood, tearing off the hats of passers-by, stirring up dust-spouts on the embankment, chasing bits of paper, dry seaweed and dung down the streets. Even in the little roadside ditches far away from the sea, near Kobazovaya Hill, the yellow muddy water tossed and foamed like the open sea. And yet, even amid the terrible thunder of the storm, which could be heard far inland, the town in the grip of the bora was still beautiful. Perched on the headland at the foot of the hill, it was like a ship that at any moment might cast off from the shore and together with its inhabitants, its houses, its market, its church, sail away before the howling north-easter on a long dangerous voyage across the foaming waves. And the wailing cry of the siren on the lighthouse seemed like the last blast of the ship's siren as it started out on its adventurous voyage.

But the beauty of this new town on the shore of the Azov Sea impressed me most just before dawn in summer.

Three o'clock in the morning. The port bells have just sounded the hour and their pleasant chimes have died away somewhere on the hill. The garden gate creaks as I push it open. I hook it shut and set off along the railway by the sea-shore.

The coal-black sea, only near the port furrowed with yellow gleams from the signal lights, nestles quietly in the bay. It seems to be asleep too, sighing from time to time as a wave rustles on the beach.

It is so quiet you feel you could melt away into the silence of the sleeping streets. Not a single light in the windows. Street lamps are burning only at the main crossings, casting pools of yellow light on the roadway. Clouds of white, grey and cream-coloured moths hover round the lamps, battering them with their silky wings as if they want to break the hot glass.

Passing from one deserted cross-road to another, you plunge into the darkness of the neat rows of houses, make your way along the acacia avenues, and gradually shake off the last traces of sleep.

The drowsy watchman at the factory gate glances at your pass and nods his head. Your workers' number-disc makes a nice ring as it drops to the bottom of the green box. And you know your disc won't appear in the foundry until after sunrise, when everybody else has arrived at work. The foundry time-keeper will hang it on a nail in a frame covered with wire netting. And every time you run past it on your way to the heater, you will see your number gleaming on the disc and think to yourself with satisfaction: "Another day without being late or missing work!"

During my first weeks at work, the thing that had worried me most was the fear of being late. And this was not because I might be fined or reprimanded by the foreman. It simply made me ashamed to think of walking through the busy foundry, knowing that you were late and that everyone was looking down on you. People would already be at work, there would be finished moulds standing behind the machines,

ready for filling. And the other foundry men would look at you and think: "Here's a fine time to turn up at work, the slacker! Everybody started long ago, but he's been taking life easy on his feather-bed, the lazy good-for-nothing!"

It was even hard to imagine how I could turn up late in front of my mate Naumenko and say to him calmly: "Hullo, Uncle Vasya!" What sort of conscience had a man who could come to work late and then share wages with his mate!

And something else might happen. Suppose you had just dropped your disc into the box after it had been emptied and were dashing across the yard towards the foundry, when suddenly you bumped into Ivan Fyodorovich, the director. "Hullo, Mandzhura!" he says. "Where are you off to in such a hurry? And why are you here when all your mates have been at work for I don't know how long?" What would I say to the director then? "I'm late, Ivan Fyodorovich?" Could I say that to him after our pledge to carry out our duties honestly and well?...

When our shift foreman had warned me that we should be starting work at four instead of at the usual time with all the others, I felt shivers running down my spine. Would I be able to get up so early? Wouldn't I be late?

But my doubts were banished by a reasonable argument. How else can we manage? If you tell the foundry men to start work with the rest, at the sound of the hooter, that'll mean casting will start about midday. The sun will be at its zenith and the midday heat combined with the waves of heat from the molten metal will make the foundry into a blazing hell. No, the director's quite right to arrange a special time-table for the foundry—at least until we've got the roof raised.

Usually I managed to be one of the first to arrive in the foundry. Today, as I came up to the furnace, I heard voices in the semi-darkness of the shed. Naumenko had arrived already. Hot slabs were glowing under our machines. My partner had put them there to warm up the babbitt that had cooled during the night.

The engineer's salty crayfish and strong beer had given me a terrible thirst. I drank from the tap and went to get the shovels. We used to keep them under the foundations of the blast-furnace that the old owner had not had time to build.

Bending down, I slipped into the vaulted tunnel under the blast-furnace and found the two well-rosined shovels. A pair of green eyes gleamed in the darkness and vanished—there were several stray cats living here underground. They kept hidden during the day, only coming out into the foundry in the evening, when the iron had cooled in the moulds and there was no risk of burning their tender paws on drops of molten metal. What they found to eat in our hot shop, I could not understand. There was nothing here to attract mice or rats. Perhaps they lived on the scraps the workers left from their lunches.

It was fine to stride over the soft sand of the foundry at dawn, with a couple of shovels on your shoulder, feeling strong and cheerful and ready to start moulding.

The workers whose voices I had heard when I entered the foundry had gathered round the machines of Kashket and Tiktov. Artem Gladyshev was among them, and my mate Naumenko was there too, tongs in hand.

"They've done it this time, the navvies!"

"No need to insult the navvies! A good navvy wouldn't disgrace himself like that!"

"And it's not the lad's fault. Pupils take after their teachers."

"Kashket was always moaning he hadn't got enough money to buy himself a drink. 'Faster! Faster!' he kept shouting. Well, this is a 'fast one' all right."

At first I did not realize what had happened. But as soon as I glanced at the pile of empty moulds,

everything became clear.

On one of the mould-boxes were chalked the figures "115—605." They indicated the results of the previous day's work. When the castings were inspected, the examiners chalked up the results on the mould-boxes. These figures meant that out of the 605 moulds Kashket and Tiktov had made, only 115 were any use.

I heard someone breathing heavily behind me.

"Enjoying yourself?" said a familiar voice.

I glanced round. It was Tiktov. His collar was unbuttoned, his forelock dangled.

"I'm not such an egoist as you," I said very quietly. "I don't gloat over other people's failures. But it's a pity so much iron has been wasted!"

"All right, buzz off out of here! Don't try to lecture me."

I looked at Tiktov's spiteful, greenish eyes and realized just how low he had sunk.

"Still at your old game, Tiktov?" I said bitterly and turned away.

Those hours before dawn, in the cool of approaching day, when your arms were not tired and there were no beads of sweat on your dusty forehead, were a real delight. One by one the electric lamps would go out as daylight filtered through the glass roof of the foundry.

That morning Naumenko and I worked well. Three rows of moulds with "sausages" in them were soon lined up behind us. Seeing that Naumenko had stopped for a rest, I asked: "How did they manage to turn out such a lot of bad work, Uncle Vasya? I just can't understand it."

"It's not very hard to understand," Naumenko turned at the sound of my voice and rested his foot up on the mixture box. "Every machine and model has a soul of its own, just like a man has. One model may be fussy and need a bit of careful handling, another may have a steadier character and not be afraid of any knocks. You've got to feel it all with your heart. There's some models you have to treat carefully with a warm slab and plenty of dusting. And there's others you can just mould with your eyes shut."

"But the machines are all the same, aren't they?"

"Not on your life! Everything here ought to be mechanized. Even packing and tamping ought to be done with compressed air. That's how it was to start with, when they first installed these machines. But as soon as the Soviets started taking over the factories, the old owners tried to mess everything up. They destroyed the plans, they pulled the compressors to pieces and buried the parts or threw them into the sea. Those foreign engineers and clerks did their dirty work at nights."

"And where was Andrykhevich? Why didn't he look after things?"

Naumenko took a pull at his cigarette.

"Who knows!" he said. "Maybe he was fishing out there on the breakwater, maybe he was swigging whisky with his bourgeois pals. He had everything he could wish for, so he wasn't much concerned about what those wreckers were doing here..."

"Did they always heat up the machines with slabs like we do now, Uncle Vasya?" I asked, feeling my model which was beginning to cool. "It's a lot of trouble."

Naumenko regarded me in astonishment.

"A lot of trouble! Why?"

"But of course it is! As soon as you've done a few moulds, your slab's cold. Then you've got to run all the way across the foundry to the heater..."

"You are a young gent', aren't you? Too lazy to run a few paces? Perhaps you'd like a horse and cart to take you there? All the work in the foundry is based on running about. If you want to take it easy, you'd better ask for a job in the office."

Naumenko's words touched me on the raw, but I did not want to argue with him.

So as not to hold up the moulding, I grabbed the tongs and ran off to the heater.

As I darted across the foundry, I thought to myself: "But you're wrong, Uncle Vasya! What's the sense in all this running about? Where does rationalization come in? If you added up the distance we cover going backwards and forwards to the heaters, you'd be half way to Mariupol!"

Before we had finished our hundred and first mould, Fedorko, the foreman, came up and asked: "Going to knock-off soon, Naumenko?"

"What's up, Alexei Grigorievich?"

"We're going to change you over."

Uncle Vasya stopped moulding.

"What to this time?" he growled, making no attempt to hide his annoyance.

"We're going to give you some rollers to do."

"Rollers? But look here, Alexei Grigorievich, let us stay on 'sausages!' We've only just got into the way of the job and now you want to change us over!"

"It's got to be done," Fedorko said sternly. "The store's chock-full of those sausages of yours, but there's hardly a roller in the place. I put those basher-boys on it, but you can see for yourself what their work's like—enough spoilage to fill a couple of railway trucks! Another performance like that and the assembly shop will be out of work. Can we risk that?"

"I get you," Uncle Vasya said, "but. . ."

"What are you 'butting' about, Uncle Vasya?" Gladyshev shouted from behind his machine. "It's a fine change! You need half a furnace of iron to cast those sausages of yours, but you can fill up a roller-mould in a couple of ticks!"

Two navvies brought some spare slabs in from the tool shop and dropped them on the dry sand, where the few empty mould-boxes we had left were piled. Whenever I went to the moulding floor to set the lower half of a mould, I took a look at the new model. It seemed very simple. Six rollers like the ones that turn the sails of a reaper were soldered to the smooth babbitt slab. On each of the rollers there was a small nipple to hold the core. And the top was even more simple. There was a nest of six little thimbles for the cores, and several small channels—like the veins on a maple-leaf—for pouring the metal into each mould.

"How could anyone make a mess of such a simple casting?" I wondered as I set my moulds.

Lunch-time was near. Turunda and Gladyshev had finished their moulds and started casting. It was too hot to do any more moulding. The heat from the filled moulds near by was scorching. There was a clang on the furnace bell and the daily distribution of metal began.

"Stop moulding!" Naumenko commanded. "Let's go to the furnace."

We did our casting to the sound of the furnace bell, which was rung every time the furnace was tapped.

Between one gong and the next there was just time to carry the heavy ladle of molten metal to the machines 'and fill the moulds.

How glad we were when the iron at last rose to the top of the mould and the round hole of the

pouring gate filled up and turned red! It was good to know that all our moulds were properly damped, and would fill up well, without spluttering hot, stinging drops of metal all round. Burbled softly inside the mould, the metal gradually filled every cranny in the mould and grew thick and firm in its cold sandy prison.

Scarcely had we tipped away the brownish slag into the sand when the furnace bell rang again calling the foundry men to refill their ladles. Then we would go back to where the teemers, in dark glasses, with their hats pulled down over their foreheads, and their tapping bars at the ready, were bustling about round the roaring furnaces. We went back at a run. Uncle Vasya would hop along like a youngster, quite forgetting his age.

I liked this risky work, the race against the other moulders across the soft sand of the shop, and the careful return with a heavy ladle of molten metal.

The air was thick with fumes. My throat felt dry from the smell of sulphur. The glare of flying sparks made the few electric lamps that were still burning in the foundry almost invisible.

Close by, behind the unfinished blast-furnace, a round pot-bellied furnace for melting copper was roaring—we used to call it the "pear," because of its shape. Now and then we felt the acrid smell of molten copper. Caught up in the general excitement, however, I noticed neither the heat nor the fumes, which increased as the casting went on.

The sweating faces of the moulders gleamed dark brown in the light of the flames.

I stood by the furnace spout, down which a yellowish stream of iron poured into our ladle, glancing at Uncle Vasya's grim attentive face, and I realized yet again that I had chosen the right job.

The little glowing splashes of molten iron flew over my head cooling in their flight, but I no longer tried to dodge them as I had once; perhaps my face quivered a bit, but I kept a firm hold on the metal ring of the handle.

In our marches across the foundry with a ladle full of molten metal there was a kind of valour, there was risk, there was cheerful daring. As we carried the heavy ladles back and forth, tired and dripping with salty sweat, but proud of ourselves and our work, I felt unbelievably.

Not until the casting was nearly over did I notice Sasha Bobir with an adjustable spanner in his hand, and another fitter tinkering about round our machines, adjusting the new 'models for the next day's casting. Apparently Sasha had been watching us filling the moulds for some time, and when I put the ladle down on the sand and came over to the machines, he asked sympathetically:

"Feeling whacked, Vasil?"

In Bobir's voice I sensed an acknowledgement that he considered the work of foundry man higher than his own job as a mechanic. . .

"Whacked! What makes you think that? Just an ordinary day's work!" I answered quietly, rubbing my eyes.

"Where were you so late last night?" Now Sasha's voice was searching and curious.

"Where I had to be! Mind you get that slab fitted straight and screw the bolts up tight."

"Don't worry we know what we're doing!" Sasha grunted, and setting his feet against the mixture-box, tugged wildly at the spanner handle.

"Come and smear the moulds, lad!" Naumenko called.

He had already brought in a box of iron moulds from the stores. I got a tin of graphite grease and sat down with my partner on the sand.

It was so hot and stuffy that the grease which had been firm in the morning was now like thin

porridge. I felt muzzy. The sweat dripped off us even at this easy job of dipping our fingers into the grease and smearing the inside of each mould.

"Know what this is for?" Naumenko asked. "To make the moulds slip easily on the rollers?" "That's right. And the other reason is to make them slip off easily with the sand."

"Do they stay in the mould-box then?" "What did you think? When the iron cools in moulds like these, it gets a smooth hard surface and you can use it straightaway, without grinding."

"Neat idea!" I said and remembered that I had often seen a drop of liquid iron fall on a smooth metal slab and become quite smooth when it got cool.

Kashket's red kerchief showed up for a moment behind the smoking moulds. He was strolling down the alley nibbling sunflower seeds and spitting out the shells.

Today he had drifted into the foundry later than anyone. As soon as he saw the examiner's notice, he raised a terrible howl, ran to the foreman, took him into the yard where defective castings were usually dumped, threatened to complain to the disputes commission and denied emphatically that the spoilage was his fault. Since then he had been wandering about the shop doing nothing.

Noticing us at our box of moulds, Kashket swung round sharply. For a moment he posed before us in his red kerchief, munching sunflower seeds, then he asked: "Getting ready beforehand?"

The question seemed rather pointless and Uncle Vasya did not answer. He went on silently smearing the moulds with graphite.

"Out to earn more than anyone else? Want to buy yourself a house and garden?" Kashket taunted.

"I'm out to help the working class, not fill the scrapyard like you!" Naumenko cut him short, reaching for a mould,

"I wonder what tune you'll sing the day after tomorrow when they give you a write-up like I got today?"

"Wonder as much as you like, but don't chuck your sunflower shells down here. They get in the sand!" Uncle Vasya said angrily.

"The sifters will look after that, don't worry!" said Kashket and spat a shell neatly at our feet.

"Little stuff like that won't come out in sifting. It'll get in the mould and there'll be a flaw... Stop making a mess, I say!" Uncle Vasya snapped, quite fiercely this time.

"All right, old pal, keep your hair on," said Kashket soothingly and put the seeds in his pocket.

Squatting beside me, he picked up a mould and started smearing it with grease. His breath reeked of vodka.

"But if you reason the thing out calmly, Uncle Vasya, you'll see you're only wasting your time with what you're doing now," Kashket lisped, rubbing his finger round the mould.

"What do you mean?" Naumenko asked with a stern look at Kashket.

"However much you grease the things, it won't do any good. The model's badly constructed, and that's why the castings are bad. It's high time they made new ones instead of blaming the workers for spoilage!"

"You brought that on yourself," Naumenko replied. "You jaw a lot, but you don't know how to mould."

"We'll see how much you and your Komsomol pal turn out," Kashket said, getting up and hoisting his trousers.

"You'd better push off out of here and leave others to do the watching, you half-baked tiddler. I've had enough of you dancing around in front of me like a devil in church!"

And although Naumenko spoke as though he attached no importance to Kashket's words, I realized that Kashket had got under his skin. I could see that Naumenko would give his ears to turn out those rollers well.

"Perhaps the model really isn't constructed right, Uncle Vasya?" I said.

"You listen to that scatter-brain a bit longer!" Naumenko burst out. "He'll tell you plenty more yarns like that.. Do you think you can believe a single word he says!"

... The next day we buckled into the work and went ahead even faster. Before lunch we had packed eighty-seven moulds. I wanted to slip out to see Golovatsky after lunch, but Uncle Vasya gave me the job of sharpening up the cores with a rasp. As I sharpened the cores for our last lot of moulds, I reflected that moulding these rollers had turned out to be the easiest job I had ever done. But what the castings would be like, we still did not know. We should know that only on Monday, when the moulds were opened.

Today was Saturday.

When we knocked off, one hundred and five glowing moulds stood on the moulding floor.

LETTERS TO FRIENDS

"You can cackle away, I'm off to write a letter to the chaps!" I said to Petka and Sasha, having listened patiently to all their jokes about my evening out.

I still had not told them where I had been the day before yesterday. From the ruthless interrogation they had given me it appeared that they intended to keep me under perpetual surveillance in case I "broke away from the collective." Comrade-like, they were afraid I might be going to the bad, and they kept dropping hints to find out what I had been doing. But I could not confess. If I so much as mentioned the crayfish supper at the engineer's, they would be down on me like a ton of bricks. Yet hadn't I defended our honour against the engineer? Of course I had!

Leaving my friends in the attic, I changed into slippers and put my foundry boots out in the goat's shed till Monday.

By the fence in our yard stood a little rickety summer-house overgrown with grapes. Inside there was a small table.

The shady summer-house was a fine place to write letters. A light breeze blew from the sea, rustling the pages of my exercise-book.

To start with I wrote some postcards: to Furman at the October Revolution Works in Lugansk, to Monus Guzarchik in Kharkov, and, of course, to Galya Kushnir in Odessa. All the morning I had been thinking what to write to her. The snub she had given me by taking Tiktov's side in the Francis Joseph affair now seemed quite trivial.

Forgetting all the sharp words that had passed between us, I thought only of the fond, gentle things. Suddenly I found myself comparing Galya to Angelika, with all her superstitions, her icon-lamp, her sad fairy, and her craze for the Charleston.

"Of course Galya is a thousand times more genuine and sincere!" I thought. And I carefully wrote at the end of the postcard:

". . . And if this postcard reaches you, Galya, try and find time to write to me. Tell me how you're getting on, how you like the work and Odessa, tell me about everything. And remember our walks round the Old Fortress and all the good things that happened to us. Petka and Sasha Bobir send you their warmest 'Komsomol greetings. We're living together in a little house right by the Azov Sea.

"Komsomol greetings,

"Vasily Mandzhura."

I could not be sure that my postcards would reach my friends. When we parted, we had only noted down the names of the factories where we were going to work. And at those factories there were thousands of other workers!

To Nikita Kolomeyets I decided to write a long, detailed letter. His address was engraved in my memory for life:

"Factory-Training School, Hospital Square, nr. Motor Works." I wrote the address carefully on the envelope and put a pebble on it to stop it blowing away. As soon as I opened the exercise-book, however, I realized that someone had been using it. Two pages had been torn out of the middle, and the first page was scrawled with Sasha's familiar handwriting. I read what was written there and could not help smiling.

"To the Chief of the Town Security Department.

"I have a very good memory. If I see a person once, I never forget him. The reason why I am telling you all this, Comrade Chief, is that you..."

At this point Sasha's letter broke off. The word "you" followed the deleted phrase: "won't laugh at me, like my friends."

Again I remembered the day of our arrival, and how the agitated Sasha had tried to prove that he had seen Pecheritsa by a refreshment kiosk. I hadn't forgotten Sasha's wrathful shout, when Petka suggested that he might have been seeing a ghost.

Folding the scribbled page, I put it in the pocket of my blouse and started composing my letter to Nikita. It turned out to be a very long one. This was not so much my fault as Nikita's.

The evening before we parted, Nikita had said: "I'll only ask you for one thing, old chap—the more details the better. Everyone's life consists of thousands of little details, and only the man who finds out what they're all about and the right way to deal with them can be called a real man. So tell me all the instructive details you notice at your new place of work, Vasil, old chap. And I'll try to find out what they're all about and make use of them on the next course."

Now I was giving Nikita his instructive details "at full blast," as the stokers say. I told him everything: how Tiktov had turned away from us, how we had been afraid at first that we should be lodging with a big house-owner, how Sasha had "seen" Pecheritsa by a refreshment kiosk. Zuzya Trituzny, the footballer with the cannon-ball shot, who had nearly spoilt our chances of getting a job, I described in sizzling terms. I told Nikita that in my spare time I was thinking of a new way of heating the machines. I gave him a very detailed description of my visit to Madame Rogale-Piontkovskaya's dancing-class. And so that Nikita should not tell me off for going to dances (you never knew what ideas he might get into his head!) I explained my reason for visiting the establishment: ". . . to see for myself if this Rogale-Piontkovskaya was a relative of that old Countess in Zarechye who gave Petlura and Konovalets riflemen such a welcome."

I asked Nikita to find out more about what had become of the Countess and her aristocratic brother.

Then followed a very favourable description of our director Ivan Fyodorovich Rudenko, who had been so decent to us. I told Nikita about Ivan Fyodorovich's concern for the workers, how he wanted to raise the foundry roof and how he was trying to puzzle out himself the technical secrets that the former owners had taken away with them.

It was getting dark and I had to finish, but my pen went on writing and writing.

I continued my letter with a piece of information that seemed to me most important:

"... Tell Kozakevich to make his new pupils in the foundry cut their sleeves short at the elbow. We had so much spoilage because of those long sleeves, and no one ever noticed it. I only got to know the dodge when I came here. And it's quite simple really. When a trainee is working on a mould he catches his cuffs in the sand. While he's patching up one place, he makes a mess in others. And the result is all sorts of cracks and bumps. It's much easier and quicker to mould with your sleeves short. Get Zhora to tell the foundry trainees all about metal moulds and what they're for. In fact, the best thing would be if he did a casting or two with an iron mould, just as an example. It would help them a lot. Then they won't feel like me, for instance, who'd never seen an iron mould till I came here. . ."

The sun was already dipping into the sea. A warm milky' twilight crept over the tired, sun-baked earth. But still I wrote. My arm ached, even more than from moulding.

A PLAN OF ATTACK

The moon rose full and serene. Its mellow light spangled the calm waters of the bay. The pale-pink chestnuts round the park were silently shedding their last blossoms. Scattered on the ground in the moonlight, they looked like pop-corn.

The three of us had spent the whole of Sunday by the sea, lounging about on the beach like regular holiday-makers. My back still red and tingling from the sun, I had been dragging my feet across the sticky asphalt of Park Street when I nearly bumped into Golovatsky. He was dressed in a light open-necked shirt, cream flannels, and sandals.

"Trying to escape from the heat!" Golovatsky said greeting me. "The fan at home's gone wrong. I've been trying to read, but it's too sultry. Just wears you out. Let's go down there, a bit further from the road." And Golovatsky pointed into the depths of the park.

As a matter of fact, it being Sunday, I had intended to visit Turunda. I had even invited my friends to go with me, but they had refused. Golovatsky's suggestion made up my mind for me.

We joined the strollers in the park and followed the path past the open-air cinema, which was surrounded by tall railings. The projector was humming and from near the screen came the sound of a piano. Today they were showing two films—The Bear's Wedding and Bricks—in one programme, and it had attracted a lot of people. For a Sunday, the park itself was comparatively empty.

The green nook into which Golovatsky and I wandered was completely deserted. Through the park railings we could see the moonlit side-road that led into Genoa Street. The air seemed fresher under the branching trees and we began to feel better as we leaned back on a park bench.

"Ssh! Look, Mandzhura!" Golovatsky nudged me and pointed towards the road.

In the light of the moon I caught sight of two girls in flimsy cotton dresses. As soon as they reached the shade of the trees, one of the girls sat down on the front door-step of a house. In frantic haste, as if someone were chasing her, she began to do something to her feet. The other girl did the same. Soon I

realized that both girls were taking off their shoes. Then, like snakes shedding their skins, they peeled off their long stockings, pushed them into their shoes and carefully wrapped them in pieces of paper they must have been keeping for the purpose. Apparently much relieved to be rid of their foot-wear, the girls skipped away in the direction of the Liski. The next moment a whole flock of girls ran up and took refuge in the shade of the trees. Sitting down on the same door-step, they did the same thing as their predecessors, and wrapping their tight shoes in newspapers and handkerchiefs, scampered happily away to their homes.

Smiling and glancing at me mysteriously, Golovatsky said: "You can't help laughing, can you? That's a sight you can see any evening out here."

"Look, there are some more!" I whispered.

Two girls appeared in the road, hobbling. One of them, with a fringe, was wearing a sailor's blouse. The other had rigged herself out in a kind of tunic with great, billowing sleeves.

The girl in the sailor's blouse could not even reach the cherished door-step. Clinging to an old lime-tree for support, she kicked off her shiny shoes.

"What a relief!" her voice reached us faintly. "I thought I'd die they pinched me so!"

"Take your stockings off, Madeleine," said her friend, who was already sitting on the door-step. "You'll make a hole in them."

"Wait a bit, let my toes have a rest." And the girl in the blouse walked about slowly under the lime-trees, as if she were cooling her feet on the stone pavement.

"You were just asking for it to order such small ones," said her friend, pulling off her stockings.

"But I take sixes as it is, I can't wear bigger than that. Everybody would laugh..." was Madeleine's reply.

The two girls melted into the shadows.

"That one in the blouse works at the plant," said Golovatsky.

"Where are they all coming from?"

"Regular attenders at Madame Piontkovskaya's dancing-classes . . . Ever been there?"

"Yes, I have!" I grunted, then I hesitated—should I tell Golovatsky how Madame had called me a lout?

"What was your impression?"

"The most daft-making place I've ever seen!"

"Put it there, pal!" Golovatsky exclaimed. "So you and I are of the same opinion . . . Rogale-Piontkovskaya's joint puts a man's mind to sleep. It's just dope that blinds him to everything really interesting in the world ..."

Golovatsky glanced round and went on: "These trees, the stars that shine in the sky, even the grains of sand under your feet still hold hundreds of secrets that haven't been discovered yet. Those secrets are waiting for the man who will come and unearth them and use them for the good of society. Look at those cottages over there. Think how they're built. Couldn't they be built better, more easily, more comfortably, more sturdily than our grandfathers built them. Couldn't they be built so that the sun would shine in them all day? Surely that's a task worth devoting your life to. Or let's imagine ourselves on the beach. How little we know about the sea! Here we are, still hauling in our nets by hand, but in some places they're using electric winches. Or here's another task—harness the power of the tides to make it serve socialism! Isn't that a dream that, can be turned into reality? And then think of those dozens of people, who could have such an interesting future before them; wasting hour after hour kicking their legs about like a lot of

puppets. It's a disgrace!"

"But we ought to put a stop to it!"

"You see, Mandzhura, I've already tried once to fight Madame's influence, but some of our more orthodox comrades wouldn't have it. 'You're getting petty, Tolya,' they said. 'We've got big problems to solve, and you bother about people going for a hop!' But I'm not being petty at all. Even if Madame Rogale-Piontkovskaya pops off tomorrow, we'll still be fighting her influence for a long time to come . . . That girl in the blouse, she's a decent, very intelligent girl. One day in the library I glanced at the file and was absolutely thrilled to see how many books she'd read. Then her friends got her on this fox-trotting business. After a couple of times she was a different girl. First she gave herself this fancy fringe, then she started plucking her eyebrows in zigzags, and soon she was changing her name."

"In church? A Komsomol girl?!"

"She hasn't gone that far yet," Golovatsky said. "She held the christening party at home. A straightforward name like 'Olga' doesn't suit her any more, now she's 'Madeleine.' And her friends were only waiting for the signal. Only the other day they were Varvara, Dasha, Katya, but no sooner do they go to Madame's than they have to have foreign names: Nelly, Margot, Lizetta ... In the tool-repair shop there's even one Beatrice—used to be Avdotya ..."

"Is Angelika a foreign name too?" I asked casually.

"You mean the chief engineer's daughter? She changed hers too. Not so much, of course. She used to be Angelina. That's only one letter different."

"Have any of the chaps done it?"

"One or two. There's a driver in the transport department, for example—Misha Osaulenko. Last year he did a daft thing—got an unemployed sailor to tattoo him all over. Not a clean patch on him anywhere. Anchors, mermaids, monkeys, St. Isaac's Cathedral, and on his back he's got a picture of a Hawaiian banana grove. Nearly gave himself blood-poisoning. Very ill, he was. And when he got better, he wanted to kick himself. As soon as he went out on the beach, he'd have a crowd round him—where's this queer painted bird sprung from? The visitors thought Misha must be an old sea-wolf; but he'd never been out to sea further than the lighthouse, and he only did that on a calm day, because he gets sea-sick. The poor chap had to go and find a quiet spot to bathe where no one could see him. But do you think that blunder taught him anything?... As soon as Madame starts her dancing-classes, he's hanging about round there. And he was a real dancer once! Of course, Madame gets round him with her compliments and gets him eating out of her hand like all the rest of them. I'm going to the works one day and what do I hear? There he is singing some outlandish song and one of his pals comes up to him and says: 'Got a light, Edouarde?'"

"You're joking, Tolya?" I said.

"Never been more serious in my life. It's the truth. Down I went to the transport department. 'Aren't you ashamed?' I said. 'Haven't you got any self-respect at all?'"

"And what did he say?"

"Kicked at first. That's my business, he says. But after I had talked to him for about an hour, he agreed at last that he was making a goat of himself."

"Does he still go to those hops?"

"He's changed his mind. But there are others who can't live without going there. Look at that Madeleine. She's from a working-class family, she's a good plater, but she had to go to Garagonich, the poshest shoemaker in town. 'Make me a pair of shoes like the pair in this magazine, with the highest heels you can find,' she says. Garagonich knew when he was on to a good thing, of course, and took her

whole month's pay for doing it. Made her a good four inches taller, he did. It didn't bother him whether she'd be able to walk in them. You saw her for yourself—wobbles about as if she were on stilts. . . . And all that muck oozes out of Madame's saloon. It's a hot-bed of bourgeois narrow-mindedness! Madame works on the young people like a worm. Her friends send her foreign music and gramophone records and fashion magazines, and she hands them round. It's time we put up a fight, Vasya!"

"How can we fight her, if she's got a licence?"

Golovatsky laughed.

"So you think a licence is a guarantee of protection for the private dealer? A guarantee that the state won't compete with him? You're very naive, Mandzhura! We'd better discuss what we're going to do."

... On that sultry evening, among the blossoming jasmine bushes on the edge of the park, we conceived our plan of attack on the Rogale-Piontkovskaya dance saloon.

Sitting on that bench, we worked everything out to the last detail. When everything was decided, Golovatsky asked: "Are you very fagged today?"

"No. Why?"

"What about coming down to my little place and putting our ideas on paper, so that we don't mix anything up?"

A CABIN ON DRY LAND

Golovatsky lived in a little house in People's Vengeance Square.

We passed through a long, untidy yard. Golovatsky felt under the door-step and found the key. The padlock on the door squeaked as he opened it.

Switching on the light in the passage, Tolya stood aside and let me enter first. The end-wall of the passage was stacked from top to bottom with books. There were books all over the room too—on shelves, on stands, even on the wooden stools.

"Don't be surprised at some of my whims, will you," Golovatsky said in an apologetic tone. "You see, I'm dead keen on the sea..."

The furniture of the small room consisted of a narrow bunk covered with a fluffy green blanket, a desk, and a round dinner table over which hung a lamp in a green shade. I noticed at once that the two windows looking out into the yard were round, like ship's portholes. A life-buoy with the name, Ochakov printed on it added to the cabin-like appearance of the room. The only chair was of heavy oak, like those in a ship's chart room.

"Surprised at the windows?" Golovatsky asked. "If only you knew what a battle I had with my landlady before she'd let me remake them like that!"

"But you've got them fixed tight in the wall. There's nowhere for air to come in."

"Oh yes, there is!"

And Golovatsky, evidently anxious to justify his eccentricity, turned a fastening that I had not noticed before. Then he pulled open the round "porthole." The scent of jasmine blossom floated up from the yard.

"My own design," Tolya said, opening the other window. "I did the brickwork and some chaps in the joiner's shop made the frame from my plan. Unusual, eh? But I like it! You feel as if you're at sea. It gives

you a sense of movement. Those square peep-holes that people call windows are too restful."

"But most people have square windows, don't they?"

"Of course they do. They've got used to dull monotony," Tolya replied half joking, half serious. "Take a thing like this, for example. Black, the colour of the past, is still the predominant colour in our clothes—black caps, black suits, black shawls for grandmothers, even black party frocks for girls. Isn't it time we started a fight against this perpetual mourning in our everyday life? Nature's so rich in colours! What beautiful colours there are in a rainbow, in sky and sea! We ought to make a firm break with the past over things like that!" And Golovatsky banged his fist on the table.

"All right, don't get worked up, Tolya," I hastened to assure the owner of the strange room, and went over to one of the bookshelves.

The number of books he had! On geography, on biochemistry, on logic... An ancient chart of the Azov Sea kept company with text-books on astronomy and navigation. Over the shelves hung drawings of fish, sailor's knots, running lights, and even a diagram of a two-masted sailing ship.

"You must want to be a sailor?"

Tolya gave me a keen glance. "What makes you think that?"

"All the books you've got about the sea!" I said, and nodded at three tightly-packed shelves.

"Besides knowing the land on which you live, old chap, you've got to know the sea that lies ten paces from your door. One day you may have to sail on it. We, Komsomol members, have work to do in the navy as well, you know."

"That officer—who's he?" I asked rather suspiciously, examining the carefully framed photograph of a naval officer wearing a black cloak, a dirk, and a very high peak-cap.

"Lieutenant Pyotr Schmidt," Golovatsky explained.

"What, the man the works is named after?"

"That's right. The one who raised the signal 'I am in command of the fleet. Schmidt!' during the uprising of the Black Sea fleet in 1905. He was against tsarism, he loved the working people. Schmidt played a part in the Revolution, you know. It wasn't for nothing the workers of Sevastopol elected him to their Soviet!"

"When did they name the works after him?" "Soon after the Revolution. Do you think it was just a matter of chance?" "I don't know..."

"Listen then.. .The point is that Schmidt worked for a short time at our plant..." "What? An officer?"

"Yes, when he was a midshipman. His family used to live in this town. I suppose he wanted to see for himself how the working people lived, so when he came on leave he changed his midshipman's tunic for a worker's blouse... And do you know how I found his photograph?" Golovatsky continued, warming to his subject. "As soon as I heard all this about Lieutenant Schmidt from the old workers, I started trying to trace his history. Very interesting it was, too. I read all the old newspapers of those years, I went all over the house where his family used to live. But unfortunately, there was nothing left! After all, twenty years had passed. Three wars, three revolutions, famine... And then I thought to myself, surely Schmidt couldn't have lived in our town without having his photograph taken once when he was on leave! I looked through the negatives of all the private photographers I could find—and there you are, that's what I found. I ordered the enlargement myself."

"But you ought to send it to a museum, so that everyone can see it!"

"Surely you don't think I'm as mean as all that? I sent the negative to the Historical Museum in Moscow the very same day. They wrote me a letter of thanks." "And where does the life-buoy come

from?" "A cabman gave me the tip. A chap called Volodya." "Used to be a partisan? Crippled arm?" "That's him. He happened to mention that there was a man from Sevastopol living in Matrosskaya Settlement who'd as good as taken part in the uprising. So off I went to see him. It turned out that he hadn't been on the Ochakov himself, but he'd kept a life-buoy from the ship that started the mutiny. It's a precious relic! Had a hard job wheedling it out of him."

The coffee that Golovatsky had put on came to the boil. Golovatsky lifted the copper saucepan and placed a strip of metal over the blue flame of the spirit stove, so that the brew would simmer.

"Now look at this photograph, Mandzhura," Tolya said, striding across the room. "He comes from round our way too."

The photograph was of a smart-looking naval officer in tsarist uniform. He was sitting facing the camera, in a white tunic hung with medals, and a white cap with a dark band, his hands resting on his knees.

"Why are you so keen on Whiteguard officers?"

"In the first place, he was never a Whiteguard," Golovatsky corrected me. "And secondly, if all the tsarist officers had done as much in life as he did, and known so much trouble, I don't suppose the White generals would have been able to make them fight against the Revolution. They simply wouldn't have obeyed them. . . For your information, that is Georgy Sedov, the famous Arctic explorer, who died of scurvy on an ice-floe near the North Pole."

"Was he from the Azov Sea too?"

"Of course! From Krivaya Kosa. You see, not all officers are the same. If Lieutenant Schmidt, besides his sincere desire to overthrow the autocracy, had possessed the character of Georgy Sedov—who knows how the uprising on the Ochakov might have ended!"

"So Sedov was a good man?" I asked cautiously, completely at a loss.

"He came from the people and he loved his country," Golovatsky said with great feeling and reached down a book from one of the shelves. "Listen to what Sedov said in his last order" of the day, written before setting out for the Pole. He wrote this order on February the second, 1914, when he was already very ill. '... Today we are setting out for the Pole. This is an event for us and for our country. Discovery of the Pole has been the dream of great Russians for centuries—Lomonosov, Mendeleev, and others. We, ordinary people, have the honour to realize their dream, and to do our best in polar discovery for the benefit and pride of our dear Motherland. I do not want to say "good-bye" to you, dear companions, I want to say "till we meet again," so that I may embrace you once more, and rejoice with you over our common success, and return with you to our country...' " "And did he return?" I asked.

"He was buried out there, in the Arctic, on the road to his goal. He gave his life for the good of his people, and all the time the tsarist ministers were pouring abuse on him in the newspapers..."

"Yes, a man like him would have supported Soviet power unhesitatingly. He wouldn't have sneered and picked holes like Andrykhevich!" I flashed out suddenly.

"Well, that is comparing a lion to a mouse..." Golovatsky looked at me with reproach. "That fellow is just a philistine with a university education. Do you know Andrykhevich personally?"

"Happened to meet him the other day," I replied. "Strange how a man could betray a tradition that had been in the family for generations. His parents took part in the Polish uprising against the Russian emperor. They were exiled to Siberia for it. But their son has served the tsar and the capitalists and treats the Revolution as a great personal misfortune."

"But he doesn't say that openly, does he?" "Sometimes he likes to play the democrat, comes out of his little mansion and takes a trip round the town. On Sundays mostly. He goes into the pubs and The Little

Nook,' listens to the blind bayan players. Drinks beer and talks a lot. One or two of the foremen are under his influence. Can't hear a word spoken against him."

"But on the whole, he's a clever man, he's useful, isn't he?"

"He has to work, there's no way out. But I can very easily imagine what Andrykhevich would do if there was a war. As for how useful he is—well, a man can be just a little bit useful, just for form's sake, or he can give the job everything he's got. That member of the gentry only does what he's told to do. You've probably heard about the owners taking a lot of production secrets away with them, or hiding them before they went. Well, Ivan Fyodorovich is doing his best, but so far the results aren't very great. And the chief engineer just hangs around and waggles his eyebrows, laughing up his sleeve all the time. Now, I ask you, do you think Caiworth kept any technical secrets from his chief engineer? All that about the drawings being messed up is just an excuse. A good, experienced engineer keeps his knowledge stored up in his mind without any drawings. It's simply that Andrykhevich doesn't want to tell us—that's the point!"

"He's waiting for a turn of the tide. Thinks everything will change," I assented, and told Golovatsky about my argument with the engineer.

"There you are! What more do you want? How much more open do you expect him to be?" Golovatsky exclaimed, and seeing that the coffee was boiling over, turned down the spirit lamp. "He doesn't like us. People like Andrykhevich don't help our cause; they're lying in wait for us. You understand what that means, Vasil—lying in wait for us! . . . They note every blunder, every slip we make, so that they'll be able to gloat over it afterwards... Why, if we ever let Denikin and the foreigners get back here, Andrykhevich would be the first to throw open his gates to them!" "

"And is his 'daughter the same?" I asked, having waited until Tolya had expended all his wrath on the old engineer.

"Angelika? Growing up to be a grebe. Gorky described people like her perfectly when he wrote: 'And the grebes are also moaning. Not for them the rapture of life's struggle. They are frightened by the crash of blows!' "

Golovatsky poured out the thick steaming coffee into little purple cups covered with black spots that made them look like lady-birds. Then he went out into the passage, drew water from a tub and filled two glasses.

"You drink the coffee in sips," he said, "a sip of coffee, then a sip of water. Otherwise it makes your heart race. Strong stuff."

I did not leave Tolya's "cabin" until midnight.

The streets of the town were deserted. Bats flitted silently above my head as I walked past the park, which was now locked up for the night.

EVERYTHING IS FOR THE BEST

What a success we'd had with those rollers for nearly a whole week! Out of about six hundred we had spoiled only six or seven. We could stand that. It was an allowable percentage of waste considering the speed of our' work. We were turning out far more rollers than anyone else, and all because Uncle Vasya did not spare the trouble to grease the moulds and sharpen the cores beforehand. According to

him it was better to spend an extra half hour in the heat and dust by the glowing moulds, and prepare everything for the next day, than to bother about getting things ready in the early morning, when you wanted to work up a good speed on the job.

The day my period of probation ended Uncle Vasya did not turn up for work. I could not make out why he was late. Nearly all the workers were at their machines. Some were spreading fresh sand, others were warming up their models, yet others were preparing their moulding floor, smoothing the dry sand to make it easier to set the moulds later on. Unexpectedly the foreman appeared.

"I'm giving you another mate today, Mandzhura. Your Naumenko has asked for two days off. He's got to take his wife to Mariupol for an operation."

A few minutes later, who should turn up at the machines but—Kashket! He was carrying his own tamper.

Kashket swaggered up to Uncle Vasya's machine and tested the frame to see that it was tight. Then he lit a cigarette. I looked at him and thought: "What a partner! I'd rather catch a stray cat under the blast-furnace and put it on the machine. At least a cat would do less harm..." True, after his fantastic record spoilage Kashket had become more careful, but though he made a great show of shouting and running about, to impress people, we had been beating him and Tiktov by a good forty moulds every day.

Turunda saw the mate I had been given and shook his head, as if telling me to refuse.

But how could I refuse? If I had been working here for a year or two, it would have been different; I could have objected and asked for someone else. But I was raw on the job. Besides, perhaps the foreman had separated Kashket and Tiktov on purpose.

"Why is the model badly heated?" Kashket asked pompously.

"Get some slabs and warm it up to your liking."

"You're younger—you go for them!" Kashket lisped.

"Do your own work!" I flung out, and hearing the bell for work to begin, I started packing sand into a mould.

Kashket dithered about, then picked up the tongs and went off to the heater.

By the time he came back I had two lower halves ready. I had inserted the cores myself and cleared a space for fresh moulds. Somehow or other we managed to finish ten moulds. Then Kashket began to tire. He went off for a smoke by the furnace and got stuck there gossiping with the furnace men.

I lost my temper. Finishing off my last mould for my partner, I ran over to the furnace.

"Look here, when are you..." I began, topping Kashket on the shoulder.

"That was last year," he said, thinking that I was asking about his story.

"I'm asking you when you're going to stop jawing and do some work?" I shouted in his face.

"Am I interfering with you?" Kashket answered calmly and turned his back on me to continue his story.

"Yes, you are!" I bawled in his ear.

"Interfering with you?"

"Not me personally, but the whole works. The working class! Everybody!" I shouted furiously.

Kashket seemed to cower back for a moment.

"Drop in and see me, Arkhip, I'll tell you the rest there," he said to the furnace man, tossing his cigarette away. "You see what a wild cat they've put on me. . . one of those Komsomolites..."

I said nothing and strode back to the machines. I could hear Kashket padding along behind me and I thought to myself: "We'll see who's been put on whom, you Makhno scum! I can do without you!"

When he got back, Kashket fiddled around, rattled the lever of his machine and, to do him justice, put in thirty minutes' real hard work. Luka and Artem goggled at the sight of Kashket, the lounge, working at such speed. They had not heard our argument at the furnace. I decided to let the matter drop altogether.

But 'Kashket was of a different opinion. Presently he started again.

"Just what am I doing that interferes with the working class?" he lisped.

Without a second thought, I answered: "Millions of peasants are waiting for our reaping machines and you are holding up the programme. The working class is trying to raise its productivity and you just play the fool. Looks as if you're for them, not for us."

"I'm one of the working class myself! What are you babbling about. Who do you mean—they?"

"I mean the Whiteguards and the capitalists, all that scum which you helped in 1919!"

"Me? ... Helped them? ... Oh no, Lad. That's a silly thing to say!"

He suddenly quietened down and became very meek. He even started going for slabs out of turn. As I watched him slink away to the distant heater, I wondered whether I had acted right. Kashket was a lot older than me, and he had been in the foundry for a long time—was I going too far?

As though guessing my doubts, Turunda called over to me: "That's right, Vasil! You took the right line with him! Where does he think he is—in a nursing home? There's a limit to what we can put up with."

"He ought to have got the boot long ago!" Gladyshev added. "Pity Fedorko's so soft-hearted! Go and put it to him at lunch-time. Tell him he'd better get rid of that slacker and leave you to mould alone until Naumenko comes back."

The older workers' sympathy encouraged me. But I decided not to follow Gladyshev's advice. "I'll stick out these two days somehow with Kashket," I thought, "then my partner will come back and everything will be all right."

It was not long, however, before I regretted my decision. My turn came to go for slabs. When I returned—again the mould was unfinished and Kashket was chatting calmly to the furnace man: "... I come in to Trituzny's office to get signed up and he asks me: 'Where've you been working for the last five years, Comrade Entuta? Why haven't you got a reference from your last place of work?' So I comes back at him: 'Comrade Trituzny! I got that scared of General Wrangel in 1920 it's taken me five years to get back into a fit state for work!' That made old Zuzya sit up. 'Five years!' he gasps. 'What a nervous breakdown!' "

This time Turunda darted up to Kashket, with a pair of tongs in his hand.

"Have we got to send you a special invitation before you'll get to your machine?" Luka said.

"But the slabs were cold!" Kashket exclaimed innocently.

"Your brain's gone cold, not the slabs!" Luka snapped as Kashket slouched back to his machine.

"You in a hurry? Got a train to catch?" Kashket sneered, resuming his work.

"Yes, I am!" Turunda shouted, driving his shovel into the hot sand. "And we're fed up with all this ballyhoo! If you're too lazy to work, get to hell out of here..."

"That's it! That's the way!" Gladyshev murmured, nodding approvingly.

Seeing that he had no support, Kashket grunted: "Cor', aren't you strict!" and went back to work.

I couldn't make out what was in the fellow's mind. Either he had always been such a lazy clown, or if I were to believe Volodya the cabman, he had been keeping an eye on the steppe, hoping to see Makhno's machine-gun carts appear over the horizon.

Kashket suddenly broke into a song:

*On Monday I woke from a drinking bout,
And all I had spent I did sore regret.
'Twas not for the money I'd lost that I sighed,
But my wife's black shawl she left when she died...*

"Kashket showing off his repertoire," Gladyshev remarked.

"Well, isn't it as good as Chaliapin?" Kashket said, striking an artistic pose.

"The lower mould's packed, Chaliapin, but I can't see the top anywhere!" I shouted.

"I wish I'd never seen you!" Kashket groaned, but started packing his mould.

As he fussed round his machine, he still could not keep quiet.

"There's a song about you. . ."

"What song?"

"Listen..."

And in a lisping vodka-sodden voice he sang:

*There was a young man of Podol
With a voice like sawing coal...*

"You're from Podol, aren't you?"

"Your geography's no good!" I said curtly. "Podol is a suburb of Kiev. I was born in the Podolia Province."

Kashket made no reply. Fighting his hang-over, he tried desperately to keep up, but I could see that we should not do anything like as much as Naumenko and I usually did before lunch.

The sand had been watered too liberally the night before. It was steaming like a cracked dunghill in spring, and was not fit for moulding. We needed some dry sand to mix with it.

Near by there was a heap of dry, coarse sand. So as not to hold up the moulding, I ran over to the heap and started throwing sand on to our side.

"Hey, you madman!" Kashket shouted and I felt him grab my elbows from behind.

But he was too late. The shovel plunged into the sand, meeting an unexpected obstacle in its path. There was a crunch as if the shovel had smashed an electric bulb.

"Who asked you to poke your nose in here, you interfering devil!" my partner bawled in despair.

He flopped down on his knees and burrowed in the sand with trembling hands.

"Are you scatty, or what?" I asked uncomprehendingly.

"I'll give you 'scatty!' I'll fix you ... I had a dram buried here and you've bust it."

Kashket lifted a handful of sand to his nose and smelt it greedily. His hands were trembling. The reek of vodka told me that there really had been a bottle concealed in the heap.

"Let's get on with the moulding!" I said.

"What'll I have to sober me up at dinner-time?"

"Get those frames clear! There are two bottoms ready and waiting for you."

Surly and frowning, he started moulding again. But the loss of the dram seemed to worry him more than anything else in the world.

"What the hell made you go over there?"

"What the hell made you bring vodka into the foundry?"

"You're a real plague, you are! No wonder Tiktov was saying what a darned nuisance you make of yourself everywhere!"

"Yes, I am a nuisance to those who swindle the Soviet state. I have always been that kind of nuisance, and I always will be. And I don't care two pins whether you and Tiktov like it or not. I'm not going to kow-tow to you. If you don't like the way things are done at a Soviet factory, you'd better get out before we ask you to ourselves."

Kashket did disappear after lunch. He must have gone to ask for a medical certificate, or for time-off. Presently Fedorko ran into the foundry and shouted to me:

"I've let your partner off for the rest of the day. Do the moulding by yourself. Turunda will help you to cast."

After all that wrangling with Kashket, it was a pleasure to work alone. When I had moulded a pair of lower halves, I would put the cores in, then run over to the other machine and do the tops.

I was glad of this spell on my own for another reason. As I ran back from the heater gripping the glowing slabs with my tongs, a happy thought occurred to me.

While I went on with my moulding, I turned the idea over in my mind. "Suppose the pipes that supplied compressed air to the machines carried hot air instead of cold? Suppose we heated it beforehand? Then the compressed air system would heat the models at the same time. The system could have taps and hoses. If you wanted air for cleaning your model, all you'd have to do would be to turn the tap on and the hot air would blow the unnecessary sand away. And the rest of the time it would be used for heating. It would be so easy to arrange! All you had to do was block up the slots under the model, make a passage for the hot air to circulate, and the model would be hot all the time. And we should gain such a lot by it! The moulders would no longer have to leave their machines and run to the heaters. They wouldn't catch cold running out into the yard when they were sweating, specially during the winter. Moulding would go on much more steadily. And what a lot of coke we should save the state if we got rid of the heaters for good!"

, Happy with my thoughts, and moulding as hard as I could go, I did not see Fedorko come up to the machine. He stood just behind me, watching how I moulded. I noticed the foreman only when he asked Turunda loudly, "Well, Luka, what do you think of your neighbour?" and nodded at me.

Turunda put down his tamper and wiped the sweat off his face.

"I think he'll do, Alexei Grigorievich. He tries hard and he's caught on quickly."

"All right, Mandzhura," said Fedorko with impressive slowness. "Your term of probation is over. When you knock off, call in at the office and they'll give you a pay-book. I'll put you in the fifth grade. Then we'll see. . . Does that suit you?"

"Fine, Alexei Grigorievich. Thanks a lot!" And I gripped the foreman's hand.

... Many of the men had knocked off already, but to fill in the time while Luka and Gladyshev finished casting.

I still went on moulding. A great cloud of steam hung over one of the furnaces which was empty.

The furnace men had knocked the bottom out of it and the half-burnt coke, coated with iron and sticky slag, like nuts in sugar, had poured out into the deep pit. The fiery mess had been sprayed and was hissing quietly as it cooled, turning from purple to a dark crimson, and finally black.

Near by, amid the steam, another furnace was belching iron. Sparks flew up as it poured into the ladles. The smoke mingled with the steam and the foundry was stuffy as a bath-house. But although Turunda and I were last to fill our moulds, I had never worked more easily than now, right at the end of the working day. The calm and rather solemn words of the foreman were still ringing in my ears. They meant that at last I was a real foundry man.

I walked home through the sun-drenched streets. I was dirty from head to foot and my face was stained with sweat, but I kept proudly to the middle of the road, for in the side pocket of my jacket there was a new pay-book stamped with my worker's number. On the front page a firm, neat hand had written that Vasily Mironovich Mandzhura was in the fifth grade. I wanted to show the book to everyone I met, although I knew my appearance alone was enough to tell them without any documents that I belonged to the great army of the working class.

After the broiling foundry, I hardly noticed the heat of the streets. I was still trying to think out my plan for heating the machines. But now that I had left the foundry, my thoughts were rambling and it was hard to put them into shape. "Never mind, the main idea's settled, the details will come later," I thought.

At the corner I was overtaken by Angelika.

"Hullo, Vasil!" she said panting. "What a hurry you're in!"

"Hullo," I grunted. "I'm in a hurry because I'm dirty. I want to wash."

"Are you angry with me?"

"What gave you that idea?"

"Why do you never come round and see me?"

"I haven't had time."

"But I left you a note. And spoke to your friends. Didn't they give you my message?"

"They did." I said grimly, trying to be as stern as I could with Lika. I was thinking: "It would have been better if you hadn't come. The chaps are giving me enough trouble as it is with their jokes about wedding rings. I can't even look out of the window without them grinning all over their faces!"

Somewhere or other Sasha had found a bunch of orange blossom that people wear at weddings, and while I had been washing at the well one day, had stuck it in my button-hole. Luckily I had noticed it in time, or I should have looked a proper fool when I went into town.

After a pause, Lika said: "But it's rude, you know. I make the first move. I call on you—a thing I've never done with anyone before—and you... It would have been only politeness!"

"Look here, Lika," I said, bracing myself, "I'm afraid I'm not the sort to suit you and your politeness."

"Am I really so hopeless? An unprincipled creature with petty-bourgeois tendencies? Is that how I

must take it?"

I realized that Lika wanted to talk frankly. But I did not feel like a heart-to-heart talk and avoided the challenge.

"Take it how you like... you know best."

"My greatest misfortune, Vasil, is that I can't be angry with you."

"You'll manage it one day," I said indifferently.

"It'll be very hard," Lika said slowly. "And I was thinking..."

"What?"

"... that at last I'd found someone who would put me on the right path..."

We were nearing my gate. After the day's work in the foundry I could not make myself fit in with Angelika's mood.

I cut her short: "Why don't you ask Zuzya. He's got a kick like a cannon-ball, and he can do the Charleston, and he knows all about politeness. There's the man for you! So long!"

I waved a work-hardened hand in her direction and pushed the gate...

The first response to my postcards came from Monus Guzarchik. There was nothing surprising about that; Kharkov was only a night's journey away. Monus wrote:

"... I was very happy to receive your postcard. All our petty squabbles are forgotten and I have only good memories of our days together. Your not wanting to accept me for the Komsomol because of that spree in the restaurant doesn't worry me at all now. I shall become a Komsomol member all the same! I am now working at the Kharkov Locomotive Works. Do you know how many workers we have here? You'd never believe it! Over ten thousand! Compared with the Kharkov Locomotive Works, our Motor Factory is a village smithy..."

"I was very surprised to read that you had 'a bit of a fight' before they took you on at the Lieutenant Schmidt Works. I had no trouble at all. I just showed them my papers and they put me straight in the diesel shop. It was here that I first saw how the huge machines for generating electricity—diesels—are assembled. You just can't picture what a giant a diesel is, Vasil! The little motor that we had at school to drive the lathes and circular saw is a toadstool compared with our power unit. I can tell you quite frankly that I find the work extremely interesting and am very satisfied with it. Every time I write the word 'satisfy' I remember our school and Bobir, who used to write it 'tasify.' How's he getting on by the sea? Give him my best wishes.

"I was put into a six-man team straightaway. The works is a long way from where I live—about nine kilometres, but I hardly notice the distance. In fact, I rather like it. It's nice to ride through the capital in a tram, looking out of the windows. I arrive at work early and get my tools ready. The foreman praised me once. 'It's not long since Monus was at a factory-training school,' he said, 'but he tries as hard as our people.' The men in my team are a good crowd, most of them old fellows. One of them tried to take the rise out of me and sent me to the tool department for a 'bigmo.' I went there and started demanding a 'bigmo,' and afterwards it turns out that there isn't such a thing. They had a good laugh at me for that.

"In the diesel department there are quite a few workers who actually took part in the Revolution. Besides establishing Soviet power in the Ukraine, some of them even took part in the May strike of 1902 and fought the police in 1905. Real proletariat! They've told me quite a lot about the Kharkov workers' fight against tsarism. Yesterday, when we'd finished work, I came out of the shop with a fitter who must

be about sixty. The tram was full up, so he suggested we should walk as far as the centre. I wasn't a bit sorry I agreed. The old chap told me how they prepared the Kharkov uprising and how the delegates from the Central Committee came down from St. Petersburg. When we got to Rosa Luxemburg Square, near the university, he showed me where the revolutionary headquarters were, where the ammunition was stored, where the first shots were exchanged with the police, and where the workers put up a barricade.

"Customs are different here from those in our town. Do you remember how even non-Party members used to get told off at our meetings for wearing ties? Here things are quite different. The young workers at my works, specially in the diesel department, think nothing of dressing well. 'Ties don't matter,' they say, 'it's what a man's got inside him that matters.' The chaps wash after work and change into clean clothes before going home. That's the right way of looking at things! It's much better than the kind of thing you meet with sometimes—a fellow wants to show he's a worker, so he gets into a tram in a greasy old set of overalls and smudges everybody's clothes.

"There is a big Komsomol organization in the diesel department. For the time being I'm a visitor. When I told the secretary why you hadn't accepted me, he laughed and said: 'Yes, you might have gone right off the rails!' And he advised me to put in an application for membership as soon as possible. How's that, Vasil!

"Well, I must close now. If the other chaps write to you, Vasil, send me their full addresses as soon as you can. Give Maremukha and Bobir my very best wishes."

I read the letter standing, even before I had changed my clothes. In spite of Monus's sly digs about our former relations, I began to forget the day's troubles—my scrap with Kashket and the rather rude way I had spoken to Angelika.

As I shook the sand out of my boots, I reflected that it would not be a bad idea to introduce Kharkov ways at our foundry. What was the sense in walking all the way through town in a dirty, scorched set of overalls, when you could wash and change at the works, like the men on the case-hardening furnace!

I remembered the spring evening when we had been strolling through the streets of our home town, munching sunflower seeds and nuts, and Furman and Guzarchik had run up to tell us our passes to the factories of the Ukraine had arrived. It was such a short time ago, and yet how much had happened in our lives since that Saturday evening, and how confident and grown-up we all felt now.

"Dear old home town," I thought, splashing about like a duck beside the well. "Shall I ever see you again? Shall I ever walk down the boulevards again listening to the rustle of the leaves? Shall I climb up on to the battlemented wall of the Old Fortress and gaze down on the broad lands of my Podolia, on the foaming spring waters of the Smotrich? We have scattered over the Ukraine to take up new lives. I wonder if we shall ever come together again on the steep cliffs of our old town and march together, with songs and torches, through the dark forests to the swift-flowing Dniester."

NIKITA IN NEED

"Dear Vasil,

"Forgive me, old chap, for not answering at once. I've been up to my neck in it. Talk about having your hands full! You went away to your factories, the school was empty and it seemed the time had come for us to sit back and sun ourselves on the rocky banks of the Smotrich. But we decided

otherwise. At a time like this, when the Party has called upon us to make a full-scale offensive on private enterprise, and put all our energy into the industrialization of the country, what right have we to take a rest cure?

"I got the first-year Komsomol members together, Polevoi invited the instructors, and at a general meeting we decided to renovate the school without any outside help.

"Every day for over a month we turned up at the school, putting the place into shape, making new tools, and enlarging the various shops. You wouldn't know your foundry now, Vasil! It's been whitewashed inside and out. Kozakevich has made a big casting of the metal-workers' trade union badge and hung it over the entrance. Nowadays, when people pass, they know at once that iron is smelted in this clean little building, where the ratecollectors used to hold their meetings. And do you remember the store-room near the locksmiths' shop? It no longer exists! We have knocked down the wooden partition and put another three benches in the extra space. That means another nine places at the school for training the new generation of industrial workers. Just think what that means, Vasil! Next autumn we shall be able to take nine extra boys and girls who would like to make friends with the hammer and chisel. And suppose every factory-training school follows our example? That will make a whole division for the army of the industrial proletariat! Our Soviet youth, plus machinery, plus a socialist attitude to labour, plus the ability to understand blue-prints, and to build the future according to those blue-prints!

"I am very glad for you that the director of the works turned out to be a real Bolshevik and treated you understandingly, as a Communist director should. From your letter, Vasil, I conclude that you have established excellent relations with your Komsomol organization at the works, and that they respect you. That is why, since I still look upon you, old chap, as a delegate of the Podolian Komsomol to the Azov coast, I have a big request to make to you, Maremkha, and Bobir.

"Do you remember the state farm on the bank of the Dniester where you and I made friends in the days when you used to live at the Party School? The District Party Committee has decided to put the whole farm with its land and outbuildings at the disposal of a Youth Agricultural Commune. This commune will train young specialists for agriculture. And they, in their turn, will show the rest of the peasantry how to farm on new, Soviet principles.

"The number of volunteers for the commune has been terrific. Young people from all over the place who have read about the commune in the newspapers are showering the District Committee with requests to be sent there.

"But now there's a hitch. We've got everything in the commune—cows, horses, plough-land, young people ready to work, enthusiasm and the desire to devote oneself to a good cause—but we're short of machinery! Our Komsomol members at the school will, I am sure, be able to repair the ploughs and harrows for their brother commune. Working overtime, we'll manage to turn out a few straw-cutters for them. But that's about the limit of our resources. And yet it's absolutely essential to supply the chaps at the commune with at least five reapers. It stands to reason, of course, that no one from the centre will send us reapers in the middle of the season. But how fine it would be if when harvest time comes round, our chaps drove out into the fields on good, new Soviet reaping machines!

"And when I read what you wrote about your works making reapers I naturally thought to myself: 'Here's the man who will help our young commune!' Yes, Vasil, say what you like, but you've got to help us! Polevoi and I are certain, and the District Committee of the Komsomol is certain, too, that you will bring it off.

"Go and see the works Party organization, go and see the director and explain to them what a great political effect it will have if a model youth commune springs up on the border between us and the Rumania of the landowners. Tell them... But why explain everything to you! Won't you be able to get us five reapers without that? Ask, insist, get Golovatsky to help you. Judging from your letter, he's a helpful sort of chap. In short, Vasil, the whole factory-training school, as well as every Komsomol on the border

have put their hopes on you.

"You may be asked who will pay for these reapers? Don't worry about that. As soon as we receive your telegram telling us the amount we must pay, we'll send the money at once. We have already started collecting the money. We have performed two plays at the Shevchenko theatre, we have held a fancy-dress ball there, like the one we held to collect gifts for the Red Cossacks. And the District Committee has also got some cash for the commune. In short, Vasil, you've got to act, act at full pressure!

"Oh, and I nearly forgot! You ask whether there's any news of Pecheritsa. There certainly is, and a lot of it. But I think it would be premature to write about it just now.

"Best wishes to you all from Polevoi, 'Kozakevich, and self.

"Dmitry Panchenko sends you his greetings and says he is sure you, Maremukha, and Bobir will justify our hopes about the reapers.

"Sincerest Komsomol greetings,

"Nikita Kolotneyets."

I showed the letter to my friends. Sasha read it and muttered something vaguely. Petka scratched his head and said:

"Now we're in for it! Five reapers will take a bit more buying than a reel of cotton!"

"But what's the news about Pecheritsa?" I said suddenly.

"They must have nabbed him," Sasha came out of his reverie. "I told you I had seen him here!"

"You saw him here and they caught him there? Very queer!" I said, bringing Sasha down to earth. "In fact, it's all a bit queer..."

"Don't you know iKolomeyets?" Petka said. "That's him all over. He always liked making a mystery of things."

"Well, what shall we do, chaps?" I asked, thinking of Nikita's request.

"Go and see the director, what else!" Sasha exclaimed promptly, as if it was the obvious thing to do.

"Let's go together."

"Count me out for today," said Sasha. "I've got a job on at the flying club that will take me all night to finish."

"What about you, Petka?" I asked, looking imploringly at Maremukha.

"I've told you already, Vasil: we've got a technical class this evening. How can I miss that!"

But I did not go to the director. First I called on Tolya Golovatsky to ask his advice.

Of course, I remembered the state farm on the Dniester that Nikita had written about. I remembered how mysterious it had seemed to me when our carts drove up to the gates in the dead of night. The farm-house was surrounded by tall poplars and a white stone wall. Horses could be heard champing in the stables. A watchman, rifle in hand, loomed out of the darkness of the yard, and before opening the heavy gates, asked us many questions.

And how could I forget the first night at the farm, when I lay in the crisp hay, with a rifle pressed to my side, under the iron roof of the barn! Or our morning bathes in the swift, cold waters of the Dniester! Or the smell of mint near a gooseberry bush that I had found while wandering through the neglected garden!... And how I used to enjoy those Sunday trips to the little town of Zhvanets for the state farm's mail.

... Before me stretches the dusty cart-track above the Dniester. The hooves of the light-bay horse plop into the soft dust raising little grey clouds behind us. I loll in the creaking saddle and look across the Dniester at the houses on the edge of Khotin and the ruins of an ancient fortress on the Bessarabian bank. My horse flicks his ears and keeps trying to snap at the ripening ears of corn by the roadside.

And then I'm on my way back with a packet of fresh newspapers and magazines. If there is no wind, I twist the reins round my arm and read the newspapers as I am riding along. I glance over the head-lines and consider what I shall be reading to the young people of the village who attend our club at the state farm.

That summer, Polevoi had given me the job of reading the papers aloud on Sundays. At first I refused. I could not even imagine myself telling the be-ribboned young girls and their boy friends from the village about the news in the papers. And my first session certainly was an ordeal. I could not take my eyes off the page and all the time I wanted to look up and see what impression I was making on my listeners. At last I made a break and, running my fingers through my hair, took a calm look at the lads and lassies gathered round me. After that everything went swimmingly. I even managed to answer their questions.

And now I was very glad to hear that a youth commune would be set up in the village I knew so well. That really was good news!

Every day the cheerful songs of young people would float across the Dniester into landowner-ruled Bessarabia. The members of the commune would certainly build a new power station to replace the little petrol engine that only supplied current until ten in the evening. Who could tell, perhaps what they wrote in the newspapers about milking cows with electricity would come true at the commune!

I imagined the former landowner's mansion given over to our young people, gleaming with electric light, ringing with songs and cheerful talk. How many young Bessarabians would be drawn across the river by those lights! After all, whom had those people to turn to in their trouble, if not to us! This was their only hope—our happiness, which might one day, like the flames of a blazing fire, leap across into Bessarabia...

But it was all very well to think about such things as I went to Golovatsky's; it was quite a different matter, however, to come down from dreams of the future to the present day and carry out Nikita's request.

Golovatsky, too, was rather taken aback when he heard the news.

"Your friend is a little bit naive," Tolya said as he finished reading the letter. "He thinks you've just got to wave your hand and you'll have five reapers ready and waiting for him! But of course, a commune on the border like that is an important job for the Komsomol. We certainly can't leave your friends' letter unanswered... You know what? Let's go and see the director." "He won't be at the works now, will he?" "We'll call on him at home," Golovatsky said. "At home?" I repeated. "Is that all right?" "Why not! This is a matter of public importance. Ivan Fyodorovich isn't one of those bourgeois specialists, like Andrykhevich. Besides he's attached to our Komsomol organization as a Party member. Come on, there's nothing to be scared of."

Golovatsky's resolute tone reassured me. But when we turned off the avenue to the left I was again puzzled.

"Doesn't Rudenko live in the centre?"

"He lives in Matrosskaya Settlement. Open to all the winds that blow! The craftsmen from the works have always lived there. You knew Rudenko used to work in the foundry before the Revolution, didn't you?"

"But couldn't he have moved into the centre of the town?"

"Of course, he could," Golovatsky replied, "specially as the old director's house was empty in those days. But he didn't want to. 'What's the use of all those halls and passages to me?' he said. 'Three rooms are all I want. And it's more free and easy down by the seaside!'" Golovatsky waved his arm in the direction of the shore, which we were approaching along a broad, dirt road with burdock and steppe grass growing in the ditches. "And Rudenko was quite right," Tolya went on. "He got the old owner's house made into a night sanatorium for the workers at our plant. If a worker doesn't feel too good, as soon as he knocks off work, he goes up there. There are lockers in the entrance-hall. As soon as he gets inside he can take off his working clothes and go under a shower. Then he goes to another locker where there's clean underwear, a dressing-gown and bedroom slippers ready for him. Everything's spick and span, the food's good, there's peace and quiet, everybody sleeps with his window open winter and summer, amusements in the evening. And in the morning, at the sound of the hooter, everyone goes straight off to work."

"Has the director got a big family?" I asked.

"Only himself and his wife."

"No children?"

"One of his sons was killed by Makhno's men. The other's an airman, a squadron commissar. He's home on leave now."

"Bobir was telling me that a flyer called Rudenko had brought a training aircraft to the flying club...."

"Yes, that's the director's son," Golovatsky explained. "He's a daring chap. He spent his leave here last year too. Paddled all the way to Mariupol in a canoe. It's a terrific distance, you know. Suppose a storm had caught him coming round Belorechenskaya Kosa? It'd have been good-bye to him then."

I realized why Sasha had been so thrilled when he told us about the airman.

"I wonder if we'll find Ivan Fyodorovich at home?" said Golovatsky, crossing a plank over the ditch at the side of the road.

In an orchard of apple-trees surrounded by a rough-cast wall stood a small cottage. We went up to one of the open windows. Quiet voices and the clattering of crockery could be heard from inside.

"Must be having dinner!" Tolya whispered and tapped on the window-frame with his finger. "Is Ivan Fyodorovich at home?"

The lace curtains parted and we saw the sun-tanned face of our director.

"Hullo, you young people! Just at the right time! I've been wanting to tell you off for a long while, Tolya."

"Me? What for?" Golovatsky exclaimed.

"For a good reason!" the director said. "But come in and have something to eat first."

"We've had our dinner, thanks," Golovatsky said hastily. "You finish yours, we'll wait for you down on the beach."

"Come in and make yourself at home!" the director insisted.

But Golovatsky refused. "We'll be down there," he said, waving in the direction of the sea.

The shore behind the little dwarf apple-trees was covered with greyish-green steppe grass and

stinging nettles. All round there was an abundance of spurge, meadow-sweet, and even the bushy, yellow-flowering garmala. Not far from the water's edge, in the midst of the pale-green steppe foliage, stood an oak bench. It must have been under water many a time during storms.

Golovatsky sat down on the bench, and turning his smooth, oval face towards me, asked: "What does he want to tell me off about, I wonder?"

"Perhaps he was joking and you're getting windy for nothing," I consoled him.

"No, he's angry about something."

At that moment we heard footsteps behind us. The director was striding across the soft sand. He was wearing a pair of slippers on his bare feet, and blue working trousers. His sleeves were rolled up revealing brown, muscular arms with a thick growth of grey hair on them.

"Well, my fine friend, why don't you and your Komsomol pals ever show yourselves in the works dining-hall?" the director challenged Golovatsky and, sitting down on the bench, put his arm round his shoulder,

"But Ivan Fyodorovich!..." Golovatsky protested.

"I know I'm Ivan Fyodorovich. They've been calling me that for fifty years or more. But what about those pledges you made when we opened the dining-hall. You said that while the workers were having their meals in the break you, Komsomol members, would give political talks—about workers' conditions in Britain, and about China, and about that humbug Chang Tso-lin... And what's been done? Yesterday I went round there—not a sign of Chang Tso-lin. Today I went there—workers from every shop in the dining-room, but not a murmur from you... Surely you aren't going to let me down like that!..."

"Yes, it's my fault... I'm sorry, Ivan Fyodorovich," Golovatsky admitted and, pulling off his checked cap, bowed his head until a lock of his auburn hair touched the bench. "You know why it happened? We've been preparing for a big campaign against those dances. All our people are working on that."

"Dances aren't the main thing, Tolya, they're a side-line. The main thing for us is production, industrialization, agriculture, education. We've got to get all the efforts of the working class focussed on those things."

"That's just what we've come to see you about, Ivan Fyodorovich," said Golovatsky hastily, and whispered to me: "Give him your letter, Vasil."

I handed Nikita's letter to the director and felt my chest tighten with excitement. The fate of our request hung in the balance!

Ivan Fyodorovich pulled an ancient, metal-rimmed pair of spectacles out of his pocket, and perching them on his aquiline nose, started to read Nikita's flowing handwriting. As he read, the expression of his tired eyes grew kinder.

"It's a grand idea, lads," he said at last. "Communes like that are just the place for training leaders of the peasantry. And the men who are trained there will lead the peasant masses on to a broad transformation of agriculture. But what can I do to help—that's the question. I've been expressly forbidden to sell the stuff we produce. The works isn't an agricultural machinery shop."

"Couldn't you make an exception?" Tolya asked cautiously.

"Don't be silly, lad, how can I make exceptions! For a thing like that I'd get expelled from the Party and the trust manager would sue me. We're not fulfilling our plan, as it is!"

"Suppose we make the reapers ourselves?" Tolya asked.

"Who? You and him?" The director nodded at me.

Tolya looked offended. "Of course not. All the Komsomol members at the works. In their spare time

the young foundry men will cast five sets of parts, then the Komsomol members and young workers in the other shops will assemble them in relays. Those reapers won't be any worse than the ones the old men turn out. I'll work at the furnace myself and do the best annealing you've ever seen."

"You're a good enough hand at annealing, I know that, but where's the iron coming from? You know, as well as I do, Tolya, it's iron that's holding us up, holding up the whole country, in fact. If our blast-furnaces were turning out more iron, how many more plants like ours could be built! Our future is based on heavy industry, and heavy industry isn't going full blast yet. That's one of our difficulties."

"Ivan Fyodorovich! What about that scrap-metal we, Komsomol members, collected? You haven't used all that, have you?"

"Used it all up ages ago. Not a bit of it left!"

My thoughts turned to my home town perched on its rocky cliffs amid the rolling Dniester countryside. Many were the old Turkish guns and cannon-balls and other kinds of scrap-metal that we had found in the yards of the old mansions, on the banks of the Smotrich, under the bastions of the Old Fortress. And how much scrap-metal of a later date was lying about in the yard of the military court, in the old seminary and the ecclesiastical college! At one time we had started bringing all that metal up to the Motor Factory, but we had given up the idea because the yard simply wasn't big enough to hold it all. And then a daring thought occurred to me.

"What if we get you the iron, Comrade Director?" I said firmly. "Will you let us make the reapers?"

"If you get the iron, Comrade Foundry Man, I'll gladly co-operate," the director said smilingly.

... Half an hour later I was at the central post-office sending Nikita Kolomeyets a telegram:

CAN MAKE REAPERS IF YOU SEND SCRAP IRON STOP GET KOMSOMOL COLLECT
SAME IMMEDIATELY STOP ADDRESS OUR WORKS STOP ALL THE BEST ANATOLY
GOLOVATSKY VASILY MANDZHURA SASHA BOBIR PETKA MAREMUKHA

PAY-DAY

Pay-day was a day every worker in the foundry looked forward to. Our pay-books, which Kolya Zakabluk, the foundry time-keeper, brought round in the morning, told us how much we had earned in the past fortnight, and all day the foundry men were thinking what new things they would buy for their families, or how much money to pay into the mutual assistance fund if they were in debt to it.

I, who had only recently been a factory-school pupil, was very surprised at the figures my book contained. Just think! I had only been working a short time in the foundry and I was already earning not less than seventy rubles a month. I felt as if I was rolling in wealth.

On pay-days Kashket got particularly excited. As soon as he came to work, he was rubbing his hands at the thought of splashing money about in the pub that evening. He never thought of the next morning when he would again wake up on the seaweed-strewn beach with a splitting headache and empty pockets.

Today, even before sunrise, Kashket was capering round his machine with his red kerchief wound round his bristly head, singing hoarsely:

I am bound for a city fair,

*And a black velvet hat shall I wear,
And I'll sit on the shore and repine
At a grief that I cannot define...*

We were moulding gear-wheels. It was a tricky job. If you used the tamper too hard, you might break one of the teeth, and then you had to turn the whole mould out. Uncle Vasya and I worked on jobs like this in silence, scarcely exchanging a word with each other. But today my partner, who hated wasters and drones like Kashket from the bottom of his soul, could not restrain himself.

"He'll put on a black hat, will he! I'd like to see him! Wastes all his money on drink, can't even scrape up enough to buy himself an ordinary cap, and now he's singing about a black hat!"

Gladyshev and Turunda were still working on the next machine. And now with a nod in Kashket's direction Turunda winked at me and said: "He'll change his tune in a minute."

Turunda glanced towards the entrance, where Kolya Zakabluk, helped by one of the messenger-girls, was hanging up a board. Turunda, who was attached to the foundry Komsomol organization as a Party member, knew what the Komsomol members had planned.

The other workers in the foundry, apparently thinking that it was only another notice-board being put up, paid no attention to what Zakabluk was doing. Kashket must have thought the same and went on singing in his hoarse, throaty voice:

*O waves of the deep enfold
A man of beauty untold,
Who would sit on the shore and repine
At a grief he could never define.
The black velvet hat will be there,
And so will the city fair,
And the shore of the sea will repine
At the grief it could never define.*

"Those bright sparks will give us some spoilage today!" Gladyshev remarked dusting his machine with compressed air.

The stream of air fanned my face and I felt refreshed by it.

"How come that you, chaps, brought up a partner to suit our Kashket back in Podolia?" Turunda said as he ran past. "He's not a bad fellow to look at—good pair of shoulders on him. We thought at first he would keep Kashket in order, but it's turned out the other way round. He plays up to Kashket all along the line."

I realized that Turunda was talking about Tiktov. "Look here, Comrade Turunda," I said vexedly, "if you put together all the words we addressed to Tiktov on that subject, you could reform a whole school of juvenile delinquents."

"But what made him into such a crab?" Gladyshev asked.

"A crab?" I said, surprised at the comparison. "Yes, a crab," Gladyshev repeated, "but not the kind of

crab you think I mean. What we call crabs are those little lumps of iron that don't melt properly with the rest of the iron. Suppose you get one of those crabs in the tooth of a gear-wheel. No one notices it and that wheel becomes part of a machine. What happens? Just at the moment of greatest strain that tooth is going to break, and all because of a little drop of unmelted iron!"

"Yes, and suppose the machine happens to be an aeroplane engine, in war-time," Turunda put in. "The plane's done for and so is the pilot! ... You know what I think, Vasil? Maybe that Tiktor of yours comes from a family of 'has-beens.' Maybe he's the son of an aristocrat or a police officer? Or maybe a priest's son?"

"But he isn't, that's the queer thing about it," I grunted. "His record's fine in that way. He's the son of a railwayman, an engine-driver. Tiktor's Dad did a good job on the railway," I added, wishing to be as fair to my enemy as I could.

Glowing iron was cooling in the moulds. The cleaners were going round the foundry picking up scraps of metal that might otherwise get in the moulding sand. Uncle Vasya and I, and many of our neighbours, were smearing our machines with graphite grease to stop them from rusting. Kolya Zakabluk came out of the office.

I must admit that at first I did not like Kolya much, just as I did not like other young chaps who only wanted to be office-workers. And I had been very surprised when I learnt that this "pen-pusher" was an old Komsomol member.

When the Komsomol members in the foundry elected me their secretary, I started getting to know everyone better. It made it a lot easier for me to know what job I could give them. Big, broad-shouldered Grisha Kanuk took on the job of editing our wall newspaper. Shura Danilenko, a core-maker, who brought cores round the foundry every day on big iron trays, undertook to read newspapers and magazines aloud during the dinner-hour. Jobs were found for other Komsomol members, too.

But what job could I give Kolya Zakabluk, the only office-worker in our organization? I felt so prejudiced against him. His tie and the neat parting in his straight fair hair irritated me. Later I was to discover how misleading appearances can be. I got talking to Zakabluk and it turned out that this stocky little fellow with so many freckles on his face that they spread even over his thin, tight-pressed lips was certainly not a pen-pusher by nature. He had had no choice about it.

Kolya Zakabluk had started working on the moulding machines as soon as the Soviets put the works into operation after the defeat of General Wrangel. Conditions of work in the foundry in those years had been far worse than now. There was no air-conditioning at all. Naturally enough, working in such an awful dust and fug, Kolya developed consumption. And of course, the food was very bad in those days—tulka and maize bread. The famine in the Volga country made itself felt even in Tavria.

Kolya and the other sick lads at the works received help only after the old foundry man Ivan Rudenko, a Communist, became director of the works, and Andrykhevich, who had been in charge of the works since Caiworth's time, was pushed into the background. A clinic was set up at the works, air-conditioning was installed, the workers were given regular medical inspections. But according to Kolya the thing that helped him most was the night sanatorium that Rudenko had opened in the mansion of the former owner. When they had fed Kolya up at the sanatorium and patched up his lungs, the doctors allowed him to go to work, but not in the foundry. And that was how Kolya had become an office-worker.

On the pay-day of which I am speaking, Kolya Zakabluk, seeing that casting was nearly finished, came out of the office carrying a long box with our pay-packets in it. Jumping over heaps of sand and

stepping carefully round the smoking moulds, Kolya went from one machine to another. He knew every foundry worker by sight and quickly handed each one the right packet.

Wiping the sand off his hands, the moulder would take the envelope and sign for it in Kolya's book. Few of them counted the money, for everyone in the foundry knew that Zakabluk was a reliable chap and never tried to swindle anyone.

Zakabluk stopped at our machines for a moment and showing two rows of small white teeth in a broad smile, whispered: "If they make a fuss, will you back me up, Vasil?"

"Count on me," I promised. "But you stand up to them as well."

Zakabluk went on quickly to the next set of machines. Soon he appeared near the machines where Kashket and Tiktov were working. Without stopping, Zakabluk went on to the furnace.

"Hi there, Kolya, don't forget your friends!" Kashket called out in his lisping voice. "Bring the cash round here!"

Zakabluk turned round. His face was strained.

"Spoilers and shirkers get their pay last!" he said loudly, his white teeth flashing.

Kashket gave a whistle of surprise. "What's this new idea!"

"What I've just told you!" Kolya snapped and went on to the furnace, where the furnace men in their broad-brimmed hats were waiting for him.

Kashket threw himself into his work more wildly than ever, urging on his partner and exchanging short, angry phrases with him. They soon knocked off and Kashket dashed away to the office to complain.

Meanwhile we dusted our machines and put our tools and materials in order, so that we could start work in the morning without any delay.

I always enjoyed washing my gleaming shovel under the tap, then warming it on a glowing slab and sprinkling the blade with powdered rosin. The amber rosin formed a gleaming sticky coating over the blade. It gave off a smell that made me think of tall pine woods oozing rosin on a hot August day, and for a moment I forgot the acrid vapours of the foundry. As I rosined my shovel, I did not notice Grisha Kanuk slip over to the board that Zakabluk had put up in the foundry. Unrolling a large sheet of paper, he pinned up the first issue of our wall newspaper.

Across the top of the page ran a large head-line, "RECORD-BREAKING SPOILERS IN THE FOUNDRY."

Below it there was a short article and a row of caricatures. Stripped to the waist like wrestlers, with vodka bottles dangling on their chests, the "record-breakers" were marching triumphantly towards a huge bottle of bluish liquid with a skull and cross-bones on the label. As was to be expected, the bottle-bound procession of spoilers and shirkers included Tiktov with his dangling forelock, and the capering, sunburnt Kashket, who in his ridiculous red kerchief looked like a Spanish picador.

Under the caricature was written: "At the request of all the honest workers in the foundry, from now on spoilers, shirkers, and disorganizers will receive their pay separately."

The next moment Zakabluk appeared with a chair and a small folding table. Quickly arranging his books on the table, he sat down just as if he were in his office, ready to pay the bad workers.

Quite unexpectedly the tall bony figure of the chief engineer appeared at the entrance to the foundry. His greying hair showed under his green cap band. At the sight of the chief engineer, the workers stood back to let him pass. Andrykhevich stopped in front of the wall newspaper, then glanced at the table.

"What's all this nonsense? Call the foreman!" he snapped.

"I'm here, Stefan Medardovich!" answered Fedorko, who had apparently been called out by one of the indignant shirkers.

"Why do you allow this sort of thing?" the chief engineer shouted at the foreman.

"I thought... It seemed a useful... er, social line..."

"No more of your 'social lines' here!" Andrykhevich ground out, narrowing his eyes maliciously. "Our business is casting metal. Take that trash down at once!"

It was a tense moment. This might mean the end of our offensive against those who turned out bad work and disorganized production. Screwing up my courage, I strode over to the engineer.

"We will not allow you to take the newspaper down," I said in a choking voice.

For nothing short of a minute Andrykhevich surveyed me in silence, apparently recalling our first meeting.

"Aha! The builder of a new world! Good day to you, my dear fellow!" he said with false joviality and offered me his wrinkled hand with the heavy gold ring on the forefinger. "May I ask you, young man, on whose behalf you are making this protest?" the engineer went on sarcastically. "Have you any reason or is it merely to satisfy that youthful thirst for controversy I know so well?"

"I'm protesting on behalf of the foundry Komsomol organization. It was us who put out the wall newspaper and you can't ban it."

"Just a moment, my dear fellow! Has the Komsomol organization the right to take matters into their own hands and break the discipline of the workers?" the engineer asked.

"Who's breaking the workers' discipline? Us?!" I burst out indignantly. "It's them who're destroying discipline—it's those shirkers and spoilers who are holding us up!"

"A little quieter, young man! I'm not deaf yet. You needn't shout. Especially as the time of revolutionary meetings has passed. This is what I want to say to you. At present I am the chief engineer at this works, and I have given orders that this paper be taken down. You, a person who has neither experience, nor administrative authority, oppose the carrying-out of my order, raise your voice, make insulting remarks to me. What else is that but an infringement of labour discipline?"

The gloating, victorious face of Kashket hovered near by. Andrykhevich's greenish eyes glittered cunningly in front of me. But I was not going to give in yet.

"The new system of paying out wages, Stefan Medardovich, has been agreed upon with the works director, Comrade Rudenko, and with the trade-union committee. The man who works best receives his wages first. It seems to me that the chief engineer should also carry out the wishes of the director and not contradict them."

"I know nothing about any such agreement," Andrykhevich grunted. "The director hasn't said anything to me about it."

"He may not have spoken to you, but he spoke to everyone in the works Komsomol committee. Comrade Rudenko approved all our plans, particularly the idea of having a wall newspaper."

"I shall investigate this matter! You won't get away with your tricks as easily as that!" Andrykhevich muttered in confusion.

Turunda appeared at my side.

"Stefan Medardovich," he said peacefully to the engineer, "I can vouch for the fact that Mandzhura is speaking the truth. I state that as a member of the Party. We thought you would thank us for our efforts, but there seems to be some disagreement..."

"We shall see about that!" the engineer interrupted in a threatening growl.

He straightened his cap and strode hurriedly out of the foundry.

"Six-nil in our favour, Vasya!" Zakabluk shouted as soon as the door banged behind the engineer.

"Look here; you Komsomolite!" Kashket babbled, going up to Kolya and breathing vodka all over him. "What have you got against me? You're a terrific talker but your talking won't do any good this time. I'd rather choke myself than take my money here. Bring it to me at my machine!"

"Well, you needn't take it then! We're not going to run after you with it!" Turunda put in. "The works cashier will make it over to your savings book."

"I haven't got one. I'm not a miser like you!" Kashket bawled furiously.

"All the better for you, you'll get a savings book at the same time. You've got nothing to fly off the handle about. Aren't you and your partner the champion spoilers in this shop?" Turunda flashed out at Kashket. "The chaps who wrote this newspaper are talking sense. If you like turning out rotten work, you can receive your wages after the others... Or else you can get out altogether and go fishing on your own account. Maybe you'll do better at that!"

"What is this, boys?" Kashket howled, seeking for support among the laughing foundry men.

But no one gave him any.

Gradually the crowd broke up.

Unexpectedly a burly figure went up to Zakabluk's table. It was the old furnace man Chuchvara. Not long ago he had spent a whole working day at the wedding of a relative of his, in Matrosskaya Settlement. The music at that wedding had been audible on the other side of the bay and Chuchvara came to the foundry next day a very sleepy man. Now he had decided to take his pay as it was offered, without making a fuss and drawing a lot of unnecessary attention to himself.

"That's started the ball rolling!" Zakabluk said loudly. "Who's next? Step up, please."

For the first time since we had knocked off I heard Tiktov's voice. Silent till now, and somehow dispirited, he nudged Kashket's arm and said: "Dry up, can't you! You know we did a bad job on those rollers. Take your money and push off!... ."

The foundry became deserted as soon as Kashket and the unusually reasonable Tiktov had received their pay.

Turunda, Zakabluk, and I walked out of the works together and I remember Turunda saying:

"Did you notice that, Vasil? Your mate from Podolia's coming to his senses. Seeing himself in company like that had an effect! He's not such a goner after all."

Turunda was right. I had thought that Tiktov would make more fuss than anyone when he saw himself in the newspaper. But the result had been quite the opposite and much more desirable.

Still throbbing with excitement after my skirmish with Andrykhevich, I strode along with my mates and thought: "Now Angelika will hear all about me from 'Daddykins' at dinner tonight! 'Confound that grubby young admirer of yours!' he'll say to his darling daughter. 'Stood in my path! And we treated the young ruffian to beer and sturgeon!' Now Angelika will turn her nose up when she sees me. Well, let her! Why should I change my principles to please her! I'll stay as I am. My path lies in a different direction—with Turunda, Golovatsky, Naumenko, and all my new friends in this town."

Warmed by these thoughts, I gripped Turunda's arm and said:

"Well, we've made a start, Luka! This'll give the chaps something to talk about! . . . But we've got plenty of fighting to do yet!"

"We're on to a big thing, Vasil," Turunda answered seriously. "Politics are a battle of millions, as they told me at our workers' university. And those who fight it on their own always lose. But there are millions like us!"

THE NOTE UNDER THE STONE

Two days after our wall newspaper went up in the foundry, Petka, setting out to work after me, found a white envelope under a stone on the garden path. It contained a note, which deserves to be quoted in full:

"Look here, you half-baked khokhol! You've got very quarrelsome rather sudden. Didn't you know that Old Man Makhno and his men will be coming home very soon. We'll be knocking the stuffing out of all these Party members and Komsomolites. So you'd better keep quiet, or better still—get out of here while your legs can still carry you. Make tracks for your Podolia, where the devil brought you from. And if you breathe a word about this letter to anyone, don't expect any mercy. We'll stop your mouth for good!"

In place of a signature a skull and cross-bones had been drawn at the bottom of the page.

When I came in from work, Petka handed me the envelope.

"The snakes are threatening you! Read this, Vasil!" he said worriedly.

I glanced through the badly-written note, and burst out laughing.

"I don't see anything to laugh at!" Sasha grunted. Like a cottage-weaver with her wool, he was winding thin strands of rubber for the flying club on the backs of two chairs.

I scanned them both keenly.

"You aren't pulling my leg, are you, chaps?" I said.

Petka flared up indignantly. "Why, you disbelieving Thomas! He thinks we sent him the rotten thing on behalf of Makhno and his men!"

And Petka told me how he had found the envelope under the stone.

Petka's story convinced me. It would have been hardly the thing for Komsomol members to play a joke of that kind.

"Who do you think wrote it, Vasil?" Petka asked. "Could it have been someone in the foundry?"

"Of course it was. One of the shirkers. We've trodden on their toes and now they're trying to scare us," I replied.

"If you're sure it was Kashket," Sasha said in a low voice, "go and report it. It's a political matter!"

"If I knew for sure. . . But no man's a thief till he's caught, you know. He'd wriggle out of it, and I'd look a fool."

But Sasha went on confidently: "Never mind that! ' They'll sort things out. The people there know what they're doing. They can find a man anywhere just by his handwriting."

"Sasha's right, Vasil," Petka broke in again. "Show that note to the right people. They'll do something about it. That's a piece of sabotage, you know it."

Until late in the evening we discussed the wretched anonymous letter. We could talk of nothing else. In the end we came to the conclusion that it wasn't their prosperity or strength that made our enemies resort to such low methods, but rather weakness and failure.

Only a short time ago I used to be very offended when people treated me as a boy. How I had wanted to skip ahead of my years and become grown-up like Turunda, or even Golovatsky! Yet today the offensive word "half-baked," which hinted at my youth, did not affect me so much as the insulting and hated nickname "khokhol." Under tsarism it was the police and the gentry who used to call Ukrainians by that name. I had often heard the Denikin boy scouts speaking contemptuously of us workers' children as khokhols. Nowadays the term was hardly ever used and on any document I wrote my nationality as Ukrainian with a feeling of pride. I liked to go to the club of an evening and sing Ukrainian songs. I spoke Ukrainian. Now I could see that the scoundrel who had written this anonymous letter was sneering at my nationality, and that offended me more than anything.

... Sasha and Petka had been silent for some time. Sasha was breathing heavily. A yellow moon, like a thin slice of pumpkin, peeped in at the wide-open window. A light wind blew from the east. It being Saturday, there was still much noise coming from the park. As I lay listening to the sounds of the evening, I heard the gate click. Footsteps crunched on the gravel path leading from the gate to the house. Who could it be? The landlady had gone to bed long ago. She was rarely disturbed by visitors so late at night. I called out of the window at the man coming up the path.

"Telegram! For Vasily Mandzhura," came the reply.

I dashed down the stairs. While I signed for the telegram and climbed back into the attic, my awakened friends had put the light on. Their faces were sleepy and impatient.

By the light of the lamp I read the sender's address: "Sinelnikovo." But that didn't make sense! I didn't know anyone in Sinelnikovo. Perhaps my father had decided to pay me a visit and was on his way from Cherkassy to spend a holiday by the sea?

"Open it, can't you! Don't keep us on edge!" Sasha groaned.

The printed letters danced before my eyes. At first I could scarcely piece them together, then I shouted:

"Chaps! Nikita's coming here!"

"Nikita coming to see us? You're joking? It's a mistake!" Petka cried, standing on tip-toe and peering at the telegram over my shoulder.

"No, it isn't! Listen!" And I read the message out loud:

ARRIVING GOODS TRAIN TOMORROW MIDDAY MEET ARRANGE IMMEDIATE
RECEPTION OF FREIGHT STOP KOLOMEYETS

"What a pity I can't be there!"

"Are you crazy?" I swung round on Sasha. "Aren't you going to meet Nikita?"

"I can't, Vasya. I've got an important job to do," Sasha answered plaintively.

"How can there be anything important on Sunday?" Petka chimed in, backing me up.

But Sasha would not give in.

"Well, there is something," he said mysteriously. "But for the time being it's a secret."

"You won't come to meet Nikita, your old Komsomol secretary? But he's bringing us iron, you mut!..."

You've got to be at the station! It's a matter of Komsomol discipline, understand?" Petka shouted, as if it were an order.

"Well, I can't!" Sasha insisted firmly. "Midday's just when I've got to.. ."

And nothing would move him. No matter how we reproached him for keeping a date instead of meeting his old friend and teacher, Sasha could not be persuaded.

The next day, taking Golovatsky with us, Petka and I went to the station. The passenger train from Ekaterinoslav had arrived in the morning and its empty green carriages had long ago been shunted into a siding. Weighers, pointsmen, stall-keepers—everyone had taken refuge from the midday heat in the cool station building which only a short time ago had seemed so new and strange to us. Today this seaside terminus with its hot rails gleaming in the sun seemed as if we had known it for ages. How quickly you get used to a new town if you meet good people there! I found myself regarding the young freckled stationmaster, like a toadstool in his red railwayman's cap, as an old acquaintance.

The steel wires beside the rails hummed faintly, and far away up the line the signals clicked to "Go Ahead." We heard the distant whistle of an engine.

"What's Nikita like now?" I thought, fixing my eyes on the growing billow of smoke in the distance. "Will he still talk down to us, or will he treat us as equals?"

The goods train hauled by a massive engine charged out of the steppe towards the sea. At last, belching clouds of hot steam over the already sun-scorched platform, it rumbled into the station, a great mass of oily, glistening iron with a grimy young engine-driver hanging out of the cab window.

Brown trucks loaded with timber, crates, potash, and coal lumbered past us until I thought there would be no end to them. Suddenly on one of the trucks I caught sight of a figure in a straw hat who did not look like a guard. The next second I recognized Kolomeyets. Dressed in blue overalls, he was standing on what looked like a huge lathe.

As our eyes met, Nikita ripped off his hat and waved it in greeting. Thin and amazingly sunburnt, his hair flying in the wind, he shouted something to us but his voice was drowned by the rumble of the wheels. Before the train stopped, Nikita had leapt agilely on to the platform.

"Hullo there, chaps!" he shouted.

At first Nikita simply shook hands with me, but then, after a moment's hesitation, he took me in his arms and kissed me on both cheeks. He smelt of the open steppes, of wormwood and meadow-sweet. Nikita embraced Petka too. Then I introduced him to Golovatsky.

Nikita glanced at Tolya merrily, gripping his hand.

"I've heard of you, of course! Vasil wrote me about you. Thanks for making our chaps welcome... What about the reapers, can you do them?"

"What about the iron, can you do that?" Tolya said with an answering smile.

Nikita turned and pointed to three trucks at the end of the train.

"Won't that be enough?" he said with a touch of pride.

"More than enough!" Tolya decided. "But I see Dzerzhinsky's words haven't reached your parts yet. 'Treat iron as gold.' Looks as if you've got a whole ironfield there. I must say, I thought Vasil was exaggerating a bit."

"Until we got your telegram, we somehow never thought of collecting it all," Nikita replied. "Thanks

for giving us the tip."

"But how quick you were about doing it!" Petka chimed in.

"We had to be. Harvests don't wait for you. We even collected at night by torch-light. Now everything rests with you!"

"What's that thing, Nikita?" I asked, pointing at a broken metal hulk in one of the trucks.

"It's not a 'thing,' my lad, it's a machine for printing money!"

"Not the one they used to have in the seminary?" I said, remembering the old days.

"The very same!" Nikita affirmed, and turning to Golovatsky, he explained: "At one time, you know, Petlura took over our town. This is the machine that the Germans sent him from Berlin for printing his currency. Petlura printed so many bank-notes on it that the local people are still using them to paper their rooms with. Afterwards, it was left lying in the cellar of the agricultural institute. When we got Vasil's telegram, we searched every cellar in the town. Our Komsomol chaps found this beauty behind a pile of wood. Can you use it?"

"Isn't it a pity to break up a machine like that for scrap?" Golovatsky said slowly. "Couldn't one of our print-shops make use of it?"

"We thought of that, but it would be wasted labour!" Nikita replied. "The German instructors who ran away with Petlura took all the valuable parts with them and wrecked what was left. It'd be easier to make a new one than repair this."

Golovatsky went to the stationmaster and asked him to uncouple the trucks of scrap-iron and send them over to the works.

"Take your guest home, lads. He's hungry, I expect. And it wouldn't do him any harm to have a wash," Tolya said, taking the bills from Nikita. "I'll fix things up here by myself."

"Yes, I could do with a wash," Nikita remarked and ran his hand over his sunburnt neck.

"Surely you didn't come all the way in an open truck," Petka asked as we went out on to the station square.

"Lovely trip!" Nikita exclaimed, throwing back his dark locks. "Like Jack London's hobo! The only difference was that no one tried to kick me off the train. At night, during the long runs, the guards used to gather in my truck as if it was a club."

"Had a good time, did you?" I asked, with a touch of envy.

"I should say! A real holiday on wheels! As soon as the sun got up, I'd take off my overalls and do a spot of sunbathing. A pleasant breeze to keep you cool and the chance of seeing the whole Ukraine—rivers, villages, fields, everything. . . Gosh, ours is a rich country! When we were nearing Ekaterinoslav the glare from the furnaces spread right across the sky! Talk about industry—it just takes your breath away! Yes, I had a wonderful trip. Never enjoyed anything so much in my life!"

"But what's this about Pecheritsa, Nikita?" Petka asked.

"Pecheritsa? ..." Nikita at once assumed a mysterious air. "That's rather a long story, old chap. I couldn't tell you all about that if I talked all night." And changing the subject, he asked: "But where's Sasha, chaps? Where's our dearly-beloved Comrade Bobir?"

"Sasha's busy. He'll be coming later," Petka grunted.

At that moment a roaring sound was heard from Kobazovaya Hill. The sound increased until it became a howl. Turning our heads towards the hill, we saw a small aeroplane leave the ground and climb above the town.

The plane banked and headed towards the sea. As it flew low over our heads, we saw the broad-shouldered figure of the pilot in leather helmet and goggles, and also another figure sitting behind him—a thin figure with wildly ruffled hair who looked surprisingly like someone we knew. The passenger waved his hand and suddenly Petka shouted:

"It's Sasha, chaps! I'm sure it is!"

His eyes fixed on the plane, Petka gabbled out the story of how for the past two weeks four Komsomol members from RIP had been helping Commissar Rudenko overhaul the training aircraft that he had brought from his squadron. Sasha's frequent disappearances in the evening and his mysterious refusal to meet Kolomeyets were now explained. Not knowing whether they would succeed in repairing the plane, the conspirators of the flying club had kept their maiden flight secret until the last minute. But how had they managed to move the plane secretly from the club to Kobazovaya Hill?

Meanwhile the aeroplane was heading out to sea. It was already over the breakwater. I watched its flight and—needless to say!—envied Sasha with all my heart. How I should have liked to be up there, in his cockpit looking down on our little town from the sky. In a couple of minutes Sasha had flashed right across the town, and we who were walking had not yet reached the centre. Nikita gave a spur to my envy.

"Surely that isn't Sasha?"

"Of course it is!" Petka cried. "That's why he was boasting about being a flying mechanic. 'How can you be a flying mechanic, when you've never flown!' I said. 'You'll see,' he says. 'I'll be flying one of these days.' And so he has! Look, look—they're making for the lighthouse! ..."

"Brave lad, our Sasha!" said Nikita. "So he's not such a funk as we thought he was after that unfortunate turn of sentry-duty at headquarters. To fly a plane you need strong nerves and a clear head. Yes, Sasha's put one across you this time!"

The aeroplane faded into the blue sky until it looked like a big dragon-fly that had been blown out to sea.

"They'll land on the bar, you see if they don't!" Petka prophesied.

And indeed the plane headed towards the sand bar, but then turned back towards the town, flew over the sanatoriums, and circling above the station, dipped its wings in greeting.

"He's greeting you, Nikita!" I cried. "He thinks you're still at the station, by the train."

"Perhaps, perhaps..." Nikita agreed excitedly, watching the plane fly away towards Kobazovaya Hill.

A second later the plane had disappeared over the crest of the hill.

While our guest unhurriedly washed his dust-caked hair in the sea, Petka and I splashed about in the water. I cupped my hands and deluged Petka with clouds of spray. He snorted and choked and splashed me back, but could not beat off my attack. Then we swam out into calm water and started duck-diving. Opening my eyes under water, I saw the sandy folds of the sea bed, a rusty anchor, and clumps of seaweed that looked like wild grasses growing under water.

We enjoyed our bathe all the more because we knew our old friend Nikita was washing himself nearby!

Sasha burst into the room when the three of us, fresh from our bathe, were eating the okroshka that our landlady had made for us out of strong ice-cool kvass. Flushed with excitement, his face and hands begrimed with oil, Sasha greeted Nikita as if he had parted with him only the day before.

"Did you see us flying?" he panted.

"We did, we did, Sasha, old chap! I must admit I didn't think you had it in you," Nikita replied with a wink at us.

Sasha was up in arms at once.

"Who hadn't! ... When we've tested the engine properly we'll be flying to Nogaisk or Genichesk. We're going to make a propaganda flight. Rudenko said so himself. And I'm going to be flying mechanic. Yes, I am... Rudenko wouldn't let any of the other chaps assemble the engine with him except me..."

"Congratulations, Sasha. And I believe you'll be flying farther than Nogaisk one of these days. Now you've started it, keep on climbing and never stop!" said Nikita.

A WONDERFUL NIGHT

The iron that our friends in Podolia had collected was unloaded.

The sun was still high in the sky when after finishing our dinner and resting a little we gathered round the pile-driver and on the instructions of the pile-driver man started dragging over pieces of old road-building machines, greasy bed-plates from unknown machines of the last century, and even a broken rusty press for making unleavened bread, which Nikita said had been found in the yard of an old synagogue.

The hardest job was to drag the heavy iron bed-plate of the printing-machine under the pile-driver. We sweated and strained and even the old furnace men came out to help us.

At last the operator closed the gates of the enclosure and we ran back out of the way.

Then Tolya set the winch in motion. A creaking steel cable hauled the heavy ram to the top of the winch. It hung poised for a moment clearly outlined against the pink-blue of the evening sky, then Tolya pulled a lever and the ram swept down with a crash. The huge metal pear had to be raised several times to bombard the scrap-metal before the massive bed-plate cracked apart.

"Hurrah!" Tolya shouted, abandoning the lever and rubbing his greasy hands with delight. The worst was over.

When we entered the enclosure, we discovered in place of the old machines a heap of shattered metal. Good, coarse grained iron glittered where it had broken. Tolya picked up a chunk of bed-plate and looked at the break.

"Good iron!" he said to Nikita. "There's not much graphite in it, but plenty of phosphorus and silicon. This kind of iron melts like butter, and it lasts a long time when it's cast."

And Tolya lifted the lump of iron on his right hand as if to test his strength. Now he was not a bit like the immaculate secretary whose appearance had given me such a shock at our first meeting.

To prevent the Komsomol iron being mixed up with the general supply, Zakabluk roped off a special enclosure for it. We carried the heavy lumps of metal into the enclosure, and when the contents of all three trucks were piled in a heap, Zakabluk hung up a notice on the rope: "Iron for Komsomol Reapers."

Already I could see the yellow fields of wheat waving above the Dniester, and the reapers that we had made with our own hands sailing across them like ships on a golden sea...

Turunda took over the job of the foundry's Party secretary Flegontov, who had been sent to Leningrad by the management on business. Every day I would ask Turunda's advice on how best to get our chaps keen on the job, how to make them reliable helpers of the Party in all things.

With the simple, practical advice of a Bolshevik and experienced production worker Turunda directed our youthful enthusiasm towards concrete achievement. He knew just when and how to give his advice. After a talk with him I could see the weak spots in our work. I learnt to understand Turunda's merest hint and he, in his turn, directed the Komsomol members in such a way as to give full scope to their initiative.

The first is always the worst. A week after my argument with the chief engineer, a second issue of the wall newspaper appeared. Grisha Kanuk was doing famously.

A tall brawny chap in a leather apron and goggles stood at the controls of a crane-operated pouring ladle. A stream of iron flowed from the lip of the ladle writing letters that made up the title of our newspaper: Young Foundry Man. The fiery title at once caught the attention of the foundry workers, young and old.

All the articles had been neatly typed out in the management office by Kolya Zakabluk, who had written two of them himself.

In an article about the economy drive our time-keeper went round the foundry as attentively as if it was his own property.

"Neither the shop storekeepers, nor Fedorko, nor the chief engineer Andrykhevich," Kolya wrote, "are paying due attention to the Party's call for economy. Has the chief engineer thought how much space is being wasted round the unfinished blast-furnace? Yet all we have to do is to clear away the sand and scrap and it would make a fine place to set up the moulding machines that have been awaiting repair for over a year in the foundry stores... And how many tampers with broken wedges are lying about the foundry! Yet, when we run short of tampers, foreman Fedorko always sends up to RIP for new ones. The tool-makers waste expensive metal making new tampers for us. Wouldn't it be simpler and just as efficient to put new wooden wedges on the iron handles?"

Zakabluk discovered many striking examples of this kind. Without mincing his words he accused the management of wasting graphite, sulphite liquor, and molasses in the fettling shop. And he did not merely pick on shortcomings, he called on the workers to fight for every drop of iron, for every handful of the coarse sand which was brought to us from a long distance away, for every cracked mould-box which could be patched up and used without recasting.

In his article "The Soft-Heartedness of Foreman Fedorko" Zakabluk "emery-papered" the shop foreman for his lenient attitude towards slackers and bad workers. Zakabluk told the bald truth. He wrote that a bad worker had only to invite the foreman to a family wedding, or ask him to be godfather at a christening and Fedorko would be ready to turn a blind eye to all his blunders. "If those slackers won't change their ways," Zakabluk wrote, "the foreman ought to clear them out of the foundry."

I signed my article "Vasil Mallet." I had liked that word ever since I had started at the factory-training school. It was a mallet that the moulders used to shake up the model before drawing it out of the sand moulds. And I wanted to act like a mallet in shaking up the lazy and complacent people who were hindering the work of the foundry.

Vasil Mallet expounded an idea that had been worrying him for a long time. He suggested abolishing the primitive method of heating the machines with slabs, which wasted so much time.

A detailed letter which Turunda had received from Flegontov in Leningrad was also published in the

wall newspaper.

The Party secretary wrote about rationalization methods in the foundry at the Krasny Vyborzhets Works, about the packing of moulds with compressed air, about distributing work properly between teeners and moulders. "And why shouldn't all this be done at our works?" asked the newspaper.

Flegontov, a stocky grey-haired man of about fifty, was a moulder of wheels for reaping machines. His was a very difficult and tedious job. When I watched him at first, I had thought he worked too slowly, too carefully. He spent ages on every mould, dabbing water on the edges as if he were washing a baby, peering into every notch and channel with the help of a mirror to make sure they were clean. In the time that it took us on our "machine-guns" to do ten or more moulds Flegontov and his partner managed to finish only one. Once I said something about Flegontov's slowness to Turunda.

"You're a sight too hasty in your judgements," he replied. "That's not a running about job, lad. Wheels and chassis are the biggest and slowest jobs of all. They have to be moulded by the most skilled workers in the foundry. Why, you ask? It's very simple. If you mess up five or six gear-wheels because you're in a hurry, it's a pity but we can face it. But just imagine what would happen if a full-size wheel was moulded badly. Think of the iron that would be wasted in recasting it! ... No, Flegontov's a fine craftsman!"

The Party secretary's letter to our youth newspaper was read with great interest by the older workers, in fact the whole issue made a deep impression.

The night when the young workers in the foundry decided to start work not at four but at one o'clock, so, that they could mould the parts for the Komsomol reapers well before the other workers arrived, I felt terribly nervous. Suppose we, young moulders, couldn't manage these big awkward parts! They were the basis of the whole machine! But we couldn't very well bother the old workers with requests for help. We would manage on our own somehow. Before we could start work, however, Turunda and Gladyshev walked into the foundry. Then the "old men"—skilled craftsmen who had long since passed Komsomol age—trickled in one by one.

"Hullo, Comrade Turunda!" I exclaimed. "We were going to work on your machines. How shall we manage now?"

Turunda grinned and said: "You're a bit too anxious to write us off as old men! We've come to help you. It's our common cause, isn't it?"

I felt as if a block of cast iron had been lifted from my shoulders. Good old Turunda! Now I could be certain that all the metal parts of the reapers would be properly moulded and cast.

We began on the stroke of one.

Compressed air hissed through the pipes, the hot slabs glowed under the models. Shovels plunged into the heaps of sand releasing thick clouds of steam.

We had arranged beforehand that my partner for moulding gear-wheels should be Kolya Zakabluk. From the way he tightened the screws on his machine, I realized again that he was no beginner at moulding.

Before Kolya had time to pack his first mould, however, we heard the sound of Naumenko's grumpy voice:

"Hey there, young fellow! What are you doing on another man's machine! You'll strain yourself and ruin your health again. We can manage without you!"

Naumenko took over his machine from Kolya, and after making sure that the mould-box was firmly fixed, drove the sharp tip of his tamper into the steaming mass of sand.

"Never mind, Kolya, don't let it get you down!" I consoled my unlucky partner. "Uncle Vasya and I will do the moulding and you go for a walk. Or you know what? Go and show Kolomeyets how to sift

the sand. Or here's something else you can do: keep the machines supplied with hot slabs, so that we don't have to interrupt our work. We haven't got much time, you know."

Nikita was on the job too. How could a restless fellow like him sleep on such a night, when he knew that the young foundry men had started making the reapers for the commune on the Dniester!

Far away on the Dniester the silvery oats, the blue-green rye, the wheat, the barley were forming ears and reaching higher every day. Soon it would be harvest time. There was not a minute to lose.

I had got a temporary pass from the foreman for our guest from Podolia. Nikita had consented to do any work he was fit for. Now he started racing Zakabluk out to the heaters for slabs.

Petka had rallied the young workers in the joinery to make the wooden parts for the reapers out of working hours and free of charge. Sasha had come to the foundry with me, so that he would be on the spot to help if there were any mechanical hitches.

As we worked, I gradually became aware that Uncle Vasya was deeply displeased about something. He kept muttering under his breath and sighing. In the end he had to tell me.

"Ah, what a darned nuisance! Just a bit late! And all because of the old woman! I told her to wake me at midnight and she goes and oversleeps herself. When I looked at the clock it was half past the hour. By the time I'd washed my face and got my clothes on, you'd started the job!"

"Never mind, Uncle Vasya, we'll still finish before work starts," I consoled the old man.

"It's not whether we'll finish or not. The point is this is social work. And it's a double shame to be late for social work. I'm not Kashket, I've never wanted to be a lone wolf. I want to be with my mates!"

I had never got so much joy out of my work as I did that night. Let's be honest about it, on ordinary days there's always the thought in the back of your mind of how much you are earning. And if by knocking-off time you've done more than your usual, you go home feeling pleased with yourself. But that night we were working purely for the public good. The joy and fellow feeling of it made our hands and feet leap to the job.

Three days later Nikita, Golovatsky, and I called in at the paint shop. The smell of oil and turpentine greeted us at the entrance. In the roomy shop stood many new reaping machines ready to be sent off.

We quickly recognized our five reapers. Even among hundreds of other machines it was not difficult to find them, for on the side of every reaper made for the Dniester commune gleamed the badge of the Communist Youth International. And just beside it, under the works trade-mark, the young painters had neatly painted two lines from a favourite popular song of those times:

Our armoured train flies on ahead!

Communism is journey's end!...

And below that fine song was painted in smaller letters: "To the Lenin Komsomol Commune from the workers of the Schmidt Engineering Works."

The works transport department had promised to send off the reapers with the first goods train after midnight.

ON THE TRAIL OF PECHERITSA

After we had inspected the reapers I suggested taking a boat out to the harbour bar. We had been intending to go out there ourselves for some time, and now there was a good excuse. It was a fine evening with a light breeze blowing from the steppe.

During the past three days of anxiety, while the various shops turned and assembled the parts we had cast, the sea had been stormy. But at dawn today the gale had dropped and we had no difficulty in getting a light white-painted rowing boat from the Life-Saving Society's landing stage.

Petka and Nikita took the oars and I took the rudder. Only Sasha had nothing to do, so he kicked off his shoes and sat with his legs dangling over the bows.

We took turns at the long, springy oars and after about an hour the nose of our boat drove into the long spit of sand that ran out from one end of the town to the lighthouse.

Here there was nothing but sea and sky. The rippling expanse of water stretched away on both sides divided only by a narrow strip of clean, silvery sand.

The town was scarcely visible. Like seaside cottages in the distance, its tiny buildings ran along the shore from the Liski to Matrosskaya Settlement. To the right, at the end of the bar, stood the white cone of the lighthouse. It must have taken a lot of work to build it out there, on the treacherous sand, if even here the bar was so narrow that any big wave could easily swamp it.

Sinking into the soft sand, as if we were wading in a corn bin, we dragged the boat out of the water and Petka slipped his clothes off.

Like a goose flapping its wings in winter, Nikita swung his arms a few times, glanced with half-closed eyes at the reddening sun, and dashed boyishly into the water. We, too, raced after Nikita into the gleaming sea.

There was something fascinating about bathing out here in this great open expanse of water. The sea was warm as a steppeland pool. Pounded by the heavy waves of the day before, the bottom was covered with sandy wrinkles. The pleasant salty breeze smelt of fish and rotting seaweed. And if you floated on your back, you could stare up at the sky where a merlin was hovering over the steppe. He was looking for prey, the rascal, but he just couldn't make up his mind what to swoop upon from his lofty height.

We had a grand bathe, and when we scrambled gasping out of the water, Nikita started doing physical jerks. He swung his arms about until the bones cracked. And although we had the open sea all round us and the tang of salt in our nostrils, it seemed as if we were back again with Nikita in Podolia. I thought of our walks round the town at night, and suddenly I remembered something.

"Enough of this mystery-making, Nikita!" I said. "Tell us what happened to Pecheritsa!"

"All right, I'll tell you, don't get excited!" Nikita replied soothingly, and sitting down in the boat, with his face to the setting sun, he began his story.

... Ever since Dzhendzhuristy had found the ginger moustache of the fleeing Pecheritsa by the entrance to the District Education Department, Vukovich's mind had been working overtime.

To discover where Pecheritsa might be hiding, one had to study his whole past, his present, and even to glance into his future, one had to find out about every friend or acquaintance he had ever had or was likely to have. One had to discover where he had travelled, what places he knew best, and then it would be easier to guess where he might find accomplices and protectors.

Zhitomir and Proskurov could be counted out. It was unlikely that Pecheritsa would think of stopping in those little towns situated so near the frontier. The frontier was always well guarded, and after Pecheritsa's flight from our town it would have been doubly dangerous for him to venture near it.

Judging from the ticket that Pecheritsa had left with me, it might be assumed that he had intended to

travel as far as Millerovo. Surely he hadn't made for the Don or the Kuban?

From the fugitive's records and from information supplied by his former colleagues, Vukovich ascertained that Pecheritsa had never been in the region of the Don. What was more, soon after his arrival in our town, when he was still quite above suspicion, Pecheritsa had said proudly to a typist at the District Education Department: "I have never been to Moscovia and, God willing, I never shall. Why should I leave the Ukraine?"

It was hard to imagine that he had made such a statement deliberately, so that in a moment of danger it would make hated "Moscovia" a safer hiding-place for him.

In case that happened, however, all suspicious persons in Millerovskaya, Olkhovy Rog, Nikolsko-Pokrovskaya stations, and even in the villages of Krivorozhye and Olkhovchik were investigated. No trace of Pecheritsa was discovered there. In all probability Pecheritsa had taken the ticket to Millerovo as a blind. Who could tell whether he hadn't written himself out several more free travel warrants to various parts of the Ukraine, and perhaps under different names?

Vukovich set about solving the riddle.

The first thing he did, so Nikita told us, was to study the period when Pecheritsa donned Austrian uniform and marched into a Ukraine seething with revolution.

At that time the Austrian generals were using Ukrainian nationalists from Galicia for their own ends. A whole legion of "Galician Riflemen" was sent as part of the Austrian army to plunder the Ukraine.

Popular uprisings broke out in the Kiev, Kherson, Yekaterinoslav provinces. Villages and even whole districts mustered partisan detachments and fought the invaders. In the neighbourhood of Zvenigorodka alone the partisans destroyed several regular units of the German-Austrian army.

The Austrian Eastern Army was led into the Ukraine by Field-Marshal Bohm-Ermolli. The command was then handed over to General Kraus. At the end of March 1918, by agreement with the Germans, General Kraus plundered the Podol, Kherson, and Yekaterinoslav provinces—a huge area of the Ukraine stretching from the Zbruch to the Azov Sea.

As soon as General Kraus took command of the Eastern Army, the Austrians' adviser on Ukrainian affairs, Zenon Pecheritsa, received a staff appointment at the headquarters of the 12th Austrian Army Corps located in Yekaterinoslav. In this capacity Pecheritsa often accompanied punitive expeditions into rebellious districts, and on these occasions he used all his cunning to make himself useful to the Austrians.

Now, tracing Pecheritsa's route from the remote little village of Kolomiya to the shore of the Azov Sea, Vukovich discovered that usually when the Austrian punitive expeditions went out from Yekaterinoslav they based themselves on the colonies of German settlers, particularly in Tavria.

Vukovich had been familiar with Tavria since childhood. His grandfather, fleeing from Serbia after taking part in the uprising against the ruthless Prince Milosh Obrenovich, had settled there in the first half of the nineteenth century. In Tavria Vukovich's grandfather had married a Ukrainian woman and made his home there. Vukovich's father went to work at the iron mills in Mariupol, where he became a blast-furnace foreman. In Mariupol his son joined the Komsomol and during the Civil War was sent to work in the security forces.

As he studied Pecheritsa's route through the country of his childhood, Vukovich discovered that one of the Austrian detachments which Pecheritsa had accompanied had got as far as the German colony of Neuhoftnung, on the bank of the river Berda. Vukovich at once began to take an interest in the history of this colony and learnt that it had been founded at the beginning of the nineteenth century by Germans who had emigrated to Tavria from Wurttemberg.

Vukovich picked up his magnifying glass and scanned the map to study Zenon Pecheritsa's route to the Azov Sea in the spring of 1918. The security man found the map dotted with German

place-names—Forstenau, Goldstadt, Muntau... These were rich German colonies that abounded in the fertile Tavrian steppes. In the time of the tsars the German colonies had lived a life of plenty. But as soon as the call "All power to the Soviets" was raised at revolutionary headquarters in St. Petersburg, the wealthy German colonists were often awakened at night by their fear of the people's power.

They welcomed the Austrian army with open arms. When army curates in grey uniforms held thanksgiving services in the colony churches and prayed for the Hapsburg dynasty, the elders of the colony wept with joy.

There could be no doubt that the colonists treated Pecheritsa—an Austrian hireling with an excellent knowledge of German—as one of themselves and gladly assisted him in his raids on the Ukrainian villages.

Vukovich decided that a cunning enemy like Pecheritsa would be sure to have contacts in the colonies where he used to stay. It was no secret that the Austrians had planted agents in the colonies when they left. These agents, too, would make useful contacts for Zenon Pecheritsa to fall back on if the danger of exposure forced him to abandon his comfortable position and go underground.

Soon afterwards Vukovich learnt that a certain Shevchuk, an agricultural student from Podolia, had arrived at the state cattle-breeding farm in the colony of Friedensdorf for a course of practical training. Shevchuk had taken full board with Gustav Kunke, an elderly colonist who in the absence of the pastor was running the Lutheran chapel at the colony.

Vukovich had scarcely read this piece of information before another message was brought to him. From the town on the Azov Sea which had now become a second home to us Vukovich was informed that the suspected spy Zenon Pecheritsa had been seen in the town, but had evaded capture.

Though he had tried to foresee every possible action that Pecheritsa might make, Vukovich could not understand why Pecheritsa had shown himself in broad daylight in a crowded holiday resort. It would have been far simpler and less dangerous for him to have spent his time with the colonist he knew, Gustav Kunke. After long consideration, Vukovich arrived at the conclusion that Pecheritsa, on reaching Zhmerinka, had changed on to a train going to Odessa, and from Odessa made his way to the Azov coast by sea.

This assumption, however, turned out to be wrong. Pecheritsa did not go to Odessa and did not reach Tavria by sea.

First of all he took a train to Kharkov, expecting to find help and support there. But Kharkov was no place for him; at that time the Ukrainian nationalists there were being exposed and tried on a big scale. Pecheritsa, who had to stay the night illegally, now with one nationalist friend, now with another, might do his hosts great harm, and they advised him to hide himself somewhere farther away.

Pecheritsa took a train to Mariupol and from there drove over the dusty coastal roads to our town in a hired cab. Perhaps he was the "profitable passenger" about whom Volodya had told us so unsuspectingly.

Looking at it from his point of view, Pecheritsa was right in going to Mariupol. He was afraid of pursuit and wanted to cover up his tracks.

At a distance it is always difficult to get to the bottom of things. By agreement with his chief, Vukovich, who knew Pecheritsa by sight, took a trip to the district where Pecheritsa had appeared. That was how I had happened to see Vukovich on the day of his arrival, when dressed in his light summer suit and Panama hat he was walking from the station into town. He had not acknowledged me because he had wanted to keep his presence in the town a secret for the time being.

In our town Vukovich received a great surprise. When he arrived at the local security department, he was shown an urgent message from the stationmaster at Verkhny Tokmak. The message said that the

body of a murdered man had been discovered near the station, in a gully where pottery clay was usually quarried. The papers found on the body bore the name of Shevchuk which Pecheritsa had assumed when he fled from our town. . .

"A body?" Sasha exclaimed in awe. "But that's impossible! Who could have killed him?"

"Do you think I know who it was?" Nikita replied.

Petka was also deceived by the calm tone in which Nikita spoke.

"Vukovich told you everything, Nikita," he said disappointedly. "In such amazing detail. Surely he could have finished his story and told you who killed Pecheritsa?"

"Yes, just fancy, not telling me that.." Nikita murmured, scarcely able to conceal a smile. "By the way, chaps, are you sure those reapers will be loaded before dark?"

"You can rely on Golovatsky," I said. "They'll be up at the station in time for the night train."

"Then I'll tell you the rest," said Nikita.

THE BODY IN THE GULLY

The thing Vukovich had been afraid of had happened. When inquiries were made about Pecheritsa in Friedensdorf, one of the chapel-goers heard about it and immediately informed Kunke that the authorities were interested in his guest.

Cursing his luck but not waiting to be captured, Pecheritsa left the colony at dusk and made for the nearest railway station, Verkhny Tokmak. Kunke had supplied him with letters of recommendation to rich Germans living on the outskirts of Taganrog.

. . . Night. Two oil lamps cast their dim light on the little station of Verkhny Tokmak that lay half-hidden amid melon-fields and vineyards in the middle of the steppe. The sleepy stationmaster dozed by the open window waiting for a call from the next station.

Pecheritsa paced up and down the gravel platform. Presently another passenger approached him and asked for a light. Pecheritsa held out his burning cigarette. Having nothing better to do, the two men strolled up and down the platform talking. Little by little Pecheritsa learnt that his new acquaintance was a supply agent from Novochoerkassk. His name was Yosif Okolita. He was on his way home after a long trip round the coastal districts bordering on the Azov Sea, and was glad of someone to talk to.

Soon Pecheritsa learnt that Okolita was a Galician like himself. Okolita's parents had taken him out of Galicia to the Volga region when he was still a boy. Fearing Austrian persecution, the people of many villages in the Western Ukraine had left their native land with the retreating Russian troops in those years. In 1916, there were Galicians to be found in the Caucasus, in Tavria, in the Crimea. Some of them travelled even further—to the Penza and Saratov provinces. Okolita's parents had died during the famine in the Volga region and he, now an orphan, had gone to live with his uncle, also a refugee from Galicia, who had settled in Novochoerkassk as a tailor.

Son of a schoolmaster from Galicia, Yosif Okolita had not only got used to living with the Russians, he even praised Soviet rule and was intending next autumn to enter the Rostov Teachers' Training Institute.

That night, as he listened to this confiding young fellow who had almost completely lost his Galician

accent, Pecheritsa agreed with him about everything and at the same time thought to himself that he could make very good use of Yosif Okolita's papers and biography.

Who could tell what treatment he would receive from the friends of Gustav Kunke to whom he was going! And besides, to save his own skin, Kunke might disclose Pecheritsa's whereabouts at the very first interrogation.

A bell rang indicating that the train for which they were waiting had left the last station and was on its way to Verkhny Tokmak. Pecheritsa's cold treacherous mind worked quickly. While trying to gain the friendship of his fellow countryman with memories of his native Galicia, Pecheritsa was thinking: "The body will be discovered with my papers on it, and if they've started searching for me, their first move will be to call up Kunke to identify the murdered man. Kunke's an old hand at the game. To save himself and give me a chance to get away, he's bound to say it's me."

A short distance from the station a well could be seen among the trees. Saying that he was very thirsty, Pecheritsa asked his companion to work the pump. Suspecting nothing, Okolita willingly agreed. They walked towards the well. As soon as they reached the shadow of a warehouse, Pecheritsa pulled out a hunting knife and stabbed Okolita in the back. Pecheritsa dragged his victim into a near-by gully, searched his pockets and took his papers, money, and cigarette-case. There was no time to lose. After hastily thrusting the false papers bearing the name Shevchuk into the dead man's pocket, Pecheritsa washed his hands in a puddle by the well, and picking up Okolita's little wooden case of provisions calmly walked on to the lighted platform from the other side of the station.

The train from the Azov Sea stopped at Verkhny Tokmak for three minutes. Then the train steamed on to Polog carrying with it the bogus supply agent Yosif Okolita.

The homebound holiday-makers, sunburnt and sleepy, dozed between their clean sheets. Anxious for a short rest before arriving at the busy station Volnovakha, the old steward nodded in his compartment. No one paid any attention to the chance passenger who had taken a vacant seat in one of the candle-lit compartments.

The new passenger was in high spirits. Certain that he had at last baffled his pursuers, Pecheritsa on arriving in Rostov-on-Don took a room in the best hotel in the city.

He calmly booked himself in at the hotel and was able to live there for three days, confident that no one would take any notice of a supply agent travelling through Rostov on his way from Novocherkassk. He must have enjoyed his sleep after so many days of agitated wanderings. In the evenings he went for walks round the city.

Pecheritsa experienced what must have been the most terrifying moment in his life on the fourth day. The door of his room opened and instead of the waiter with silver-plated tray whom he had been expecting he saw framed in the doorway the slim fair-haired figure of Vukovich.

Vukovich raised a revolver and in a calm, everyday voice said: "Hands up! ..."

"Hold on, Nikita! How could he have found Pecheritsa under another name, and in a big town like that?" Sasha exclaimed.

"You may be a flyer, Sasha, old chap, but you are still unforgiveably naive," Nikita said impressively. "Try to understand this. Vukovich and his comrades were trained under the Iron 'Knight of the Revolution, Felix Edmundovich Dzerzhinsky! They serve the Party and Soviet power, guarding all that we gained in the Great Revolution of October. Everyone is eager to help them! When Vukovich had caught that spy, he wrote the railwaymen of Verkhny Tokmak a letter requesting them to put up a memorial on the grave of Yosif Okolita, near the gully where he was murdered by Pecheritsa. And he

even thought out an inscription for it. Do you know what it was? To a son of the oppressed Western Ukraine, Yosif Okolita, who was murdered by a hireling of world capitalism. Sleep in peace, dear comrade. Your native land will know the happy hour of liberation.' I'll be passing through Verkhny Tokmak tonight, and if the train stops there, I'm going to have a look at that memorial."

"All right, Nikita," I interrupted, "but you haven't told us properly yet how Vukovich guessed that Pecheritsa was living in that hotel."

"How did he guess it?" Nikita said with a grin. "I'll tell you. I mentioned that the dead man's uncle was a tailor in Novocherkassk, didn't I? Well, knowing his nephew would stop in Mariupol for a few days, Okolita's uncle sent him a letter to be called for at the post-office there. It was brief but pleasant. Okolita's uncle told his nephew that he had been accepted for the Rostov Teachers' Training Institute. He advised him to turn in his work and come straight home. Okolita had put this precious letter in a pocket that Pecheritsa in his haste failed to search. Vukovich immediately telegraphed the murdered man's uncle to come to the scene of the crime. While the coroner was checking the age of the dead man, which obviously did not correspond to Pecheritsa's, Okolita's uncle was on his way to Verkhny Tokmak. He identified the body and after that it was quite a simple matter to arrest the murderer..."

As if awakening from a deep meditation, Petka said excitedly: "Just think what would have happened, chaps, if Pecheritsa had fooled us! We'd never have finished our schooling, we'd be hanging about half-trained in Podolia somewhere, and the working class would have lost a reinforcement of fifty-two people!"

"And the commune wouldn't have got its reapers," said Sasha.

"There wouldn't have been any reapers, that's a fact," I agreed readily. "A lot of things wouldn't have happened. We wouldn't have been sitting here... Gosh, what a lot of harm just one traitor can cause, if he isn't discovered in time!"

"You're not going very deep, Vasil," Nikita cut in. "It's not just a matter of our factory-training school. People like Pecheritsa do harm to the life of the whole people, to Soviet power. The point is that we've learnt how to get at their dirty hearts long before they can get at ours! They'll never succeed in splitting the Ukraine away from Russia. The people of the Ukraine are honest working people, and they understand very well what gentry like Pecheritsa are after. Remember Lenin's words that we learnt at school: 'If the Great Russian and Ukrainian proletariat act together, a free Ukraine is possible. Without that unity the subject cannot even be raised.' Every worker in the Ukraine has got those wise words deep inside him now. He tested them well during the Civil War and treachery won't change his convictions. And sooner or later those traitors will get what's coming to them, because the truth is found to be on our side." Nikita was silent for a little, then he said: "Let's go back, chaps. The sun's setting and we've a long way to row."

We all heaved together and pushed the boat into the calm water of the harbour. I rowed at stroke and Sasha took charge of the rudder. The long springy oars swept easily through the water. Glistening drops falling from the blades sparkled in the dying rays of the sun. The rowlocks creaked in time with our oars and Sasha, resting in the stern, struck up a song:

*Bravely we march to fight
For the power of the people!
All of us our lives will give
In that great battle!*

... We saw Nikita off late at night. With us we brought a sack of hay to make him comfortable in the open truck under one of the reapers.

The engine was being coupled to the long goods train, when Nikita suddenly pulled an enamel flask out of his rucksack and said: "Show me where I can get some water, Vasil."

"Come on, we'll show you," Petka volunteered readily.

"No, you and Sasha wait here and look after my things. Vasil will take me there. Come on, Vasya!" Nikita said hastily.

When I led Nikita to the water tap I did not know that it was a desire to tell me a secret that had made Nikita insist on my showing him the way. As soon as we reached the taps sticking out of a stone hut at the back of the platform, Nikita glanced over his shoulder and whispered in my ear: ;

"Tell me, Vasil, did you show anyone your letter before you sent it to me?"

Not realizing fully what Nikita was driving at, I replied cautiously:

"No, I didn't... Why?"

"And you didn't tell anyone about what you had written?"

"No, nothing... that is, I said I had written you a letter, but I didn't tell anyone what was in it."

"You didn't tell anyone about your suspicions that this woman Rogale-Piontkovskaya who runs the dancing-class is a relative of the Countess in Podolia?"

"But is she? ... Well, that's what I thought!" And I went on excitedly: "But when I saw her, I decided it must be just a coincidence. That one back home was thin and dignified-looking, but this woman here's more like a meat-trader at the market."

"Well, go on thinking that, understand?" Nikita said meaningfully. "Just a coincidence of names, and no more! And don't talk about it. That's a request not only from me, there's someone else..."

"Vukovich?"

A loud clanking announced that the engine had been coupled to the train.

"I'll tell you all about it one day," Nikita said, "but for the time being... dead silence! All game has to be stalked quietly."

"Wait a minute, Nikita!" I protested, thoroughly bewildered. "We're planning to show up Madame and her dancing-class. I told you..."

"As a Komsomol undertaking?"

"Yes, all the young chaps will be in it..."

"If it's the Komsomol that's doing it, that's all right. That won't interfere. But you must act as if you'd never heard that name in your life before. Then the little detail that you told me in your letter won't be wasted... Now, let's go..."

WHAT IS AN "INSTIGATOR"?

Even before the five reaping machines that Nikita had taken away with him had reached their destination, Golovatsky had suggested that every Komsomol group should appoint speakers to inform the workers about the political situation during their lunch-hour. True, one of our fellows, Arkady Salagai from the drilling shop, objected to Tolya's suggestion. Salagai said that we should be interfering with the

works Party organization, and argued heatedly that reading out the newspapers during the lunch-hour was the Communists' job. Salagai bawled out his arguments with his greasy cap tilted rakishly on the back of his head, but Golovatsky knew how to answer him.

"Everyone knows," Tolya said very quietly and distinctly, "that there are twice as many Komsomol members at the works as there are Party members. And isn't it our job to help the Communists? What harm is there in devoting our efforts to work that the Party has pointed out to us! On the contrary, we ought to be proud of doing it!"

... That summer, our workers, like everyone else in the country, were very interested in our relations with Britain, and Golovatsky had decided that our first task should be to read our workers a few of the latest newspaper articles on the subject.

Today the joiners' Komsomol group was on duty and I was not a bit surprised to hear Petka's deep voice when I entered the dining-hall. My friend had been working over the newspapers in the club reading-room till very late last night.

Petka was standing on the low platform at the end of the hall with a copy of Izvestia in his hands. He was reading the Soviet Government's note to Britain:

"British Government spokesmen are trying to interpret the fraternal help afforded by the workers of the U.S.S.R. and their trade-union organizations to the strike movement in Britain as an act of interference in the internal affairs of the British Empire. While considering unworthy of comment the crude attacks made by certain British Government ministers on the U.S.S.R., its working class and trade-union organizations, the Soviet Government points out that it is a fairly wide-spread phenomenon for any government to belong to a definite political party, and for one or another political party to have a dominating position in certain trade unions..."

The eyes of everyone sitting at the long tables covered with fresh-smelling oil-cloth were focussed on Petka. If any of the men who were eating needed hot water from the steaming urn in the corner, he went up to it on tip-toe, trying to make as little noise as possible, and still keeping his eyes on the speaker.

I couldn't help feeling glad for Petka. A factory-school trainee, who only a little while ago had been catching birds with "wobblers" and running barefoot about our hilly town, was now reading out a government note to the workers of a big engineering works and everyone was listening to him attentively. I regretted that Nikita was not here; he would have been pleased to see the progress his pupil had made.

In the farthest corner of the hall I noticed Golovatsky and Flegontov, who had arrived recently from Leningrad. They, too, were listening attentively to my friend.

As I listened to this note in which the Soviet Government swept aside the foolish slander of Chamberlain and Co., I recalled my conversation with Old Turunda.

"Yes, we shall go on helping arty honest worker who is oppressed by the capitalists, and if the capitalists don't like it, they can lump it," I thought to myself.

It was as if the Soviet diplomats had overheard our argument that evening and were now expressing our thoughts in the note. True, they did it in a very polite manner, but that did not make the thoughts any less clear and definite.

Lost in my reflections, I missed a little of what Petka was reading and it cost me an effort to recover the thread of the argument.

"... The degree of friendship in relations between states," Petka continued steadily, "tells mainly on their economic relations. The most important feature of the speech of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Churchill, is his attempts to undermine economic relations between Britain and the U.S.S.R.

"This slander by the man who was once the chief instigator of the British intervention against the

Soviet Republic in 1918-19 clearly pursues the same aims in relation to the Soviet Republic as he has pursued ever since the Soviet Republic came into being. Churchill has not forgotten the blockade and intervention and his present speech is calculated to revive the economic blockade against us..."

Petka read the long sentence without stumbling over a single word, then paused for breath. The short moment of silence was at once interrupted by Kashket. Kashket jumped to his feet, holding a mug of steaming tea.

"Can I ask a question, young man?" he shouted.

"Go on," Petka said doubtfully.

"You've been reading out a lot of long words. You reel 'em off so fast our minds can't get the meaning of them. Would you mind explaining to me, an ignorant working man, what this here word 'constigator' means?"

And glancing round triumphantly with his shifty little eyes, Kashket sat down noisily on his bench. Anyone could see that it was not ignorance but a desire to put Petka off his stroke that had made him ask the question.

"All right, I'll explain," Petka said. "But the word is not 'constigator,' it's 'instigator.' An instigator is a..."

At that moment firm, heavy steps were heard in the hall. Flegontov, a short, stocky man in grey overalls and brown boots thickly coated with dust from the foundry, was walking up to the platform. He raised his hand like a pupil to his teacher and said quietly to Petka: "Let me answer him, old chap."

Feeling that his attempt to spoil the reading was going to fail, Kashket called out, but in a much quieter tone: "Why interrupt the lad? He was reading fine, let him explain it to us in his own way."

"I want to help our comrade and make things clear to you and everyone else. Will that spoil anything?" Flegontov retorted. "You want to know what this queer word 'instigator' means, do you? Well, let me tell you. In this particular case you might explain it this way. In 1918, the people we call 'instigators' were those who started the foreign invasion of the young Soviet country. After the world war, a few foreigners who owned factories in this country left their factories and ran away abroad. At first they thought we, Communists, would break our own necks, then when they realized that wouldn't happen they decided to act differently. So those 'instigators' got together the armed forces of fourteen countries to crush the Soviet land, but, as you know, they were defeated. Well, that's what an instigator is in international politics. But there are all sorts of instigators. . . Sometimes you find people of that kind who've wormed their way into the ranks of the working class, and although they don't work on such a big scale as the international type, they do a lot of harm to our cause. Take the foundry, for instance. There's a fellow working in the foundry who during the Civil War wobbled about between Old Man Makhno and General Denikin. And that fellow's lasted out till the present time, when we're rebuilding everything. He's been given a partner to work with, a young fellow who doesn't yet know the way we do things here. Anyone can see that this lad could take an intelligent attitude towards production, and work well not from fear of the big stick, but because his conscience tells him he ought to work well, and you'd think the older worker would help him on that path. But in this case the opposite's happened. The fellow I'm talking about instigates the new lad to follow quite a different path, the path of bad work, and slacking, and indifference to our Soviet production. And what does such instigation lead to? Hundreds of castings are written off as spoilage, and somewhere out there, in his village, the peasant waits in vain for the reaper he's ordered and says that co-operation between town and country is just a swindle. . . Do you see what I mean?"

Laughter was heard all through the hall. The men looked at Kashket, who had buried his nose in his enamel mug and was pretending to drink tea.

"Well, if there are no more questions, we'll go on with the reading," Flegontov said and with a nod to

Petka walked back to his corner.

Petka looked at Flegontov with gratitude, cleared his throat and went on reading.

The bright midday sun dazzled me when a few minutes before the end of the lunch-hour I followed Flegontov out of the dining-hall. Trucks piled high with oily bolts fresh from the finishing shops stood in the yard, left there by the workers during their break.

"That was one of your mates reading, wasn't it?" Flegontov asked me.

"That's right! We used to study at the same factory school."

"He's a good chap. He didn't get rattled."

But I was wrestling with a problem: should I tell Flegontov, the secretary of the Party organization, that he had been wrong about one thing?

I said cautiously: "But there are one or two things I don't agree with you about, Comrade Flegontov."

"What exactly?" His big sunburnt, slightly pock-marked face turned towards me.

I noticed that the peak of his old army cap gleamed with graphite. He must have been wearing it ever since the Civil War.

"When you hinted that Kashket is inciting his partner to turn out bad work, you seemed to be protecting Tiktov. What you seemed to be saying was, Kashket's a spoiler and a slacker, but Tiktov's as pure as a lamb. That's not true, Comrade Flegontov! If only you knew..."

Flegontov interrupted me.

"How old is Tiktov?"

"About eighteen."

"I see. Well, what ought I to know?"

In clumsy, stumbling phrases I told the secretary how Tiktov had acted at school, how he had stuck out against the collective, how he had failed to respond to the security alarm because he was drunk.

"And is that all?" Flegontov asked.

"But we expelled him from the Komsomol! He's a hopeless case."

"You're making a mistake, Mandzhura," Flegontov said calmly. "We can't throw people away like that. As far as I can make out from my own observations, your mate Tiktov is an obstinate, stuck-up sort of fellow. But such people can be re-educated. Don't you see, Mandzhura, that we've got to fight for every man, especially the young man? I'm sure that expulsion from the Komsomol has turned your mate sour. You must try and make him understand that everything is not lost. I don't want you, a Komsomol organizer, to wash your hands of people like Tiktov. That won't do us any good. If he's stubborn, go at him with good, principled arguments. It's the easiest thing in the world to say a man's a hopeless case and leave it at that. But sometimes, you know, even a criminal can be reformed and put on the right path by the strength of our convictions. We've got the truth on our side! . . ."

That evening a north wind sprang up and the bay was flecked with white-capped waves. The strong steppe wind lashed them furiously and clouds of spray gleamed pink in the bleak light of the setting sun. For a few minutes our faces turned a deep ruddy bronze in the sunset. Petka and I were sitting on a bench near the harbour restaurant.

Night approached imperceptibly. As the blue shadows crept over the earth, a faint smell of baking

bread reached us on the little mound where we sat.

Knowing that Petka had no rehearsal at the club this evening, I had suggested a walk along the sea-shore. Petka had agreed willingly, and when we sat down on the bench, he said with a sigh of relief:

"Flegontov did me a good turn today, didn't he? He must have known I wasn't very well up in my knowledge of Britain. You see, I had picked on China as my subject. The number of notes I'd made about it—colossal! And then Golovatsky made me read about our relations with Britain.. ."

"I know as much about Chinese affairs as I do about the Chinese language," I consoled Petka.

"Chinese affairs are very complicated," Petka said firmly, in a rather superior tone.

He was silent for a moment, then as if deciding to abandon his shyness, he said enthusiastically:

"I say, Vasil, do you remember the statement that the Chinese revolutionary Sun Yat-sen made to the Soviet Government?"

"I've missed a few things lately... Wait a minute, though ... He's dead, isn't he?"

"He made the statement last spring, just before he died. He dictated it to his friends. It's a fine statement! Listen. This is what Sun Yat-sen said: 'You stand at the head of a Union of Free Republics—the legacy left to the world by the immortal Lenin. With the help of that legacy...' " Petka wrinkled his broad forehead in an effort to recall the exact words, then went on enthusiastically: "Yes, and then it goes on like this. '...With the help of that legacy the victims of imperialism will inevitably achieve liberation from that international system whose foundations have from ancient times been rooted in slave-owning, wars, and injustice...' Fine, isn't it? What conviction! And it ends up like this: 'In saying farewell to you, dear comrades, I wish to express the hope that soon the day will come when the U.S.S.R. will welcome a great and free China as its friend and ally, and that in the great struggle for the liberation of the oppressed peoples of the world both allies will march forward to victory shoulder to shoulder.' Perhaps you and I will live to see that day, Vasil. Think what China and the U.S.S.R. mean together! Hundreds of millions! Nearly half the world! We shan't be afraid of anyone then!"

Just then we heard voices behind us.

"There's someone sitting over there!" I heard Golovatsky say loudly. "This will do, there's an empty bench here. You can go to the restaurant later."

And suddenly I felt as if a bucket of cold water had been tipped over me—Tiktor's harsh, stubborn voice replied: "What do you want to talk to me for? I'm not a Komsomol member..."

"So you think if I'm secretary of the Komsomol organization there's nothing for us to talk about?"

"Yes, I do. . . You caricatured me in your newspaper as if I was a saboteur..."

We were sitting on the lee side of them and could hear every word, but at that moment the lights of an engine showed up from behind the warehouses.

A shunting engine rolled past hauling a long line of empty trucks. For a minute the air was filled with the hiss of steam, the clank of wheels, the piercing whistles of the guards waving their lanterns from the trucks.

What Tolya and Tiktor said to each other amid the noise of the passing train, I don't know, but when the last truck winked its red light and vanished into the darkness, the wind again brought us Golovatsky's excited voice.

"You've got youth, strength, you've got a good pair of hands, Tiktor," Golovatsky was saying feelingly. "I won't believe that you can't work well. I just can't believe it! But you keep on turning out bad work, careless work, work that's done any old how. And don't talk to me about bad models. I know a bit about foundry work and I won't believe that under existing conditions you can't turn out a decent job."

"If you give me a different partner, I'll show them..."

"Who do you mean by 'them,' Tiktov?"

"Don't you know yourself? The chaps from my town! I suppose they've been complaining to you about me, haven't they?"

"If you are thinking of Maremkha and Bobir, you're quite wrong, Tiktov. I've never heard them say a word about you. As for Mandzhura, he gave you up as a bad job long ago. He and I even had a bit of an argument about you."

"An argument?" Tiktov asked in surprise.

"Yes, that surprises you, doesn't it? Mandzhura thinks you're a hopeless case, and I say you aren't. He'd be glad to have a decent chat with you and forget the past, but he's sure you'll give him the cold shoulder."

"And what do you think?" A fresh note of interest had crept into Tiktov's voice, and it was not so proud.

Golovatsky was silent.

And in that silence, broken only by the distant whistle of the engine, the twanging of an orchestra in the harbour restaurant, and the moaning of the wind, I realized that Flegontov had told Golovatsky what I had said against Tiktov that day.

"What do I think?" Golovatsky repeated, then deciding to bide his time a little before answering the question, he said: "All right, I'll tell you, but before I do so, you must answer a question that interests me."

"I will," Tiktov replied firmly.

"You'll answer everything I ask you?"

"Yes."

That "yes" sounded very sincere.

"Why did you do private jobs when you were studying at the factory-training school?"

"So you know about that too? ... All right, I'll tell you... To earn money!"

"But weren't your parents helping you?"

"Like hell they were! After my mother died, my Dad got married to another woman. She got him right under her thumb and set him against me."

"Is that the truth, Tiktov?" Golovatsky asked very seriously.

"Why should I lie to you? I can tell you more. Dad would go off on a long run and my stepmother used to nag at me every day. I put up with it because there was nowhere else to go. It was a long time before the chaps who were living with their parents got any grants, you know."

"But you could have told the other lads what was going on at home," Golovatsky remarked.

"I was too ashamed..." Tiktov confessed. "I didn't want to let the whole school know about our bickering. So I had to get by as best I could. I even took work from profiteers, so as not to be dependent on my stepmother."

"I want to believe that's true, Tiktov," Golovatsky said. "Why do you think I brought all this up? We are very interested in your future, Tiktov, just as we're interested in the future of any other young fellow. I want your hands to work for the good of society. How can that be brought about? Team up with the rest of the chaps! Take an interest in what they're interested in. Think less of yourself and as much as possible of others. But you're a lone wolf, so they tell me, you scowl at everyone as if we were all against you. But

we only want one thing—that you shouldn't waver between the two sides. Sooner or later such people get caught out. And I certainly don't want to see that happen to you. Train yourself to love your work, to get on with the other chaps. Crush that pride which is eating away at you like rust, and believe me, you'll become a different man."

"Well, if you really want to give me a chance, I'll try," Tiktov said after a pause, and in his voice there was no longer that scornful malice with which he usually spoke to people.

They walked away in the direction of the town, disappearing quickly in the darkness.

Petka said to me: "It's true about Tiktov's Dad whopping him, you know. Do you remember how Yasha came to school once all bruises, and pretended that he'd got beaten up by tramps after a wedding party? And afterwards we found out that it was his Dad who'd made such a sight of him."

"He didn't tell us because he was afraid we'd laugh. We were living independently and he had to rely on his father. He was ashamed of being tanned like a kid," I said, feeling genuinely sorry that we had not found out about Tiktov's family troubles in time. Had we known about it before, we could have talked to him in quite a different way.

A DISCOVERY

The weather was getting hotter and hotter. Except for an occasional storm, there was no wind. But the stifling, sultry days could not stop us from carrying out our plans. Our success in making the five reapers for the youth commune seemed to spur us on.

At first we thought that the chief engineer would at least condescend to read the second issue of our wall newspaper, particularly the article by Zakabluk. But not a bit of it! When Andrykhevich came into the foundry, he never so much as glanced at the newspaper.

But we went on thinking about the future of the foundry and, supported by the Party organization, appealed to the young workers of the foundry to do a voluntary job on Sunday.

As Petka, Sasha, and I walked to work on the following Sunday, I thought over all that had happened in the past few days: the long searches for spare parts and models to fit the twelve new machines that we were planning to install in the foundry; the drawings we had made of the new row (we had decided in advance to call it "Komsomol Row"); the distribution of key jobs among our most active members; the furious wrangling in the chief engineer's office, where our project had been condemned on all sides; and finally, my first report to the foundry Party committee.

At first I had tried to get out of making the report. As Komsomol secretary and an ex-foundry worker, Golovatsky seemed to be the best man to explain our idea. But Golovatsky would not hear of such a thing.

"Don't be shy, Vasil," he said. "The idea started in the foundry, didn't it? It's you who ought to tell the Party organization about it."

Our young draftsmen managed to produce several copies of the project for the future "Komsomol Row" in time for the meeting, and before I started making my report I handed them out to the members of the committee.

While I was speaking, Flegontov studied the drawing intently and kept looking up to glance through the dusty office windows into the foundry.

By one of the smoke-stained walls there were several piles of dry, unused sand, "old regime" sand, as we called it. Under this sand lay the concrete bases for the moulding machines, which the world war had

prevented the old owner from installing. In those days, the works had stopped making reapers, some of the workers had been called into the army, and the moulders who remained behind were all put on one job—the casting of hand-grenades. The works turned out hundreds of thousands of those little pineapple-shaped missiles. The moulding was done fast and no one objected to the workers' throwing away scrap, cinder, burnt sand, and all sorts of rubbish on to the unfinished furnace. It was this foundry rubbish dump that we had decided to get rid of.

"It's a first-class idea, Komsomols!" said Flegontov. "And you've worked it all out properly. Twelve new machines—that will mean hundreds of reapers above plan! It'll mean jobs for the workers who are still waiting their turn at the labour exchange..."

We parted at the plant gates. Petka went to the joiners' shop, Sasha disappeared into the store, where his mates were fitting out the new machines, and I went off to my "sand brigade."

The first thing I noticed in the foundry was Tiktov's broad back. Yasha was standing by his machine pulling off his blue blouse.

"So you've come!" I thought with a thrill of pleasure.

On Flegontov's advice and carrying out a promise I had given Golovatsky, I had gone over to Tiktov after work on Saturday and said: "We're doing some voluntary work tomorrow, Yasha. Feel like coming along?"

"I've heard about it!..." Tiktov had grunted without looking at me, and had gone on piling his empty mould-boxes.

From such an answer I had been unable to tell whether he would come or not, and now I was very glad to see him.

When we began to hand out spare shovels to chaps from the other shops, Tiktov strode up to me in his singlet and said gruffly: "Well, where's my job?"

"Take your choice," I suggested. "Either you can stay here and clear the moulding floor, or you can carry sand. Or perhaps you'd rather sift it over on the other side?"

"I'll stay here," Tiktov decided. "Let's get hold of a shovel."

"You'd better put a cap on," I advised, glancing at his flowing hair. "You'll never wash the dust out, if you don't."

"Who cares!" Tiktov said with an obstinate shake of his head.

A few minutes later he was one of the first to plunge his gleaming shovel into the dry, caked sand.

Soon there was such a dust in the place that we seemed to see each other through a fog. The shovels soon grew blunt from grinding on the iron cinder and broken mould-boxes buried in the sand.

Every time my shovel screeched, I thought to myself: "That's another chunk of metal for the sieves. The chaps will sift it out of the sand and it'll go into the furnace with all the other chunks, and then it'll come back here for casting in a big glaring ladle. . ."

Before I came here I had never realized the value of metal to the country. But after our talk with the works director I had begun to see things from another angle. And a few days ago we had re-read Comrade Stalin's report to the Fourteenth Party Congress, in which he had spoken of the shortage of metal. "Under these conditions, our economy and our industry in particular, cannot make further progress," Comrade Stalin had said, advising us to pay special attention to metal. Those words had made a deep impression on me, and now, as I cleared the sand, I felt overjoyed at every piece of metal we found.

The things we found in that dump! Broken shovel handles that might have been used before the

Revolution, half-finished grenades that brought back memories of the time when the troops of the south-west front moved through our town to Lvov armed with grenades of the same type. Our shovels unearthed newspapers in old-fashioned pre-revolutionary type, twisted iron watering cans for sprinkling the moulds, gear-wheels, even cartridge-oases green with age.

We put it all on stretchers and carried it out into the yard.

Soon Yasha pulled off even his blue singlet. The other chaps followed his example. Their bare sweating bodies gleamed in the light of the electric lamps. All of us were glancing at Tiktov. It was a pleasure merely to know that he wasn't spending his day-off at a cafe table with cronies like the lispig Kashket. "We must fight for every lad we've got, and make him ours for always, not chuck him away to our enemies!" I remembered Golovatsky's words. And I realized that I had been wrong about Tiktov and that Tolya had been right.

"But why can't we fight for Angelika then?" I thought. "Her father's a bourgeois through and through, and doesn't like us. That's a fact. But surely she may turn out better than her parents!" But the way Golovatsky had called her a "conceited young hussy" suggested that he had washed his hands off her entirely. "No, Tolya, old pal, you've made a mistake here somewhere," I thought, and plunged my shovel even harder into the sand.

I had another reason for being in a good mood. The day before I had received a postcard from Galya that Nikita had sent on to me. Apparently my card had never reached her.

The factory to which Galya had been sent had been full up, but the steelworkers' trade union had helped her to get a job as a turner in a shipyard engineering shop. Judging by the tone of the postcard, Galya was very pleased with her job. "If you take a trip through Odessa when you go on holiday next year, don't forget that your old and true friend lives here," she wrote. "Be sure to look me up. And in the meantime, don't forget to write 111"

The three exclamation marks at the end of the postcard, and the whole postcard with its view of the sea, and especially the fact that Galya had gone to the trouble of finding out my address gave me a thrill of joy. "I was unjust to Galya," I thought. And as I tossed sand on the stretcher, I firmly decided to make a point of going to Odessa next year...

Without waiting for us to clear away all the sand, the plumbers were bringing in pipes for compressed air. As I glanced at them screwing the pipes together, my thoughts turned to an idea that had been worrying me for some time. What with the reapers for the commune, Nikita's visit, and all sorts of other affairs, I had not been able to get my ideas down on paper...

At that moment I noticed Tiktov throw aside his shovel and, bending down, lift something that looked like a piece of cord. Then he straightened up and, noticing an electrician in blue overalls standing on a step-ladder, shouted: "Hey, lad, come over here."

Thinking that he was being asked to shovel sand, the electrician responded gruffly.

"Can't you see I'm working on the line!"

"Get down quick, there's something else you can work on here."

Reluctantly the electrician climbed down from his steps. Swinging his screwdriver, he walked unhurriedly over to Tiktov and, stooping on one knee, glanced carelessly at the wire.

The wire stuck out of the sand like a rat's tail. Shovels were scraping all round and no one paid the least attention to Tiktov's discovery. The electrician crouched lower and lower over the wire, as if he wanted to lick it, then suddenly he leapt to his feet as if he had been stung by a snake.

"Stop!" he bawled, throwing a wild glance round him.

"Don't panic! Tell us what's up?" Tiktov said tapping the dazed electrician on the shoulder.

"I'm not panicking. I know what I'm talking about," the electrician replied. "That's not a wire, it's a fuse! Understand? . . . Who's the senior here?"

The menacing word "fuse" flashed through my mind like a shaft of lightning. I thought instantly of the unsuccessful attempt to sabotage security headquarters. What should I do—shout for help or break the fuse?

Luckily, at that moment, Flegontov came out of the store. While we were cleaning the moulding floor, Flegontov, Turunda, and other moulders even older than they, had been helping the fitters from the tool shop to test the spare machines.

"Comrade Flegontov! ... Come over here!" Tiktov shouted at the top of his voice.

Flegontov turned in our direction, quickening his pace a little.

"What's the matter?" he asked calmly.

"Look at that!" the electrician said pointing.

"A fuse?" Flegontov said sharply. "Where did that come from?" And making a quick decision, he shouted: "No smoking in here!"

He walked quickly to the glass-fronted office and we saw his lips move as he picked up the telephone...

We finished our job that Sunday so tired that we could hardly stand. It was dusk when we left the shop after the twelfth and last machine had slid from the wooden rollers on to its stone foundation. Many a time that day it had seemed that the shouts of "One, two, heave!" would bring the glass roof down on the heads of the cheering team of young and old men.

The carpenters had made neat, fresh-smelling pinewood boxes for the moulding mixture and set them up between the machines. New pipes were gleaming everywhere. The damped stone floor looked black from a distance.

Before the twelve new "machine-guns" could be used, they had to be tested. Hundreds of new mould-boxes had to be brought into the foundry, the machines had to be partitioned off in pairs. Dozens of tons of clean sifted moulding sand had to be carried in from the bunkers and piled in great heaps on the broad space we had just won from the foundry rubbish dump. But the hardest, preparatory work was over.

Dog-tired as we were, you'd have thought we should have dropped down on our hard mattresses and fallen into a dead sleep. Ahead of us lay a whole week of piece work. But even when we got home, we still could not settle down.

"When did they plant that mine there—that's the question!" Sasha exclaimed.

"Anyone can see that—when Wrangel ran away!" I retorted. "That year their ships often came into our harbour. When those blighters had to pack their bags, they decided to blow up the works, so that we shouldn't get it, but something must have gone wrong. Uncle Vasya was right about those technicians nosing round the shops at night."

Cicadas were chirping in the garden below. Our landlady could be heard sighing heavily in her sleep.

Talking in whispers with my friends, I still imagined myself in the foundry watching the electrician carefully dig out the fuse from under the unfinished sand-covered furnace. Even before the town OGPU chief, a short, amiable-looking man in a grey suit whom Flegontov had called up by phone, had arrived in the foundry, Flegontov himself had discovered a mysterious box under the furnace and said that it contained enough dynamite to blow up the foundations of the blast-furnace, the copper furnace, and even the main wall of the foundry.

Tolya Golovatsky pointed to the box of dynamite and said: "Look at the present those capitalists left for the working class, and remember it! They took the drawings away and put dynamite in their place. What for? To blow up the foundry and stop the works for many months. To wet this sand with workers' blood."

"One thing's not quite clear," Sasha said, breaking the silence. "Those capitalists want to get back here. Why should they blow up the foundry?"

"You are a silly fellow," Petka said in quite a grown-up way. "What's insurance for? Perhaps Caiworth insured this works before the Revolution. Whatever happens, he's bound to get his money out of the insurance company, if the tsarist government gets here."

"All right, but why didn't they hide that fuse better?" Sasha insisted.

A new idea occurred to Petka.

"Perhaps one of them put it like that on purpose. We were always throwing dregs of iron out on that dump. Just think, if a drop of hot iron had fallen on that fuse, the mine would have gone off!"

"It's better not to think of it!" Sasha replied in an awed tone.

"But you tell us this, Sasha," Petka said, tapping Sasha on the shoulder. "Why did the OGPU chief shake hands with you? Do you know him?"

"Oh he shook hands with everybody," Sasha said evasively.

"None of that! He only shook hands with Flegontov and ^ you," Petka retorted.

"Well, I don't know," Sasha grunted.

"But I do! Give me the matches, Petka," I broke in.

Petka rummaged under his mattress and tossed me a match-box. Striking a match, I lighted the lamp. As it burnt up, I pulled out of my breast-pocket a folded slip of paper whose existence I had almost forgotten.

"Read this, Petka. Recognize the handwriting?" I said, handing him the paper.

"His! Of course it's his!" Petka exclaimed pointing at Sasha.

Peering at the paper that Petka kindly thrust under his nose, Sasha gave a groan.

"Gosh, what a memory!... Why didn't I burn it!" "Come on, out with your story! We're your pals, aren't we?" I said.

"What is there to tell? You know yourselves. . . You wouldn't believe me when I said I'd seen Pecheritsa. You laughed at me. But I thought to myself: 'Let them laugh, but my eyes can see all right.' And I reported it. Pity I didn't destroy the copy... There's no need for you to laugh!"

"Who's laughing? You are a funny bloke! It was the right thing to do!. . . Do you think we ought to go stargazing while they plant mines under us?" I said to Sasha.

That night I was the last to go to sleep. Listening to the steady breathing of my friends I thought over everything I had seen during the day until my head ached.

The quiet, sunny seaside town seemed a very different place to me now. A desperate, struggle between the new and the old was being waged behind its facade of blissful calm. The signs of this struggle came to light suddenly, like the anonymous letter from one of Makhno's men, or the hidden fuse that Tiktov had discovered today. Our hidden class enemies were still hoping to recover the power of

which the 'Revolution had deprived them for ever. In order to hinder our progress, they would sink to any depths.

"They are on the watch for every mistake, every blunder we make," I thought. "And they are still hoping to take advantage of our carelessness and good-nature. They are hoping that we shall collapse; if we live and prosper, sooner or later we shall rid the whole world of them... They realize that and will stoop to anything to prevent it. But if that's the way things are, don't be caught out, you of the Komsomol! Have ears like axe-blades, as Polevoi used to say. Wherever you are, wherever you go, always be on the alert."

WE ATTACK!

Although we made every effort to keep our plan of attack on Madame Rogale-Piontkovskaya's saloon a secret and held all our rehearsals behind locked doors, the rumour of it spread round the town. Even the old men began to ask how much longer it would be before we put on our Komsomol show.

Two Leningrad musical-hall artistes, an Arkady Ignatievich and his wife, had come to our town for a seaside holiday.

Arkady Ignatievich often brought his guitar down to the beach with him. When he grew tired of the silent occupation of sun-bathing, he would sit on the edge of the pier with his legs dangling above the water and start parodying the variety singers who made money out of their public with all sorts of rubbish.

He composed his own parodies on the widely-known ditties of those early days. What a trouncing "Klavochka," beloved of all kinds of profiteers and sugar-daddies, got from him, with her "fancy ways and bursting stays!" Arkady Ignatievich did not even spare a new romance that many undiscerning people were fond of: "He was a miner, a working man..." Arkady Ignatievich spotted something in this highly romantic ballad that many people had failed to notice—the banality of it. And banal it was—a miner, who for twenty years "in gloomy mine had toiled," falling in love and pining away like an idle, good-for-nothing of high society!

The visitor from Leningrad also brought with him a gleaming nickel-plated saxophone. In the mornings, when he practised the high notes on this strange and unheard-of instrument, our landlady's pensive-looking goat would start bleating plaintively and the chickens would scatter in all directions squawking as if a hawk were lurking overhead.

The Leningrad artistes took lodgings two doors away from us, near the brine baths in Primorskaya Street. We decided to ask them for help in our enterprise.

Arkady Ignatievich listened to my stumbling request and said weightily: "In other words, local manners are to be parodied? Very well, let us stir up this bog of petty-bourgeois sentiment!"

... Sometimes after that I peeped into the rehearsal room where the people from Leningrad and Tolya Golovatsky were selecting performers for the show. Arkady Ignatievich was usually leaning back in his chair with a guitar in his hands. He had a long, gaunt face with a jutting chin and clean-cut profile. His wife, the frail, graceful Ludmilla, in a blue sports frock with red pockets and an anchor on the front, would sit beside him, tapping her foot in time with the music. Golovatsky paced about behind them, stern and important-looking.

At one of the rehearsals I saw Osaulenko, the lad who had changed his name. He had dropped in at the club on Golovatsky's invitation and was rather worried, thinking that Tolya might want to have another chat with him [about his tattooing. When he learnt what was afoot, however, Misha, still

nicknamed "Edouarde," readily agreed to take part in our scheme. There was some hidden power in this tousle-headed lad, who was decorated from top to toe with mermaids, monkeys, and old-time frigates. He wanted to do everything at the show—dance, and juggle with ten-pound dumb-bells, and even sing, although "Edouarde's" voice was not exactly tuneful and often cracked on the high notes. When I glanced into the rehearsal room, Misha was dancing. He was hopping about wriggling every part of his body and kicking his legs wide. From time to time he would crouch down nearly touching the floor, then straighten up wagging his finger and shuffling his feet in a kind of scissors movement.

"What do you call that dance?" Golovatsky asked dubiously.

"Black Bottom!" Misha replied, panting for breath.

"Where did you learn that?" Tolya went on.

"A sailor was dancing it at the 'Little Nook.' The chaps who've been overseas say it's all the rage abroad nowadays."

"Do you know what 'black bottom' means?" Golovatsky asked.

"Well, it's the name of the thing . . . like 'waltz,' for instance."

"But what does the name actually mean? Do you know that?" And Tolya winked across at Arkady Ignatievich.

"Can't say I do..." Misha replied hesitantly.

"Well, you are a coon, aren't you! Just repeating other people's words like a parrot and not even troubling to find out what they mean! Are you really going to live your whole life in such a dull, lazy fashion? 'Black bottom,' in Russian, means 'chornoyedno,' the lower depths. Do you want to sink to the lower depths?"

Misha grinned flashing his silver teeth: "N-n-no, I don't!"

"I should think not either! Let those who think that dance fashionable do that, we'll find something a bit more cheerful. We've got to stride on towards the light, not sink to the lower depths!"

... When tickets for our youth show were distributed at the works, I took two extra tickets and sent them by post to Angelika Andrykhevich. Instead of writing my own address on the bottom of the envelope, I wrote: "From Lieutenant Glan." What gave me the idea, I don't know. I suppose I just did it out of devilment.

As I had expected, Angelika turned up at the show with Zuzya Trituzny. He sat in the third row, oozing with self-importance. Now and then he offered Angelika fruit drops out of a blue tin and whispered in her ear, grinning at his own jokes.

As I watched him paying his attentions to Angelika, I thought to myself: "Wait a bit, Zuzya, old chap! You can't imagine what a treat's in store for you!"

In spite of Zuzya's attempts to amuse her, Angelika was glum and gazed at the stage with a far-away look in her eyes. From time to time she pushed her hair back carelessly in a way that suggested she would be only too glad to be rid of her tiresome companion. She did not even smile, as many did, when Golovatsky began his introductory speech.

"People who don't realize that youth can get fun and pleasure out of doing something useful are downright stupid!" were Golovatsky's opening words. What the audience was to see he called "only our first attempt to show in its true light the depravity of the old life that still surrounds us, and to brand for ever the aping of things foreign."

"The decadent music of the dancing-saloon and night club," said Golovatsky, "gives rise to feelings of impotence and apathy, it lowers a man's working ability. And it is no accident that our enemies use it as a

weapon against us. But while branding what is rotten and alien to us," he went on, "we must learn from what is good, seek it out and cherish it, show everything that is genuinely of the people."

Golovatsky's words, which seemed to promise a very unusual spectacle, were listened to attentively by the large audience in the club hall. Besides the young people of the works, there were old workers and their wives among the audience. In the front row I saw Rudenko, the director, Flegontov, and Kazurkin, the secretary of the Town Party Committee.

I had heard Kazurkin speak once at a production meeting in the foundry, when he had called on us to combat spoilage and not to hold up the other shops. Turunda had told me that during the Civil War Kazurkin had been with Budyonny's cavalry in its campaign from the Azov steppes right across the Ukraine to Lvov. It was not for nothing that he wore on his white tunic the gleaming Order of the Red Banner, a very rare award in those days.

Kazurkin had helped us to prepare the show. After Golovatsky went to see him, everything was available— materials for the costumes, make-up men, balalaikas from the local watermen's club, Caucasian daggers that the militia had taken from captured Makhno bandits...

As soon as Golovatsky had finished speaking, I slipped over to the signal bell. From there I could watch not only what was happening on the stage, but also what took place in the hall. True, it was rather difficult for me to read the large notice bearing the title of the show which was revealed as the curtain went up:

CHARLESTONIADA or DOPE FOR DANDIES

The club decorators had reproduced the Rogale-Piontkovskaya dancing-saloon in detail. The tall papier mache columns placed along the sides of the stage were as greasy and finger-marked as they were in reality.

The title notice was raised out of sight and a pianist in a long dress-coat appeared on the stage—an exact replica of the pianist at Madame Rogale-Piontkovskaya's. In a squeaky affected voice he started praising the dances that the "mademoiselles" and "messieurs" could learn at the saloon for fifty kopeks an evening. Then he skipped over to the piano and the rattle of the Charleston filled the hall.

To the sound of the music, dancing couples began to appear from the wings.

First a titter of amusement skimmed across the hall like a puff of wind heralding a storm, then the titters swelled into loud laughter, and soon the audience was laughing fit to break every window in the club. The club artists had done a fine job! Working with the make-up men they had made the dancing couples into almost photographic images of the regulars at Madame's saloon.

Madeleine the plater jerked wildly on to the stage. She was wearing a sailor's suit with a broad collar and her fringe was so low that she seemed to have no forehead at all. Her friends were kicking their feet in such high heels that the audience could scarcely understand how they managed to move on them at all.

The girls' lips were vividly painted, not in "bows," however, as fashion demanded, but in huge ribbons! Nearly every dancer had a lurid blob under her nose, about the size of a hen's egg. And the coiffures the make-up men had given them! Fringes reaching to their plucked eyebrows, turbans of hair rising in spirals on top of their heads, birds' nests protruding from the back of their necks, spaniel curls in huge abundance.

One of the dancers, with bare legs, had pinned a green doll in her hair and cross-belted herself with two red fox furs tied at the back by their tails.

All the male dancers were Charlestoning in narrow, pipe-like trousers that seemed in danger of

splitting at any moment.

The audience quickly guessed who was represented by a man with greying hair parted in the middle and plastered flat with hair-cream. He was dressed in cream flannels and a grey jacket, and his face had been darkened with a thick layer of powder mixed with black grease. The grey-haired dancer's face positively glistened. On his arm dangled a carved walking-stick.

Without a doubt this was Mavrodiadi the lawyer. Half-Greek, half-Turk—no one knew how he had come to be in Tavria—Mavrodiadi patrolled the noisy Avenue at a certain hour every day. Many were the pairs of shoes he must have worn out on its pavements. In winter he would sit in an office somewhere coining money by giving legal advice to private traders on how to avoid paying their heavy taxes, or wangling inheritances for maiden aunts, and when spring came round, as soon as the first holiday-makers appeared, he would creep out on to the Avenue again. There he would get acquainted with young girls new to the town, read their palms and tell their fortunes with cards, go down to the beach with them, and lie about by the water's edge until dusk in his red fez with a black tassel. In the evening, after taking a turn along the Avenue, he would march off to the saloon swinging his walking-stick, kiss Madame's hand and dance until midnight.

But the most dangerous thing of all was that this old rake enjoyed the company of young people.

We hoped that Mavrodiadi's clientele would be considerably reduced after this evening, for the best way of exposing rakes and swindlers is to ridicule them in public.

At that moment, yet another belated pair of dancers popped out of the wings. The audience roared—a girl with her hair done in a bird's nest on the back of her head had walked in accompanied by Zuzya Trituzny!

He had been fitted out with checked trousers, but they reached only to his knees, like football shorts. He was wearing orange football boots, so that nobody could have any doubts as to who he was meant to be. Everything had been copied—Zuzya's favourite hair style with rubicund neck bare almost to his pate; the bow-tie adorning a stiff collar. And all his mannerisms were there too—the affectedly polite inclination of his head, the sentimental, doe-eyed staring into the eyes of his partner. Abandoning the 'Charleston from time to time, Pasha the carpenter, who was acting Trituzny, would pretend to be dribbling a football and bellow out all Zuzya's favourite foreign words and football terms—"shoot!", "s'il vous ptait!", "ach, charmant!", "aujourd'hui!", "off-sidei"...

Never in his life could Zuzya have felt so foolish as he did that evening. On the football field he would have been far more at ease. Even if he had missed a shot at an open goal, the blunder would have been quickly forgotten, for the spectators' attention would have turned to the other players. But here Zuzya twisted and squirmed in full view of the audience for rather a long time.

At first the real Trituzny, recognizing himself in his double, snorted and, shrugging his shoulders contemptuously, started talking to Angelika. But when Pasha the carpenter approached the footlights and called out Zuzya's favourite phrases, the footballer with the cannon-ball shot realized that he was being made fun of in a rather unpleasant way. He began to blush. His neck turned purple, his lips hardened in a straight line. He tried to sit still as if nothing had happened, but more and more of the audience fixed their eyes on him. At last the works director turned round in his direction and burst out laughing. Zuzya could stand it no longer. Twisting in his seat, he whispered something to his neighbour. Angelika smiled and shook her head. Zuzya grabbed her hand, obviously trying to lead her out of the hall. But with surprising calm Angelika took her hand away and again shook her head, continuing to watch the stage attentively.

Zuzya shrugged his shoulders offensively, and letting his seat bang, walked towards the exit. He strode down the long passage between the rows. His long pointed shoes squeaked and people's heads turned as he passed. Some winked, others whispered the hateful phrases after him, but the final blow came from Pasha himself. Seeing that the dandy whom he was imitating was retreating, Pasha stepped up

to the footlights with his girl friend in the tunic and shouted after Zuzya: "Au revoir!"

Then, sweeping Pasha aside, Madame Rogale-Piontkovskaya herself burst on to the stage. She ran up to the footlights, stirring up the dust with the hem of her old-fashioned dress sewn together out of overalls. Surveying the audience through an ivory lorgnette, Madame began a slow dance.

Who would have thought that this amazing likeness to the mistress of the dancing-class was not an actress but my friend Petka Maremukha!

Petka's hair had been transformed into grey ringlets and his plump cheeks had received a liberal coating of rouge. With paper clips Petka had fixed bits of cut-glass from a lamp shade to the lobes of his ears. The result was the living image of Madame! Only when Petka's husky bass began a monologue did we guess who it was.

Speaking to her dancing pupils and patting their shoulders,. Petka chattered away at about the speed of the Charleston.

"How are you getting on, my dears? Missing your Mummikins? Don't miss anyone, don't be sad. I'll teach you not to think. . . Why should you study and think of the future and read books? There's no need! It's terribly bad for you! Dance! Think with your feet! Like I'm doing, look at me. That's the way! That's the way! One-two! One-two-three! Hot it up, maestro!..."

Holding up his voluminous skirts, Petka began to perform amazing antics. It might have been a chechotka, it might have been a Ukrainian' gopak. But that did not matter.

He went over to the piano, and brushing the pianist aside, sat down at the instrument himself. And just as his fingers touched the keys, an invisible band picked up the melody.

Although Petka swayed from side to side and worked the pedals, everyone realized that he was not playing, and gradually forgot about him.

The dancers quickened their pace in time with the music. Each pair danced in their own fashion. One of Madeleine's heels broke. She came down with a crash, pulling her partner, a lanky fellow with a pointed moustache, down on top of her. In the scramble that followed the girl with the fox furs had the green doll torn out of her hair and an elegant dandy attempted surreptitiously to hide it in his pocket. Trituzny (alias Pasha) left his tunic girl and started dancing with another. His insulted partner rushed at her rival with clenched fists. Madame Rogale-Piontkovskaya dashed up to separate them. In the confusion the dancers gave way to all their petty feelings. From stiff, stuck-up dummies they turned into yelping, whining creatures, jostling and abusing one another. Someone trod on Mavrodiadi's foot. But still he went on dancing, brandishing his walking-stick at his offender.

One after another the girls in high heels began to look down at their feet. Painful grimaces appeared on their faces. While they danced they tried to stick their fingers in their heels to gain a little relief.

At this point an obliging pair of hands appeared from the wings and placed a sign-post and a little bush on the edge of the stage. The sign-post had many arms, on which were written: "To the Liski," "To Sobachaya Gully," "To Matrosskaya Settlement," "To Kobazovaya Hill". . . The dancers made a dash for the cherished "grove." And then the audience saw more or less what Golovatsky and I had seen, when we were sitting on the park bench under the acacias. The girls pulled off their tight shoes, hopped about barefoot round the sign-post, uttering cries of joy and relief, then ran off home.

A few of the most determined couples went on dancing.

At that moment the lighting-effects man twirled the spot light. Bluish moonlight flooded the stage, and when the lights returned to normal, the men all had grey beards. They had danced their lives away. The girls, too, had turned into old women. Their movements were tired and feeble. And Zuzya Trituzny was not only bearded, but to cap everything—bald.

MAKING IT UP

Several times the curtain had to be raised while the performers came out on the stage joining hands with Madame Rogale-Piontkovskaya in the middle.

But the real show did not begin until after this introductory parody.

As usual, the "Blue Blouse Show," which was very popular in those days, performed a few turns.

After that, the milling shop's string orchestra, which was almost entirely composed of young people, performed the Russian folk song *The Moon Is Shining* and Chaikovsky's *Sentimental Waltz*.

Then the old workers' choir appeared on the stage. To my great surprise I saw Gladyshev among them. I had been accustomed to seeing him in a rough shirt with short sleeves, and now I could scarcely recognize him. He was wearing a long black dress-coat over a finely-embroidered blue high-necked shirt. Gladyshev turned out to be the leading bass.

The choir sang *In Bondage Harsh*, then *O'er the Wild Steppes of Trans-Baikal* and *The Red Banner*. The old men were loudly applauded and asked for an encore. After whispering together for a moment, they sang *By the Don a Young Cossack Roams*, then *We Are Smiths and Young in Heart*. But anyone could see that the songs of exile were the favourites of the old workers, for when they were encored again, they sang *Ding-Dong, Hark the Fetters Ring*. While they sang, chains could be heard clanking backstage. And you could just imagine the long road across Russia and a party of revolutionaries tramping through frost and snow to Siberia...

To vary the programme, Golovatsky and the club-manager had invited some singers from the watermen's club. There were only three of them. To show that they were connected with the sea, they came on to the stage in oilskins and sou'westers. One of them I recognized as Kolya, the big sailor from the Life-Saving Society who had offered Angelika a life-buoy when she and I took a boat out together. The singers cleared their throats and to the tune of a bayan sang the gay *Taganrog Chastushki*. Now and then they stamped their big fishermen's boots that came up to their thighs. I did not know that Azov Sea fishermen were so good at composing comic songs.

Then they sang some comic songs about the sea which can still be heard along the Azov and Black-Sea coasts. Composed in the early years after the Revolution, these songs made fun of the interventionists who helped the Whiteguards to fight against the young Soviet Republic. To the twanging of a pair of balalaikas, the singers ridiculed the black Baron Wrangel, the shaggy-headed Makhno, and the British naval commanders who had taken the Russian grand princes out of the Crimea in their destroyers and been rewarded for their services with the family jewels.

For the first time I heard the sailor's song *Spreads the Sea Wide* performed by Arkady Ignatievich.

Then the solo dancers came on the stage. There turned out to be a lot of them. No one would have thought that so much talent was hidden among the workers of our plant. A fellow would do a dance sometimes at a wedding, or a christening, or at some other family gathering, he might dance for his friends at "The Little Nook," but no one had ever thought of inviting such people to perform at the club, of giving him the chance to display his aft toy the whole works. Golovatsky was a real brick to have thought of it!

First came fitter Khimenko in a lambskin cap and Cherkess cloak. He made several low bows, then began walking round and round the stage. Gradually the circles grew smaller and smaller, his feet clad in soft chuvyaki moved faster and faster across the boards, and finally he burst into a whirling highland dance, flourishing a dagger.

Stupak, a swarthy refugee from Bessarabia, gave a performance of a dance that was popular in his

country—the zhok. Later this dance became widely known in the Soviet Union, but in those days it was a curiosity.

Misha Osaulenko from the transport department leapt out on to the stage dressed as a sailor. His face was beaming with pleasure.

Osaulenko did all sorts of tricks, now pretending to climb a tall mast, now bending down and hauling on a rope. Then he gave an imitation of a sailor battling with a fierce storm.

I knew that Misha had never been farther out to sea than Belorechenskaya 'Kosa and wondered how such a land-lubber could play the part of a sailor so well.

Arkady Ignatievich's wife, Ludmilla, did a dance too. She was wearing her blue sports frock with red pockets. It was a tap-dance and her little feet moved with wonderful speed and precision. At a sign from Ludmilla the orchestra stopped playing and for a good two minutes she kept up the tune with the tapping of her feet.

At first Golovatsky had not wanted to admit our friend the cabman to the stage on the grounds that he worked for himself, privately, instead of at the plant. But we had persuaded Tolya to change his mind and even shown him Volodya's partisan card. No one had cause to regret Volodya's appearance on the stage. While the band played a lively tune he juggled beautifully with nickel-plated balls, and even did a handstand on two bottles, supporting all his weight with his one sound hand. And after these tricks he danced as well as Ludmilla. His sailor's hornpipe won loud applause. But when Volodya danced the famous Azov chebachok, and then completed his performance with the comic dance tip-top, his success overshadowed that of all the dancers who had performed before him.

The large entrance-hall into which the audience poured after the concert had been hung with caricatures of the regulars at the Rogale-Piontkovskaya dancing-saloon. Above them placards in large letters stretched the full length of the walls: "Down with Charlestons and Foxtrots!" "We will drive bourgeois culture out of our life for ever!" "Give our youth sensible, cheerful amusement!"

At the same time the youth section told its guests what amateur-talent groups they could join. One of the groups was a solo folk dance group. There was also a notice saying that in a few days a class would be started for those who wanted to learn such dances as the waltz, the cracovienne, the mazurka, the vengerka, and the polka.

The instructors at the workers' evening institute had taken advantage of the show to exhibit a notice laying out the conditions of admission to the institute. "Every Worker Can Become an Engineer!" was the heading at the top of the notice.

While the people strolled about the hall, I went outside for a breath of fresh air. At the entrance I met Lika.

"Good evening, Lieutenant," she said, offering me her hand. "Thank you for the invitation."

"Good evening," I pretended not to notice her sarcasm. "Did you like the show?"

"It was very unusual. And funny. There's never been anything like that at the club before... Are you going home?" She looked at me from under her thick eye-lashes and, as if afraid that I might say "no" added quickly: "Do see me home, please. My companion took offence and ran away.""

"I know."

"And now you're gloating? It was rather cruel. Do you think he really enjoyed going to Genoa Street? Everyone goes there because it's so dull at the club. . . Are you going to see me home?"

I looked at Angelika. Her big, rather slanting eyes were so full of appeal that I could not refuse. I went with her.

"What do you mean 'dull,' Lika? That's silly. You talk as if your Zuzya were a little baby who needed a nurse to play with him. Do you think he gets through one book a year?"

"He doesn't," said Lika and laughed. "You're quite right about that."

"There you are!" I said heatedly. "A chap who never bothers to think and keeps his brains in his feet will feel bored everywhere."

"But tell me, Vasil, what made you spare me in this Charlestoniada of yours? All the time I was expecting to see myself among that dreadful lot."

"We wanted ... we thought..." I muttered, trying to avoid the direct answer. And then I blurted out: "It was mainly the young people from the works we wanted to influence."

"What you really mean is that you consider me past any 'education,' don't you?" And Lika looked at me so intently that I felt embarrassed.

"I didn't say that," I muttered, and thought to myself: "There she goes again, trying to make it a personal issue."

We were walking along the deserted street that led to the sea, and I felt annoyed because this was not at all how I'd planned to spend the evening. Had I been polite, I should have tried to amuse the girl walking at my side, but I kept a stubborn silence.

My thoughts were far from Angelika. Still fresh in my mind was the excitement of the days when all of us, a gay team of young workers, helped by the older men from the works, had been making reapers for Nikita Kolomeyets and clearing the space in the foundry for the new machines.

And what a lot of work lay ahead of us! Flegontov had related how Komsomol members in Leningrad were trying to increase productivity. We wanted to make use of their experience. We'll put up a Lost Minutes screen in our foundry and mark on it every single minute lost through inefficiency, then Kolya Zakabluk will count up how much these minutes cost us... We'll plant out trees and flower-beds in the grounds... There's so much to be done!

As if sensing my thoughts Angelika asked quietly: "Am I bothering you?" : "No, why?"

"Why are you trying to avoid me?" "Our outlook on life is too different," I said frankly. "I quite agree with you, but you must admit it's wrong to regard a person only from one angle." "What do you mean?"

"Well, take for instance the way you look at me. 'Here's a silly, whimsical girl who leads an easy life under her father's wing!'— that's what you're thinking, isn't it?" There was a tone of sadness in Angelika's voice.

"But how can I think differently, Lika, if you yourself. . ."

But she did not let me finish and said passionately: "You like to condemn everything irrevocably, Vasil! You won't try to understand a person who may have a worm eating at his soul. You mustn't "be like that! Thai time on the boat it was enough for me to say, 'I'm waiting for a lucky chance,' and you immediately reproached me. You didn't even try to understand what I really meant. I know very well that you consider me one of those helpless creatures whose sole desire is to get married. But I wish you'd understand that a future like that won't satisfy me. I don't want to be like those fat merchants' wives who only find pleasure in 'stuffing themselves with food, dolling themselves up, and going out with their husbands on Sundays to show off and gossip about other people..."

Lika's frank words knocked me right off my balance.

"What do you want then?" I asked helplessly.

She shook her head and murmured thoughtfully: "If only you knew how I hate this suffocating provincial life!"

"You're wrong again, Lika," I retorted. "It's your own fault if you choose your friends from the dregs. There are good people in the town as well. You shouldn't lump everybody together like that. Take our works, for example. Think how many decent, clever, interesting people there are there. What's 'provincial' about them?"

We sat down on the sea wall, not far from the spot where I had first seen Angelika.

Far out in the bay lay a foreign ship, her portholes gleaming. It was being loaded with grain from big shalandas that had come out from the shore. We could hear the noise of the winches mingled with the sound of the foreign speech and the tramp of sailors' feet on the brightly lit deck.

Lika was the first to speak.

"Look here, Vasil, I know there are quite a lot of interesting people in town who would give me strength and an aim in life if I'd let them. But at the moment I'm talking to you about my own surroundings..." Her voice trembled. "May I be frank with you?"

"You can try, I like frank people."

"And you promise not to spread a lot of talk about what I say?" She looked at me rather strangely and I realized that she wanted to tell me a secret.

"Why should I do that?"

"I trust you, Vasil... You see, Father and Mother think that this isn't going to last ... I mean Soviet power and all that..."

"Well, you do surprise me, Lika! Do you think I didn't know that without you telling me. One talk with your father was enough."

"You realized that, did you? Well, there it is. He was very frank with you. At least, more so than with others..."

You see, my parents have convinced themselves that this just can't last, that they've got to sit and wait for it to come to an end, like a shower of rain. And all the people they know think the same. 'Not much longer now. . .' that's what they all say, those gossiping women who come round to see my mother. First they placed their hopes on Wrangel, then on General Kutepov. Once there was a rumour that Petlura had joined forces with Makhno, and that a whole army would be landing in Tavria to save Russia from the Bolsheviks. Mother even started counting up her tsarist government bonds..."

This was too much for me and I said grimly: "That'll never happen, they'll go bald waiting for it, like your Zuzya in our show. They'll just waste their lives and Soviet power will still be here, strong as ever."

"Let's get one thing settled right away, Vasil: Zuzya's no more 'mine' than he is 'yours.' " She sounded hurt. "Let me finish what I was saying..." And she looked at me fixedly.

"Go on then," I said.

"Well, these women spend days on end at our house, gossiping about one thing and another, about the weddings that were held there, how some person called Edwards got married to a Rogalikha, how many glasses the guests broke when they got drunk. Their whole life's a memory! I hear the same thing day in, day out, and I think to myself: 'What has all this got to do with me? They've nothing left except their memories, but I want to live! And I could have a real future.' "

Moved by the sincerity in Lika's tone, I asked more gently: "Why did you argue with me before?"

"Oh, that was just my stupidity! Just to be argumentative."

"That never gets you far," I said.

"Do you think I don't realize that?" she said in the same sincere tone. "Of course I do! That's why I repented and sent you that note. That's why I've come to you now.

It's the first time I've ever admitted myself wrong to anybody, obstinate creature that I am..."

"My opinion, Lika, has always been that it is better to tell a person the truth straight out than to coddle him and pander to all his whims."

"And you're quite right. But now tell me this, are you really convinced that I'm hopeless."

I could see she had been leading up to that question for a long time. She asked it with a slight laugh, then looked at me with her deep, attentive eyes.

"No one thinks that, but it seems to me.. ."

"Don't beat about the bush! Say what you think," Angelika challenged me.

I said it: "Won't you be sorry to leave your comfortable home with your carpets and fairies? You've got rather used to them, haven't you?"

She replied: "Believe me, if I see so much as a gleam of light ahead, I'll find a way out. I'll break with it all for ever."

"Are you quite sure of that?" I asked quickly.

"Absolutely! How utterly fed up with it I am, if you only knew! I used to be a tomboy and now I'm supposed to be a young lady. My mother nearly asked Father Pimen up to the house to teach me the law of God. But what law of God can there be, when millions of people are living by new laws!"

I found it hard to conceal my joy. "So you don't believe in religion?" I said with relief.

She laughed gaily and smacked my arm.

"You are funny sometimes, Vasil. And naive too. Surely you don't think I'm such a hopeless fool? Of course I don't believe in it!"

"Why do you have an icon-lamp in your room then?"

Still smiling, she answered simply: "While I go on living in my parents' house, I can't have rows every day."

"Give them up! Say to hell with all those icon-lamps and gossiping women and fairies. Go and study. And it would be better if you went to another town. Listen, Angelika, I'll tell you something. There used to be a girl at our factory school called Galya Kushnir. She studied with us for two years and never got behind in anything, though she did find it pretty hard sometimes to work the cutters on a lathe. When we finished at school, she was sent away like the rest of us. And she had a mother and father, and no one would have said anything against her if she had wanted to stay behind. But Galya did the right thing. 'Aren't I as good as the boys?' she said. Our Galya had guts. She went off with the rest of us. To Odessa. I've just had a letter from her. She's fixed up all right and very glad about it. She earns her own wages and she's not dependent on anyone..."

Lika looked at me questioningly.

"You think I ought to throw everything up? I'd be frightened."

"Why should you be? We had chaps at school who were complete orphans, whose parents had been killed by Petlura. But do you think those chaps came to any harm? They made the grade fine! They're craftsmen now! Of course it was hard to live on a grant of eighteen rubles a month, that's a fact. We had to make do with lentils and hominy for weeks on end. But we got through it. And why can't you live independently, without your father and mother? I honestly advise you to chuck this rotten life and go and

study."

She sat without speaking, tapping her heels on the sea wall. Her gaze rested on the lighthouse that was sweeping the sea with its silvery beam. There was something very pleasant in her thoughtful face at that moment.

"Yes, Vasil, I've made up my mind!" she said turning sharply towards me. "It's a promise. But there's one thing that I'm not going to chuck up—that's music. I want to go and study at the conservatoire. I've got an aunt in Leningrad, I'll go and live with her. She invited me once when she came here."

"Fine!" I said, very moved. "You seem to be a good sort after all!"

"Perhaps.. . I don't know. . ." she answered simply.

I helped her to jump down from the wall and we walked quickly towards the club. The faint sound of music floated to us along the shore.

"Tell me frankly," Lika said falling into step with me. "Were you very offended with my father because of his sarcastic tone?"

"I was more offended about something else."

"Why, have you seen him since?"

"Plenty of times. We had a real tussle over one thing. He wanted to scrap my idea..."

"Daddy did?" Lika exclaimed, as if her father could do no wrong.

"Yes, your father! I had an idea ... it was about heating the moulding slabs automatically... My suggestion was put forward at a foundry production meeting and supported by both the Party organization and the older workers. Then they sent it to your father, as the chief engineer. And do you know what he wrote on my suggestion?"

"He doesn't tell me much about his affairs," Lika said.

"He could just have written 'no' and left it at that. I'd have tried somewhere else. But he put in a crack with it: This young spark is hot enough without heating.' What do you think of that?"

"I recognize Daddy's style," said Lika. "But don't let that worry you. He's got all sorts of cranky ideas. He even eats apples with maggots in them and says: I'll eat this maggot while I've got the chance, or one day it'll eat me.' "

"But he was just making fun of me!"

"I can tell you this quite frankly, my father's a great egoist and very fond of himself. Very often he enjoys seeing other people's failures. The worse, the better!" that's what he says. Would you like me to try and persuade him to change his decision?" Lika suggested eagerly, and I saw sympathy in her eyes.

"No, don't bother. I'll manage without that."

A band was playing loudly when we walked into the brightly lit entrance-hall of the metal-workers' club. I recognized the old waltz A Forest Tale.

The first thing that struck me when we got near the dancers was the old men waltzing round the hall. They had not gone home, nor had they dropped in at "The Little Nook," as they usually did. Their visit to the youth of the works seemed to have restored their own youth. Even the close-cropped Gladyshev was waltzing gaily, if not very gracefully, with his wife. And the young people were-breaking all records. There were far more of them here than at Madame's saloon, even on the most popular evenings. A glance at the faces of young workers was enough to tell me that they all felt themselves far more at ease than in the Genoa Street saloon.

Luka Turunda in a blue and white sailor's suit whirled past with his wife, who was wearing an amber

necklace. He winked at me, and then, noticing the engineer's daughter with me, opened his eyes wide in surprise. He knew about the offensive remark Andrykhevich had made on my plan. Luka's comment had been that the engineer was a "devil of the old regime," no wonder he could not understand why I was talking so peaceably to Angelika.

The band struck up a polka. I was about to invite Lika to dance, when I started as if I had been pricked with a pin. On the other side of the hall, not far from Petka, stood Golovatsky, arms folded and watching us intently. Apparently Tolya had not forgotten his joking advice to me "not to get tied up with the neighbours." Now, seeing us together, he was lost in speculation.

"Who cares!" I thought. "I'll tell you all about it afterwards, Tolya." And taking Lika's elbow, I led her on to the floor.

Before we had finished the polka, however, Grisha Kanuk appeared at the entrance. His sweat-stained face showed that he had only just finished work in the foundry.

I wondered why Grisha had not gone home to change, instead of coming to the club in his dirty working clothes. The moment he caught sight of me, he started beckoning me out of the hall.

"Somebody wants to see me, Lika, excuse me," I said and after finding her a seat went straight over to Grisha.

"Golovatsky, you and all the active members of the Komsomol are wanted at the works at once," Kanuk whispered panting. He must have run all the way from the works.

"But there's no one there..." I began bewilderedly.

Luka Turunda touched my elbow as he ran past.

"Hurry, Mandzhura," he said. "It's a meeting with Rudenko."

By the time we got to the director's office, the room was full of Communists and Komsomol secretaries from the works. By the light of the two green-shaded lamps I recognized Kazurkin, Secretary of the Town Party Committee, our Flegontov, and the OGPU chief whom I had seen when the mine was discovered under the foundations of the blast-furnace.

"We won't wait any longer," Rudenko said looking round when we had all sat down. "Tonight, comrades, making use of the fact that tomorrow would be a day-off, our enemies intended blowing up all the vital sections of our plant. Their plan is in our hands! There it is." Rudenko pointed to a crumpled paper lying before him. "I consider it my duty to thank our comrades, the security men, for discovering this document in time."

Ivan Fyodorovich turned to the security man and gripped his hand warmly. The latter shook his head, as much as to say that neither he nor his assistants deserved any gratitude.

The announcement shocked us, and in the tense silence that followed the director's voice sounded even more impressive.

"The first warning we got of this kind of thing came to us, as you know, during the Komsomol members' voluntary work on Sunday. The despicable hireling of the bourgeoisie who had been entrusted with the task of detonating the mine lost his nerve and failed to carry out this act of sabotage. Then the lads in the foundry spoilt everything for him. Fortunately he has now been arrested, and at the first interrogation turned out to be very talkative. Similar mines planted by the old owner and his assistants in 1919 have been discovered in the stoke-hole and near the furnaces..."

"Who was it, Ivan Fyodorovich?" several voices asked at once.

"The worst worker and the worst drunkard at the plant —Entuta," the director said amid tense silence.

"So that was the man who tried to frighten us with his anonymous letter after we had showed him up!" the thought flashed through my mind.

After a pause the director went on: "Our comrade here will tell you the rest." And again he looked at the benevolent little man in the grey suit, beckoning him to take the chair.

All night, until daybreak, we stood watch in the shops, guarding the works until every fresh mine that had been discovered was rendered harmless.

The fact that the good-for-nothing drunkard Kashket had turned out to be a foreign agent soon lost its novelty. "Wasn't it obvious from the start that the foreign capitalists would recruit their agents among such degraded types!" I reflected as I paced up and down between the cooling furnaces. "People like him who've never had any feeling for their country will do any filthy work to get more money or another bottle of vodka..."

Madame Rogale-Piontkovskaya, about whom the security man had spoken in a restrained but very impressive manner that evening, had known about Kashket's past for a long time, ever since she had agreed to become a resident foreign agent in our town, concealing her secret activities against the Soviet state under the mask of being a dancing-mistress.

The first messenger to arrive on a cargo ship from London met her in secret. Besides handing her a letter from her husband, the sugar-refinery owner who had escaped to England, the messenger presented her with a certain "business document." This document was a list of people who were "still loyal," compiled by Nestor Makhno himself, who was in those days living in Paris and, so it was rumoured, even lectured on his bandit activities at the Staff Academy. With the help of the Entente forces he was hoping to return on his machine-gun carts to the shores of the Azov Sea.

This list included the name of the anarchist Entuta, nicknamed Kashket. Madame had got her plump jewelled fingers on him back in the days when she still owned the "Little Nook" restaurant. Kashket came to his "mama" to cadge drinks, which thanks to Madame's "kind heart" he rarely paid for. And when at her own dancing-saloon in Genoa Street Madame demanded Kashket's first signature on a receipt for a hundred rubles received from the British Intelligence Service, Kashket did not hesitate.

For a whole year after that Rogale-Piontkovskaya and her agents were left to themselves. Connections with London broke down. For a long time no ship flying a British flag entered a Soviet port. Madame's bosses decided to make contact with her by other means.

Had he succeeded in blowing up security headquarters in our town in Podolia, Kozyr-Zyrka was to have visited the Donbas and the Azov coast and handed fresh instructions to other resident secret agents, Rogale-Piontkovskaya among them. Apparently that was the Kozyr-Zyrka's second task, which had baffled Vukovich for so long.

Many things that at first sight seemed trivial had helped Vukovich in his work. One of them was the chance suggestion I had made in my letter to Nikita that the keeper of the dancing-saloon might be a relation of the old countess whom we had seen in the far-off days of our childhood in Zarechye.

Vukovich established a link between Pecheritsa's appearance in the town by the sea and the fact that the engineer "killed at Uman" was passing the time very pleasantly abroad and had even got his name in that strangely named index of celebrities Who's Who.

When Polevoi wounded Kozyr-Zyrka in the loft of security headquarters, Kozyr-Zyrka took refuge in Pecheritsa's flat and entrusted Pecheritsa with this second task.

It was quite possible that had not Vukovich discovered in time where Kozyr-Zyrka was hiding, Pecheritsa might have made a "business trip" to Kharkov, taking in the Azov coast as well. But things

turned out differently. Pecheritsa had to flee and at the same time carry out the task that he had been landed with by Kozyr-Zyrka.

When Vukovich had laid hands on both Pecheritsa and Kozyr-Zyrka, he was able to tie up all the threads.

Nikita's warning at the station had had a purpose. Any gossip about Rogale-Piontkovskaya might have hindered the exposure of the plot.

Madame's nerve had begun to fail her of late. As soon as she learnt that Kashket had been arrested, she hastily packed her family jewels and with the coming of dusk decided to go "for a boat trip."

While Petka Maremukha was acting her on the stage, Madame was making her way round the breakwater towards the foreign ship, which was finishing loading in the bay.

The town security chief did not tell us that evening that another boat with Soviet security men in it had followed Madame's boat, and that it was they who had prevented Madame from climbing aboard up a conveniently lowered rope ladder... He merely explained what a danger "had threatened the works, and mentioned in passing that "Madame was detained in time."

I must admit that many of us were still very puzzled during the night we spent guarding the works. I can write of it all now in such detail because the following days of discussion and thought about this mysterious affair helped us to understand what had happened.

ACROSS THE AZOV WAVES

Such a gale blew up in the evening that the yellow waves raged fiercely even in the harbour. The low-funnelled paddle steamer moored there ready for sailing rose and fell on the pounding seas.

The name of the ship was written in a semi-circle over one of the paddle-wheels:

FELIX DZERZHINSKY

Not long ago when calling at our port on its way to Kerch, this steamer had been the first to bring us the sad news of the death of the man whose name it now bore. Even before, it entered the harbour from the bay, we heard the melancholy note of its siren. Its flag, edged with mourning, flew at half mast.

Before the newspapers arrived from Mariupol, we had learnt all the details from the ship's wireless operator. We were told that Felix Dzerzhinsky had died of heart failure in Moscow, after his speech to the Central Committee, where with his usual vehemence he had exposed those despised enemies of the people—the Trotskyites. The news of Comrade Dzerzhinsky's death overwhelmed us... Not long ago, just before I set out for this town, I had heard Dzerzhinsky ring up the chief of our frontier-guard detachment. I still remembered with what excitement Nikita had said to me: "Do you know who that was on the phone? The first security man of the Revolution!"

The next day, at lunch-time, on Flegontov's instructions, I read out the Central Committee's announcement on the death of Dzerzhinsky to the workers of the foundry.

"The sudden death from heart failure of Comrade Dzerzhinsky, terror of the bourgeoisie, true knight of the proletariat, noble fighter for the communist revolution, tireless builder of our industry, ceaseless toiler and fearless soldier of great battles...

"His weak heart, strained beyond endurance, at last refused to function and death claimed him instantly. Death in battle..."

I got that far and stopped. Choking sobs rose in my throat. With an effort I checked myself from

bursting into tears before the whole foundry, before the sad, stern faces of my mates. Afterwards, when in a quiet, muffled voice I had finished reading the announcement, folded the newspaper and was walking back to my machine, Flegontov came up behind me and placed his heavy graphite-smeared worker's hand on my shoulder.

"Hard to read, wasn't it, Vasil?" he said quietly. "I know how you feel. What a great loss! You understand, old chap, how all of us—young and old, Communists and non-Communists—must rally round the Party to make up for our loss. We must press on no matter what the bourgeoisie plot against us. . ."

And now, as I stood on the quay looking at that name I loved so well, I still could not get used to the idea that Dzerzhinsky was no longer with us...

The Felix Dzerzhinsky was on her way to Rostov-on-Don from the Crimea and we were to make the stormy voyage on her to Mariupol, where a district Komsomol conference was being held.

Not being used to rough weather, we felt rather scared of putting out to sea on a night like this...

A tall sailor appeared on the upper deck and shouted: "Hi, Selezen! Get the boats ready!"

The sailor's voice had a familiar ring but I could not see his face.

Tolya Golovatsky, who was standing near me, said: "It's going to be tough, chaps! The barometer's falling."

"The wind seemed a bit quieter to me..."

"Don't you believe it, Mandzhura. Take a look at the weather tower. There were only eight balls hanging up there, this afternoon. Now there are nine."

"Yes, if the captain has ordered them to get the lifeboats ready, the sea must be really rough," Kolotilov, the freckled secretary of the customs Komsomol group, agreed with Golovatsky.

We mounted the creaking gangway and the officer of the watch checked our tickets. Golovatsky suggested going up on deck.

"The cabins are stuffy, you'll feel rotten down there," he said, glancing at Kolotilov who was already looking rather pale.

Having stacked our things near the stern life-boat, we went to the rail. We could make out distant signal lights somewhere near Kobazovaya Hill.

Soon the gangway was taken in. The stevedores cast off the bow line. There was a hiss of steam, the engine burst into life and the ship moved slowly away from the granite harbour wall. The stern line slipped off the mooring post and was thrown on to the deck. Its paddles churning swiftly, the ship manoeuvred out into the harbour. The rudder chain clanked. Slowly the grey hump-backed warehouses dwindled in the distance.

Striving to make his voice heard above the roar of the wind, Golovatsky shouted: "Shall we have a song, chaps?"

And taking our answer for granted, he struck up in a deep pleasant voice:

*Forward, young sailors and Communists all,
Arise to build the new age! . .*

Looking back affectionately at our little harbour, we picked up the refrain in ringing voices that were

at once borne away on the wind.

Dotted with twinkling yellow lights our town slipped past along the sandy Azov shore. As I sang my favourite song, I tried to pick out the lighted window of our little house. Sasha and Petka had volunteered to see me off, but I had refused. It had not been certain that the ship would leave on time, and they had to work the next day.

I also wanted to spot Lika's ivy-covered window in the house next door. Now I was sure that she would carry out her promise. At dinner today, Maria Trofimovna, our landlady, had unwittingly confirmed my conviction.

"There's been a terrible crying to-do next door," she had said. "The lady's sobbing her heart out and the engineer's black as thunder. Their daughter wants to go to Leningrad and they've been trying to talk her out of it. Her mother says she'll give her anything. 'You don't need that . . . what d'ye call it ... "conservatoire," ' she says. 'We'll teach you at home. I'll hire two teachers and the choir-master from the Liski church will come round too. You'll die of consumption in Leningrad. But their daughter won't give in. Dead set on the idea, she is. She's a stubborn little miss."

Maria Trofimovna was a reliable source of information about next door and as I listened to her I felt glad Lika was going away, yet sorry that she would go without my being there to see her off. I had wanted to talk to her frankly about everything and say good-bye to her and wish her success in her new life of independence.

Children of workers and sailors, we march

With hearts that are strong and loyal.

No fear have we of tempest or storm,

Nor of long hard days of toll. . .

sang the boys.

The ship was pitching hard. Now it would plunge down from a billowing, foam-capped wave, so that your heart rose to your throat and your legs suddenly felt as if they had been filled with air, now it would rear up on a mountain of angry water and-the paddles would lash the long broken ridges of the waves. The rising wind howled at us from the pitch blackness of the open sea which was broken only by the flashing beam of the beacon on the headland.

One by one, the shore lights disappeared and the light of 'the beacon showed us that we were leaving the bay.

But we sang in spite of the storm:

Let the storm winds rage and the tempest blow,

The tide of the workers is high.

Forward, young sailors and Communists all,

Forward to conquer or die!...

"Your singing's fine, but do you mind clearing your stuff away from the boats. We might have to lower them if things get worse." Again I heard that familiar voice, this time at my elbow.

I turned. For an instant the beam from the lighthouse showed up the face of a young navigating officer and I recognized my old friend.

"Weasel!"

I gave such a shout that all our delegates turned round.

The sailor fell back a pace and his quick gypsy eyes widened. Obviously it was a long time since anyone had called him by his childhood nickname. For a moment he rubbed his forehead in a puzzled fashion, as if trying to remember something, and only when the beam from the lighthouse swept again over the heaving deck did he run towards me with outstretched arms.

"Mandzhura! . . . Where did you spring from?" . . . Something caught in Yuzik's throat. He glanced round helplessly, then mastering his excitement, he spoke more quietly.

"Fancy meeting you here? Well, I'm darned! Vasya! . . ." I could hardly believe it myself. On a ship's deck, in a storm like this! But he it was, my old friend Weasel!

Half an hour later, the Felix Dzerzhinsky rounded the harbour bar and set course across the open sea for Mariupol. Yuzik was relieved from his watch and invited me to the officers' saloon. Golovatsky and several of the other delegates went with me.

With great difficulty, clutching hand-rails and banging our elbows on the bulkheads, we made our way to the saloon.

"I've found a friend, Nikolai Ivanovich!" Yuzik said joyfully to an old waiter in a white apron. "Haven't seen each other for years! . . . How long is it since we met, Vasil?"

"Over five years."

Weasel put his arm round my shoulders and said reproachfully: "You couldn't even write to me! You're a fine pal!"

"But we did write to you! Petka and I, both of us! You answered once, then dried up. We we're a bit sore about it, thought your naval training had made you stuck-up."

"Me stuck-up!" Yuzik laughed. "I kept on writing and the letters came back to me all the time."

"What address did you write to, I wonder?"

"To 37, Zarechye."

"So that's what it was!" I said with relief. "We had moved to a flat in the Party School."

"Now I understand," Weasel said, also with a kind of relief in his voice, and again his face brightened with joy.

The ship was pitching and rolling. Any moment, it seemed, the huge waves would smash one of the glass portholes and pour into the saloon.

"You've grown up," Weasel said eyeing me closely. "Not the same Vasya that ransacked the birds' nests, eh! Remember how we found that hawk's nest on the cliff near the cemetery?"

"You bet I do!" I said smiling. "We found a yellow egg there with red spots on it."

"Yes, a very rare egg. And Dad chucked it away with all the rest of my collection." There was a genuine note of regret in Weasel's voice.

"That was when you took two icons out of their frames and put eggs in them instead, wasn't it?"

"That's right," he exclaimed. "What a memory you've got!"

"You made us so jealous with your gilded boxes. None of us had anything like them."

"No, they didn't," Weasel agreed and his face broke into a broad smile.

The waiter came over to us, wiping his tray and balancing with the agility of a tight-rope walker.

"What's this, friends meeting at an empty table!" he said with a smile. "What can I do for you?"

Golovatsky winked at me, then cleared his throat pompously and asked: "Any lobsters?"

"What do you mean, sir!" The waiter stared at Golovatsky as if he had dropped from the moon.

It cost us a great effort not to burst out laughing.

Weasel also looked at Tolya in surprise. How was he to know that it was a favourite joke of our secretary's to amuse us with the knowledge of aristocratic manners that he had gleaned from old novels?

"What else has this unsavoury establishment to offer then?" Golovatsky drawled in his best aristocratic manner.

The old waiter brightened up visibly.

"Olives, if you wish, sir! Caviare, fresh or salted! Very nice with fresh cucumbers! Butter. Smoked mullet. Mackerel. Sturgeon. Herrings and mustard sauce. Cold veal and horse-radish..."

"Listen, old chap," Tolya said, suddenly changing his tone, "give us a good plateful of olives and about ten pounds of bread. We've got terrific appetites. Is your bread fresh?"

"Baked in Kerch," said the waiter.

"That's fine!" Golovatsky said. "Nice and crusty?"

"Very crusty, sir!"

"Let's go on then. Butter. Cucumbers. Mackerel, or mullet, if it's good. And tea with lemon in it, of course..."

"Nothing to drink?"

"How do you mean, 'nothing'?" Tolya exclaimed. "What about the tea?"

"Nothing stimulating?" The waiter eyed our secretary meaningfully.

"Don't go in for such things," Tolya snapped. "We'll have some mineral water though, if you've got it."

"The passengers drank it all this afternoon!" And the waiter spread his arms despairingly.

"Just a sec', chaps!" Yuzik jumped to his feet and walked quickly to the companion way with as much ease as if the ship had not been rolling at all.

My old friend had been nimble enough as a boy. He had Ukrainian, Polish, and perhaps even gypsy blood in his veins. There wasn't a cranny in the Old Fortress that he hadn't climbed into, and that was why we had called him Weasel. But at sea Yuzik's movements had become amazingly sure and supple. He swayed effortlessly with the roll of the ship. Just the man to dance a hornpipe at one of our shows!

"Fine chap, isn't he?" I said to Tolya.

"Looks as if he's a smart sailor," Tolya agreed. There was a clatter from the companion way as Weasel ran down it carrying two bottles of mineral water. A third was peeping out of his side pocket.

"From my own cellar!" he said heaving a deep breath. And to the waiter: "Nikolai Ivanovich, bring us some glasses, please."

"Coming right away, Yosif Vikentievich!" the waiter called.

It was the first time anyone had addressed my old friend by his patronymic in my presence. I didn't

even know that Weasel was a "Vikentievich!"

Well, our childhood days were over now. Gone were those wonderful times when we used to run about the grassy banks of the Smotrich hoping to find Turkish coins in the mud.

"What's your job on this ship, Yuzik?" I asked.

"I'm fourth mate," Yuzik replied. "Before I came to the Azov Sea, I'd sailed on quite a few other craft—the Toiler of the Sea, the Feodosiya, and the Pestel. I went through my practical training on the Transbalt. Even went abroad on her."

"How did you manage it all in the time!" I said, envying Weasel a little. "We only finished at the factory-training school this year."

"I'm older than you," Yuzik replied with dignity. "You and Maremukha were still at the people's school when I was manning sails off Batumi."

A heavy wave struck the ship. Tea-spoons scattered over the buffet-counter. A few olives slipped off their plate and rolled over the floor.

"Oho!" said Yuzik, and listened for a moment. "That took us head on. The wind's changing. It'll be blowing right from the East soon."

"Will an east wind be better or worse than the one we've got now, Yuzik?" I asked as off-handedly as I could, but there must have been a note of alarm in my voice.

Yuzik eyed me keenly.

"Afraid of getting drowned, Vasil? Don't worry! This ship can weather any storm. A change of wind can't hurt her."

With the head wind howling louder and louder outside it was pleasant to sit among a circle of new friends listening to your old friend yarn about his voyage, remembering other old friends and the battle with those boy-scout snobs...

Then Yuzik took me over the ship, showed me the stokehold, the chart house, the crew's quarters, and finally led me to his cabin. He made his bed on a little couch, and since I was his guest, offered me the narrow bunk with a high side to prevent one from falling out.

The cabin was cosy and well looked after. Above the table hung a bookshelf with a number of books on navigation and steering. I thumbed through one of the books whose margins were covered with notes in Yuzik's hand. It was hard to believe that my old friend had already learnt something so incomprehensible to me as this science of navigating a ship.

A kind of map moulded in lead hung over the couch. There was something familiar about it. On glancing at it more closely I recognized the outlines of our town, copied from a map of the sixteenth century.

Putting his arm round my shoulder, Yuzik said: "I bought it in Odessa. I thought I'd seen it somewhere before, so I took a closer look. And blow me if it wasn't our town!"

"The Old Fortress is shown on it too! Look!" I exclaimed, examining the fortress with its walls and bastions that barred the entrance to the town.

"It's very fine work. Everything's shown, even the smallest tower," Weasel assented. "And the river Smotrich. See how it makes a loop round the town that's knotted by the fortress?"

"And here's the fortress bridge! Gosh the banks are steep here! Remember, Yuzik, how we carried flowers across that bridge to Sergushin's grave and Maremukha was frightened all the time that we'd be stopped by Petlura men?"

"As if I could ever forget it!" Weasel answered, and I realized that the evening we had spent tending the grave of the murdered Bolshevik had made a deep mark on him too. "But where do you three live?"

"In Primorskaya Street. Almost next door to the harbour."

"Gosh, what a pity!..." Yuzik murmured. "If I'd known, I should always have dropped in to see you when we were in port. . ."

When at last we had exchanged all our news, it seemed almost as if we had never parted. We realized that not only had we grown up and become men, but that our young country had grown up too.

I learnt that while he was still on the Black Sea Yuzik had been admitted to the ranks of the Communist Party. The oldest of our trio, he had become a Communist at the time of Lenin's death in 1924. Lying on the little plush coach, his feet propped against the wall of the next cabin, Yuzik asked: "Is yours an important invention, Vasil? Or just a little thing?"

So I had to tell him about that too.

... I had found people who were willing to take up my proposal. Andrykhevich's remark about my "fantastic ideas" had scared off Fedorko, the foreman, but it had not affected our director. After all, someone at head office had even called Ivan Fyodorovich a "reckless character" because he was planning to raise the roof of the foundry and complete the blast-furnace without stopping production.

The director had called me up and said: "Well done, Mandzhura! Go on plugging away at things, as you are now. It's a good thing to work hard and fulfil your target, but use your brains as well. Let your imagination go!... You won't object if we put an engineer with you on the job for a week or so, will you? Not to make him a co-designer, of course, but to get your idea into proper technical shape." Naturally I agreed willingly.

Soon a placard appeared over the works gate: "Young Workers! Follow the example of the young foundry men. Vasily Mandzhura's rationalization proposal will save the plant 660 working hours per day. His proposal to get rid of the heaters and introduce a central heating system will also protect workers from catching cold and other illnesses!"

This placard, so I heard later, had been drawn on Golovatsky's advice by the same artists from the metalworkers' club who had caricatured the frequenters of Rogale-Piontkovskaya's dancing-saloon.

Rudenko thanked me publicly on behalf of the whole works and awarded me a prize of 500 rubles.

We were no longer in danger of having to make do with "tropical furniture." That night, while I chatted with Yuzik, my friends were sleeping at home on proper comfortable beds, with spring mattresses. And there was a bed in the attic for me, too, covered with a green woolly blanket.

With this unexpected windfall we subscribed to Home University for Workers, as well as to several magazines and a daily newspaper.

Following Golovatsky's advice I bought myself an excellent brown tweed suit and a good pair of shoes at the co-operative store.

And even then I still had ninety-five rubles left over. This I put away in the savings bank. I told none of my friends what I needed the savings for. That was a secret. I had decided to save the money in case Angelika needed it when she was in Leningrad. Whether asked for my help or not, I considered it my duty to assist her at the start of her independent life.

"Well, now I understand why you've been made a delegate to the conference!" Yuzik said, when I had told my story. "And what are your plans for the future?"

"Everything's decided, Yuzik!" I answered proudly. "All three of us are going to study at the workers' university. Work in the day-time, study in the evening. The winter will pass in no time... Where will you

be this winter, when the sea freezes?"

"On the Black Sea. Odessa-Sukhumi line. Or perhaps I'll get a job on an ice-breaker, helping the Azov Sea fishermen."

"Ice-breakers are little ships, aren't they?"

"Yes, not very big. Sailors laugh at them. 'Old tin cans!' they call them. But I don't mind. While you're young you can learn navigation even on coasting vessels. And soon, you know, we'll be having ocean-going ships here. That'll mean long voyages. We may even go up to the Arctic. Look up there," Yuzik nodded at the bookshelf, "I'm studying the charts of the Barents and Karsk seas in my spare time."

"So you like your life too, Yuzik?"

"Like it? That's hardly the word! As soon as I see a compass dial in front of me, I feel on top of the world. The waves slap against the bows, the engine- chugs down below, and I keep watch knowing that the lives of our passengers are in my hands. They sleep peacefully in their cabins, confident that I know my job, and it's my duty to steer the ship on a safe course!... And there are enough seas to last my lifetime. And stars to reckon by. . . Now let's get to sleep, Vasil! I'm due on watch at four." And Yuzik put out the light.

The waves kept heaving the ship up on their great crests, then letting her down into yawning troughs. Creaking and groaning she reared and fell over the oncoming seas, beating them into submission with her paddles. The engine thudded steadily below. It was powerful enough, as Yuzik had explained to me, to light our town and all the surrounding villages as well.

As the ship steamed on its course, I listened to the steady beat of the engine and thought how fine it was that we, chaps, had not been mistaken about our path in life. My father had said something good about that in his last letter to me from Cherkassy. He told me how he had once had to dissuade my aunt from the absurd idea of taking me with her to Cherkassy. "But I thought, Vasil," my father wrote, "that it would be better to let you stay at the factory-training school. Now your hands know a good trade, and although you had a lot of difficulty learning it, it's better than being tied to your aunt's apron strings. I am sure that now you are on a true, independent path of your own, you won't let anyone budge you from it. I also approve of your decision to go and study at the workers' evening university. Good lad! Soviet power is giving you, young people, things that we of the older generation didn't even dare dream about. And it would be wrong if you didn't take advantage of what we've gained by the Revolution. Learn and study, son, don't waste your life on trifles, remember that communist society can only be built by educated people with firm characters and a clear idea of what they are striving for."

Mariupol came up at dawn, wonderfully white and clean in the rays of the morning sun.

When I opened my eyes sleepily and saw the pink light of dawn filtering through the porthole, I jumped out of my bunk. Yuzik's couch was empty and the bedding gone. When he went on watch, Yuzik had left the cabin silently, without even waking me.

I washed my face quickly over the basin and feeling fresher slipped out of the cabin. Swabs were swishing up and down the deck and water was hissing out of hoses. Stalwart sailors, barefoot and with their trousers rolled up to their knees, were washing down the forecastle head. The deck gleamed wetly under my feet. Its clean boards smelt fresh. A bright pennant fluttered at the mast.

The white horses riding from the east were flushed pink in the windy dawn. But what were they to compare with the mountainous foam-capped waves of yesterday! Weasel had been right; the wind blowing from Rostov had not only tamed the storm, it had brought down a lot of fresh water from the Don. The sea had become even yellower and in some places looked like the sandy shores of Tavria.

Mariupol spread out before us. The chimneys of a big plant were smoking in the background. Flame-flecked clouds of smoke belched from the black, dumpy blast-furnaces. "That must be Sartana!" I

thought.

The railway station of Sartana outside the town was the place where the Ilyich plants were situated. Before the Revolution they had belonged to the Providence Company. Probably most of the delegates to the conference would be from these plants, for they were the biggest on the Azov coast. They had more Komsomol members in one of their shops than we had in the whole works.

And as soon as I thought of the conference, I began to feel worried. What should I say in my speech?

"Mind you speak, Mandzhura!" Golovatsky had advised me when he handed me my mandate the day before I left. "Tell them about your working experience. But don't get nervous. Think out what you are going' to say on the journey."

I had thought of everything but that!. . .

"Awake already, Vasil? Come up here!" Yuzik called out.

He was standing on the captain's bridge in a tunic with little gold chevrons on the sleeves and a peaked cap. A pair of binoculars dangled on his chest.

"How did you sleep? All right?"

"It was all right for me, but you didn't have much."

"We mustn't get into the habit. Our job's like that— sailors always sleep with one eye open."

"It's a lovely day," I said. "You were right with your forecast."

"But it's clouding up again in the East," Weasel answered, nodding towards a cloud that had crept up over the horizon. "There'll be another gale by the evening. But by that time we shall be safe up the Don. . . What are we steering, Vanya?"

"North-East by North!" the helmsman shouted.

Everything was new to me in this long, passage-like room panelled with fumed oak: the telegraph with its arrows and instructions written on the white dial, "Full Speed Ahead," "Stop," "Full Speed Astern"; the polished speaking tubes leading down to the engine-room; the sensitive compass floating like a huge eye-ball under its glass cover.

Yuzik showed me his domain. Now and then he would go over to the wheel and check the course shown on the compass. He kept glancing from side to side where buoys were bobbing on the yellow waves, as if wishing us "good morning." They showed us the way into the harbour, and then, bowing politely, dropped away astern.

I listened to my friend, looked through the spotlessly clean windows of the bridge at the town rising up out of the sea, and thought over my speech. What if I begin with the story of three friends who came here, to the Azov Sea, from distant Podolia, and became active members of the Komsomol?

I'll tell the delegates how ever since we were children we have hated the Petlura men and other scoundrels who try to prevent the Soviet Ukraine growing and developing. . . I'll tell them about Petka Marmukha, about Weasel, about the vow we made under the green bastion of the Old Fortress... Perhaps I'll say something about how we studied and what our aim is in life?... After all, our three small lives are very typical; the whole working youth of the Ukraine has been through the kind of thing we experienced. Then I must swear to continue being loyal to the behests of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. And say that we have the Party and the Komsomol to thank for everything we have achieved. I'll make a solemn promise to the delegates that we three, friends, will go on fighting for every young chap at our works, to win him over from the old world and teach him to serve the people and those fine, noble ideas that the Communist Party has pointed out to us.

The dazzling sun rose higher and higher, gilding the tops of the waves. The white town, with the strong

salty east wind blowing round it, spread out before me in the faint mist of the July morning.

EPILOGUE

TWENTY YEARS AFTER

Twenty years have passed since that sunny morning when the Felix Dzerzhinsky steamed into the port of Mariupol.

The sailors darted about round the windlass preparing to drop anchor, the passengers came out of their cabins, and we, gathering on the upper deck, sang loudly: *O'erthrown the night. The sun is rising* ...

What a fine song that is! It has engraved itself on my memory for ever.

Even now, twenty years later, as I sit in this little room reading some old newspapers and listening to the rain lashing on the windows, that song is still ringing in my ears.

I can see wet chestnut-trees through the window. Their big, broad leaves are drooping dejectedly. The rain has knocked all the blossom out of them and exposed their little prickly pods.

I arrived here last night from Leningrad. When I went to bed, I had made up my mind to go into town and visit the Old Fortress first thing in the morning.

My hostess, Elena Lukyanovna, is a nerve specialist. She lost all her family in Leningrad, during the first winter of the blockade, and after demobilization came to work in my home district. We got talking on the train. The mere fact that we had both lived for ten years in Leningrad at once drew me towards this thoughtful, prematurely grey-haired woman in a green army tunic with the marks of shoulder-straps that had only recently been discarded. My father had suffered the same fate as her parents. Not long before the war he had come to Leningrad from Cherkassy to work at the Printing-House. He died in my arms of starvation, in December 1941.

"I'm afraid you won't find anywhere to live," said Elena Lukyanovna towards the end of the journey. "The town's just a heap of ruins... If you like, you can stay with me." Since I had no longer any relatives in the town, I gladly accepted her invitation.

And overnight it started raining. The rain is still pelting down now, although it is four o'clock in the afternoon and high time I went out to see the town I have not seen for over twenty years.

When Elena Lukyanovna went out to the hospital, I asked her if she could let me have something to read.

"All my books are about medicine," she said. "My library hasn't arrived yet... But there are some books and magazines up in the attic. They've been there ever since the occupation. Have a look through them. Perhaps they need burning."

And now for two hours I have been turning the gaudy pages of *Die Woche*, *Signal*, and other Nazi magazines. Hitler's frenzied face glares at me from every page—meeting Mussolini, receiving the Spanish ambassador, admiring Warsaw destroyed by German bombs. Petrified ranks of Hitlerite troops line the deserted squares, banners with the sign of the swastika wave over the stricken city. . . But what is this? . .

I pull a heavy bundle of newspapers out of the bottom of the basket. Its title, the *Podolian*, sends my thoughts racing back to the days of my childhood. The Russian newspaper that was published in our provincial town in the time of the tsar used to be called the *Podolian*. But why is it in Ukrainian?

I look for the date: 1942. As I turn the pages of this Nazi Podolian, I seem to see the invaders' chronicle of the war turned inside out. I see Hitlerites driving through the deserted streets of Kiev, I read the screaming head-lines about the inevitable fall of Leningrad and Moscow, and other Nazi announcements. One reads them now with the laughing contempt that one feels after a bad dream. And suddenly a familiar name leaps to my eye—"Grigorenko." I read hastily: "On the 12th of this month, by order of the District Commissar Baron von Reindel, a Ukrainian Committee was set up in the town. It is composed of the following persons: Evgen Vikul, Tser (interpreter), Yuri Ksezhonok (chairman of the committee), Kost Grigorenko. The committee will supervise collection of taxes and help the German authorities to levy contingents. The committee is an organ of the District Commissar and acts under the Commissar's orders."

Grigorenko! The Petlura boy scout, the doctor's son, serving Petlura and the Germans! So this was where he had turned up again!

"I see you've found an interesting pastime?" Elena Lukyanovna says entering the room.

"I've just traced some old acquaintances, Elena Lukyanovna, and there are one or two whom I wish I had handed over to justice when I was young."

"Yes, I met some old acquaintances today, too," Elena Lukyanovna replied, missing the point of my remark. "One of them was a boy from Siberia, Dima. He was wounded in the fighting' when our town was liberated. He's a very difficult case. For over a year now he hasn't been able to say a single word. We've got to decide whether to operate on him or not," she went on, seeming to think aloud as she took off the hospital gown she has been wearing under her great-coat. "Today I called up Lvov and asked them to send a consultant. There's an old friend of mine working there, a professor of neuropathology from Leningrad. . ."

"I called up a professor in Lvov!" I repeated. "It sounds so simple nowadays, Elena Lukyanovna. But if only you knew how much that phrase means to a person like me, who was born here! It sums up the immense changes that have taken place in the Ukraine. Twenty years ago Lvov was very far away from us, like Paris, London, or Madrid. Now it will take your professor only two hours to fly here."

"Yes, not more than that," Elena Lukyanovna agreed.

It is the second morning of my stay. I open my eyes. Good! Blue sky is shining through the window and the dark green leaves of the chestnut-trees, still dripping with last night's rain, are looking up to greet the sun.

I dress quickly and dash off to the town.

Weeds and flowers are sprouting everywhere from the stone walls at the side of the road. Rattling the old tin cans that have been tied round their necks instead of bells, the goats are having a fine time in this profusion of green. That is familiar enough, I remember that from the days when I was a boy.

But I can't understand why the road leading down to the New Bridge is overgrown with weeds. Surely people still drive over these cobble-stones! This used to be the main road through town to the Dniester.

A sorry picture confronts me as I reach the cliffs. All that remains of the beautiful New Bridge are the tall stone piles at the foot of which the Smotrich gleams in the sunlight. They are spanned by a narrow wooden strip whose planks creak and sag underfoot.

No one crosses the bridge now. Nearly all the buildings of the old town perched on its high cliff above the river are in ruins.

With great difficulty I guess from the shattered walls what part of the town I am in. This must be Post Street. That's where we used to buy scraps of sausage on the days we received our factory-school grants...

And over there, that's where the Venice Restaurant used to be, where Monus Guzarchik held that rowdy party after his grandmother died...

Where is he now, our rowdy Monus, "non-Party" man, builder of electric locomotives? The last letter "I had from him was in 1940, when I was in Leningrad. Guzarchik wrote me that he was chief foreman at the Kharkov Locomotive Works, and sent me a booklet about his method of converting plants to assembly line production. . .

Many of the cottages round the huge Stephen Bathori Tower look as if they had been struck by a hurricane.

The tower was" built here on the orders of a Hungarian king, the usurper of the Polish throne who was seeking to conquer the Ukrainian lands of Podolia. And in 1943, (I heard this from Elena Lukyanovna), the Hitlerites shot more than seven thousand of the finest people in Hungary, who had refused to help the German invaders. The Gestapo officials had been afraid to slaughter them in Budapest, so they sent them to their death in this little Ukrainian town. Not far away I noticed the ruins of the building where Shipulinsky's cafe with its broad windows used, to stand. I remembered how I had invited Galya Kushnir to that tempting cafe. There we sat, Galya and I, chatting and sipping our coffee like grown-ups, when Father on his way home from the print-shop glanced in and saw us. The trouble I had then!...

And where is Galya Kushnir now? She and I were separated by the war. I received my last letter from her in the spring of 1941, from Odessa. She wrote that her thesis for a degree in history had been successful, and that she was continuing her studies on the history of the Black Sea Straits. Had she managed to get out of Odessa in time? And would I ever meet her again, my first love, a working girl who had become a historian?

As of old, a few women were selling flowers by the low wall at the entrance to the fortress bridge—red, white, and yellow peonies, bunches of wild daisies, bright-red poppies...

A stocky, broad-shouldered lieutenant-colonel standing with his back to me was buying flowers. He took the women's bunches in armfuls and carried them to the seat of a light army truck. From the number of petrol tins in the back of the truck I guessed that the lieutenant-colonel and his driver had come from afar and were just as much chance visitors to this town as I.

What does he need all these flowers for, I wondered, then looking up and noticing the Old Fortress towering above me, I at once forgot the soldiers.

The fortress still stood there on its steep cliffs guarding the entrance to the town from east, south, and west, just as it had for centuries. Its thick stone walls built in ancient times, strong and indestructible as the grey weather beaten cliffs on which it stood, had often saved the inhabitants of the town from enemies.

As before the square and round watch-towers with their narrow embrasures and pointed moss-grown roofs rose above the zigzagging walls of the first ring of fortifications. Green tree-tops could be seen peeping over the fortress walls. Big bushes of honeysuckle and pink heather grew on the edge of the cliffs, their roots firmly embedded in the stonework that Turkish cannon-balls had never shaken.

By the wide-open gates hung a red notice-board that seemed to have been put up only recently: Historical Reservation and Museum.

Deeply moved and excited I walked under the arch of the fortress gates.

"Our fine, dear, old lady!" I thought, surveying the fortress. "Neither time, nor the Turks, and not even Hitler's bombs could destroy you. As you have stood for centuries, an invincible stronghold on the south-west border of Podolia, you still stand, bringing joy to our people and striking terror into the hearts of the enemies that have been driven for ever from our ancient Ukrainian soil!"

As soon as I entered the grassy yard, however, I realized that even our old lady had suffered pretty badly in the ' recent battles.

The watch-towers, whose loop-holes looked out on all sides, were riddled with shell-holes. The roof of the Ruzhanka Tower had disappeared altogether. The Commandant Tower was a heap of rubble. But the fortress, evidently a museum now, had been restored. Its new window-frames and fresh plaster work told me that the building had been raised from the ruins only recently.

. The noise of a car made me turn round. The same army truck with its array of petrol cans came into view. Apparently the lieutenant-colonel who was so fond of flowers had decided to look over the museum.

I saw the truck pull up near the guard-house, and turning away followed a narrow path that led to the green ' bastion behind the Black Tower.

But in vain I sought for the grey marble obelisk that had been erected' to Timofei Sergushin, the Bolshevik who had been shot by the Petlura bandits a quarter of a century ago.

Enemies and traitors in their hatred of Soviet power had tried to destroy the memory of that fine man, the first Communist to enter our little cottage in Zarechye.

But in the thick grass under the Black Tower I found a piece of marble bearing the last word of the inscription that had been written over the grave.

The base of the obelisk—a simple square of stone—was still there, so was the grave-mound. The hump of earth under which lay Sergushin's remains was thickly carpeted with periwinkle.

I stopped by the mound and my memory carried me back to those far-off days when Soviet power had only just been established in Podolia.

I remembered the evening after Sergushin had been shot, when Weasel and I and Petka Maremukha had come to this spot. In accordance with Cossack custom, Weasel had spread a red flag over the grave-mound and we had sprinkled fragrant lilac branches over it. Over the murdered man's grave we had sworn that evening to stand up for one another, like true friends, and to take vengeance on the enemies of the Soviet Ukraine for the murder of one of its finest sons.

I stood there lost in thought, my head bowed over the unkempt grave, and the words of Sergushin's favourite song came clearly to my mind:

*This song that I sing would soar up like a lark
But a heart full of sorrow has given it birth.
Like a bird in a cage it rings out in the dark,
Borne down by the weight of the earth...*

*And soon, very soon, never sung to the end,
In the twilight of autumn this song will fall still,
And replacing myself in the mine, a new friend
Will finish my song, yes he will!*

Lost in thought, I did not notice that someone else had come up to the grave until crimson peonies scattered into the thick grass.

The stocky, broad-shouldered lieutenant-colonel was sprinkling flowers over Sergushin's grave, paying no attention to me at all. I glanced at him closely, and suddenly, under the stubbly beard that fringed his sunburnt face, I recognized the familiar features of Petka Maremukha... "Comrade..." I began excitedly.

Turning at the sound of my voice, the lieutenant-colonel at first looked at me very sternly, almost with annoyance, then his face changed suddenly and he shouted: "Vasil!... Good old friend!..."

Half an hour later we were sitting on the dewy grass under Karmeluk's Tower, deep in conversation.

Maremukha's driver, a red-cheeked tank corporal, spread out a cape-tent on the grass and piled it with good things. "But look here, Vasil," Petka interrupted me, "why didn't you answer my letters when you were in Leningrad? I bombarded you with them. I even wrote to the staff department of that aircraft factory you were working at. Where's your engineer Vasily Mandzhura, I said. And they just wrote back once that you'd been sent off on a job, and nothing more. Where did you get to?"

"They sent me to the Bolshevik Works..." At that moment we heard an old man's voice behind us: "Comrades! Aren't you ashamed of yourselves! This is a historical reservation, and you scatter your rubbish about here!"

We swung round at the sound of the voice, as if we had been schoolboys caught here by the care-taker in the old days.

On a mound close by stood a grey-haired old man in an old-fashioned canvas blouse with a black bow-tie and gold pince-nez. He had appeared silently, like a vision from one of our childhood dreams, and the mere fact of his appearance had made us a good quarter of a century younger.

Were it not for the old man's familiar pince-nez, we might not have recognized him as Valerian Dmitrievich Lazarev. But he, it was—our favourite history master and the first head-master of the Taras Shevchenko People's School. Leaping to his feet, Petka brought up his hand in salute. "Our deepest apologies, Valerian Dmitrievich! We were so excited we forgot where we were. This rubbish shall be removed at once."

"I beg your pardon! But how do you come to know my name?" Lazarev responded, obviously a little confused as he stepped down from the mound.

How could he have recognized in this grizzled officer with medal ribbons on his chest that short little chap who had once run barefooted after a lot of other little boys with a lantern, all of them longing to go down the underground passage!

Lazarev had seen thousands of pupils like him in his many years as a schoolmaster—could he remember them all!

"How do you know my name?" Lazarev repeated, planting himself in front of Maremukha.

Then I intervened: "

"When shall we be going down the underground passage with you again, Comrade Lazarev?"

"Just a moment!..., What's all this about?" The old man took off his pince-nez and wiped them with his handkerchief. "You aren't from the regional education committee, are you, comrade?"

"I'm from the Taras Shevchenko People's School, Valerian Dmitrievich. And so is the lieutenant-colonel. We both left in 1923. You haven't forgotten us, have you?"

And with these words I warmly embraced our old head-in-aster.

We had talked of many things. . . "You want to know about everything that happened here?" Lazarev asked, rising from the cape-tent. "Let's make it a demonstration lesson then. I think the last one was about the rebel, Ustim Karmeluk, wasn't it?"

"Quite correct, Valerian Dmitrievich!" Petka rapped out in military style. "Remember how we found those fetters of one of Karmeluk's or Gonta's friends..."

"Those fetters are still in the museum today," Lazarev said. "Now I'm going to tell you about some other heroes of the struggle against the oppressors of the Ukrainian people.... But just tell me this to start with, Colonel," Lazarev glanced slyly over his pince-nez at Maremukha, "do you know what the general military situation was in this area in the early months of last year?"

"More or less," Maremukha replied evasively. "In that case you'll be able to help me out if I go wrong."

And he began his story.

"When Soviet troops captured Volochisk in March 1944, the Nazis lost the direct railway to the West. Then all their forces that were left in the Podolia bag made a dash in this direction. Thus the Soviet forces had to cut off the Hitlerites way of retreat through our town into Bukovina and the Western Ukraine. At the beginning of March the Soviet artillery ripped open the German defences at Shepetovka. The tank forces of Generals Lelushenko, Rybalko, and Katukov poured through the gap in an offensive that was heading South, towards the Dniester... What are you smiling at, Maremukha? Have I said something wrong?"

"I'm smiling because I had something to do with the offensive you mentioned," Petka said quietly. "I served with Lelushenko."

"Oh, you did, did you, you rascal!" Lazarev exclaimed. "I suppose it was you who put up such a fight here? Come on, out with it!"

"No, not here—over there!" Maremukha pointed to the North-West. "We took Skalat."

"Well, listen to me then," Lazarev went on reassured. "After you had captured Skalat, a tank brigade of the Urals volunteer corps was sent here..."

"Yes, they were Guards, weren't they?" Maremukha added. "The tanks of that corps were the first to break through into Lvov, and it was them who saved Prague from destruction."

"You're probably right," Lazarev agreed. "When our forces struck in the direction of Ternopol, this brigade was given the task of paralysing the enemy's rear by cutting through Gusyatin, Zherdye, Orinin, and capturing our town... And then what happened, my lads..." At this point Lazarev's voice trembled and he spoke more quietly, pausing now and then to take deep breaths. "On the twenty-fifth of March 1944, the inhabitants of Podzamche, for the first time after two and a half years of Nazi occupation, saw Soviet tanks! They wept for joy, they rubbed their eyes and thought it was a dream. . . I wept too, my boys, like a child, when one of those tanks stopped in the village where I was hiding from the Hitlerites. A tank man jumped down and asked for a drink. He was covered with dust and grease.. . I kissed him as if he had been my own son..."

Lazarev started coughing and turned his thin face away, as if to look at the fortress gates, but we realized that he wished to hide the tears that had welled into his tired, old eyes.

". . . At the head of the brigade," Lazarev went on after a moment's pause, "in that lightning swoop from Dolzhok to Podzamche was a heavy tank called 'Suvorov.' The banner of the brigade flew from its turret. Its driver was Junior Lieutenant Kopeikin, later to become a Hero of the Soviet Union. And the commander of the forward detachment was Senior Lieutenant Ivan Stetsuk, an orphan brought up in a children's home in the town of Dnepropetrovsk. His detachment was given the task of taking the Old Fortress district at all costs and blocking the road out of town.

"After capturing Podzamche, Stetsuk and his men crossed the fortress bridge and stormed the town.

"The attack was so sudden that the Germans came running out of the houses in their underwear. Later they recovered their wits and started counter-attacking the town on all sides.

"Stetsuk was given the task of defending the Dolzhok and Podzamche approaches to the town. By that time he had only four tanks and sixty infantrymen left. The whole day he and his men held the road-fork near the tinning factory, while the Nazi Panthers and Tigers assailed him from all directions. Although the Soviet soldiers showed exceptional bravery, they were pressed back to the bridge. Just at that time, in the last days of March, General Katukov had forced the Dniester in the region of Zaleshchik and reached the northern approaches of Chernovitsy. When, the Hitlerites got word of this, they started attacking our town even more fiercely, to force a way of escape for themselves into Bukovina.

"The roads were jammed with troops and the Germans were making their way across country straight to the Dniester and the Zbruch. But the spring thaw held them up and forced them to abandon their heavy equipment and even their wounded. Over fifteen Hitlerite divisions tried to dislodge our brigade. Of course, the tank men could have retreated and let the enemy through, for what is one brigade against fifteen divisions!... Are you smiling again, Colonel? Have I made a mistake?"

"Not one, Valerian Dmitrievich! You're quite right about everything!" Maremukha assured our old teacher gently.

". . . The tank men decided to hold their defences here because they knew that if the Hitlerites recaptured our town the Soviet Army's offensive operations would be held up for several weeks..." Lazarev continued. "And now kindly follow me."

On coming out of the fortress gates, Lazarev halted.

The cobbled road led steeply down to the bridge.

Lazarev tapped his stick on the big round cobbles and said triumphantly:

"This is where Stetsuk stationed his last tank commanded by Junior Lieutenant Kopeikin. You see where the stones have been torn up. That's where the tank swung round and faced the bridge. 'Do what you like, Kopeikin, but don't let a single Hitlerite reach the gates!' Stetsuk said to his second-in-command..."

Lazarev pointed his stick towards the bridge.

The entrance to the underground passage poked up out of the ground near the wooden bridge like a ship's hatchway. According to legend this passage led into Bessarabia, to another fortress like ours—the Khotin Fortress.

"In the underground passage," said Valerian Dmitrievich, "Stetsuk stored a supply of fire-bottles. His plan was simple. While the enemy tanks tried to force the bridge, our men stationed in the passage would throw fire-bottles at them. . . Captain Shulga mined the bridge under enemy fire and was killed in doing so. He was born in Krasnodon. . ."

"Perhaps he knew Oleg Koshevoi and his friends of the Young Guard underground organization?" I said, remembering that one of the Young Guards had been called Shulga.

". "Yes, he may have been a relative of Matvei Shulga. Anything is possible," Lazarev agreed. "I must check that.

In any case, Stetsuk told me that Captain Shulga was a very brave officer..."

... I have seen many museums in my lifetime and listened to a good many museum guides, but none of them ever moved me so much as Valerian Dmitrievich. We had known every stone of the Old Fortress since childhood, every moss-covered wall; we had tapped and explored every tower in search of hidden

treasure. Now the new history of this Podolian stronghold, as described by Lazarev, came to life in every detail. It was the history of how Soviet people had defended our native land. As we listened to Lazarev, we seemed to see the sturdy broad-shouldered commander of the fortress, Ivan Stetsuk.

Towards evening Stetsuk comes into the fortress. His face under the leather helmet of a tank soldier is grimed with dust and oil. He keeps his wounded hand behind his back. Blood is oozing from it. He shows no sign of the intense pain he is suffering, it would be wrong for the garrison if it knew their commander was wounded.

Before him in the snow-damp yard surrounded by watch-towers his men have formed up—Siberians, men from Moscow, from Odessa. They are the remnants of the advanced detachment that staggered the Hitlerite rear on the line of the Zbruch and forced its way through the dark forests round the Dniester to the rocky banks of the Smotrich.

Senior Lieutenant Stetsuk regards his men and officers in silence. They scan his face hopefully. Tired and gaunt, they are wondering what reassurance their commander will bring them, cut off as they are from their own forces.

Stetsuk says simply:

"We are going to hold this fortress to the last shot. Understand? If necessary, we shall die for our great cause, but we shall not let the enemy through!"

... Before Stetsuk stood the last man of the garrison to receive his orders—Dima Bezverkhy.

Many of the men did not even know the surname of this bright blue-eyed lad, and simply called him Dima.

Dima had been with the brigade since its formation and had fought his way to the foot-hills of the Carpathians. Before the war he had planned to enter a mining institute when he left school. "The only thing I want to be is a mining engineer," he often said to Stetsuk. "I want to look for coal under the earth."

That March evening Dima shifted from one foot to the other in the cold and looked up at his commander with clear boyish eyes—he was only just fourteen.

"What shall I do with you, Dima?" said Stetsuk. "Perhaps you'll stay with me?" But seeing the disappointment in the boy's eyes, he said: "You know what? See that tower over there, on the ledge? Take a machine-gun and get inside it."

It was the round tower behind the museum. Dima picked up the light machine-gun and dashed across the yard.

A few minutes later Stetsuk noticed Dima's cheerful face in the top window of the tower. The boy had taken off his helmet and was waving it to attract the attention of his commander. Stetsuk pointed out the direction Dima was to cover—enemy tanks might approach the bridge from Orinin. Dima realized the meaning of his commander's gestures and took his machine-gun over to the loophole on the opposite side. ... Thus the young Siberian lad became defender of the Archbishop Tower.

... Artillery rumbled dully near the station. Up the line the village of Shatava was in flames. As darkness fell the glow spread across the horizon. But the old town still stood firm on its impregnable cliffs surrounded by the river Smotrich.

"... And in the morning it started!" Lazarev continued his story. "Not only the Tigers and Panthers advancing from the road-fork kept the fortress under fire. It was bombarded by batteries in concealed positions that were out of range of Stetsuk's guns. The gun crews of the batteries mounted on Otter Bank could see the fortress perfectly. Several times the German tanks attempted to break through to the bridge, but every time the garrison barred their advance... And it was very difficult to fight mobile forces

from towers. Quite often Stetsuk stationed his men on the walls and earthworks round the fortress and fought the enemy from there. The next day the Hitlerites tried to get into the town from the Karvasar side, but again they were thrown back..."

"By a counter-attack?" Petka asked. "That's right," said Lazarev. "Part of the garrison left the fortress and mowed them down before they could reach that little bridge."

Valerian Dmitrievich led us to the ruins of a tower near the guard-house.

"You see the remains of this tower?" he said. "Still haven't forgotten its name?... This is the Commandant Tower. On the fourth day of the siege a direct hit on the tower killed soldier Krasnuk... That day the artillery bombardment was ceaseless. The position of the garrison had become very serious. They had no more bread, no more sugar and their water supply had run out. And suddenly at that critical moment, Dima came running up: 'Comrade Senior Lieutenant! There's a live goat up there in the attic! Can I bring it down?' Stetsuk, of course, consented willingly and gave Dima his sheath-knife. A few minutes later, Dima climbed back down the drain-pipe, scared to death, and shouted: 'The place is full of animals but none of them move! They must be bewitched, or something!... ' And you know, it was I who had hidden my zoological collection of stuffed animals in the tower when, the town was evacuated. . . You'd have thought the men would have been too tired to laugh at a thing like that, but the joke about Dima and the goat flashed round every post and raised their spirits. And then they found water..." "In the Black Tower?" I asked.

"Yes, in the Black Tower," Lazarev said. "You see, it wouldn't have been difficult for us to find water here, we're natives of the place. But for them it was harder. The fit ones among them had given the last of their bread and sugar to the wounded. But that was not enough. The wounded men lay in one of the rooms of the museum, suffering terribly from thirst. You can imagine their joy when water was discovered!

"The Hitlerites had surrounded the fortress and would not allow any of the local population to approach it.

"But on the fifth day of the defence, one local man did manage to reach the fortress by climbing the almost sheer cliffs above Karvasar. He told Stetsuk that he could show him the exact positions of the enemy batteries bombarding the fortress. Stetsuk trusted the man as a Soviet patriot. He sent with him Corporal Myshlyaev and another soldier from the motorized infantry whose full name we still have not been able to discover. All we know is that people called him Sashko. He was nineteen and in spite of his youth he had already been decorated with the Order of Lenin.

"It was getting dark when they left the fortress. The local man borrowed Sashko's submachine-gun and disposed of an enemy sentry, thus providing himself with a weapon.

"The three of them made their way through the back yards to Orlovsky's Mill, where a German battery was stationed. They wiped out its crew and threw the breechblocks from the guns into the river. That happened half an hour after they had left the fortress. After that they put eight guns which had been shelling the fortress out of action. First they would deal with the crew, then smash the breech-blocks, and on they went!

"In one of the skirmishes the guide was wounded in the arm. Then the three made their way to a hut in the forest where this local man was living, bandaged his arm, picked up some food, and moved on... On the second of April all three of them were found dead near a shattered German machine-gun..."

"Did you find out the name of the guide, Valerian Dmitrievich?" Maremukha asked. "He must have come from round here."

"He certainly did, he was a pupil of mine... His name was Yosif Vikentievich Starodonsky!" Lazarev said proudly. "I don't suppose you remember him. He was away from the town for a long time."

"Not remember Starodonsky? Yuzik, Weasel!" I exclaimed.

"But Starodonsky was 'a sailor," Mareukha put in, also surprised. "How did he come to be here, so far from the sea, and in war-time too?"

"He was a sailor, you're right there," Lazarev replied, "perhaps I am in a better position than anyone else in this town to confirm that. Come into the museum for a minute. . ."

A clear smiling face looked down at us from a photograph draped with mourning. Yuzik wore a smart naval cap. His face had remained almost as thin and dark and stubborn as on that July morning twenty years ago when Yuzik and I stood on the captain's bridge as our ship steamed into Mariupol.

In a glass case there were several exhibits. The first that caught my eye was a rusty Turkish dagger. Above it I read the same faded notice, written a quarter of a century ago: "Presented by a pupil of the Town School, Yosif Starodonsky."

I remember one cloudless Sunday when Yuzik and I were walking round the Old Fortress. Searching for the nest of a linnet that had flown up out of some hawthorn bushes under the Donna Tower, Yuzik poked about for a long time and at last came out of the bushes, beaming with pleasure and carrying in his hand this Turkish weapon —relic of a cruel and bloody age.

With what pride he afterwards watched Lazarev, our chief adviser on the history of the town, peer down at the rusty sheath of the curved dagger, almost touching it with his pince-nez. "This weapon dates from the second half of the seventeenth century," Lazarev said at last. "It is just possible that this dagger was dropped by one of the Turkish janissaries fleeing from Podolia as the Russian troops advanced."

Beside Starodonsky's dagger there now lay a long thick note-book in strong binding. The white label bore an inscription in Indian ink: "Log-book of the Slava."

"You know what a log-book is, don't you?" Lazarev asked, noticing that I was staring at this exhibit in some surprise. "It's a document that every sea captain must bring ashore if his ship is sunk. It's the living history of the ship and its voyages. It records everything that happens on board."

"But how did it come to be here?" Petka asked.

"Starodonsky picked it up just before his ship was sunk and brought it ashore," Lazarev replied. "And after that he brought it home with him."

"May I see what's written there?" I asked.

"Why not?" Lazarev replied, "You are close friends of the owner."

The director of the museum opened the case and handed me the thick note-book. It had been started in the winter of 1939 and the first entries were made in an unfamiliar hand.

From the hurried entries made during the first days of the war we could picture the situation in the southern theatre of operations during the second half of 1941.

"15.02. Enemy aircraft sighted in the North-East.

Maintaining course.

15.08. 80° to starboard German aircraft attacked one of our neighbours. Force composed of 10-15 torpedo aircraft and bombers.

15.17. Chief Engineer Voskoboinikov wounded.

15.20. Attack weakening. Bombing from high altitude. Guns still firing, I have ordered Kostenko to

take over from Voskoboinikov in the engine-room. Voskoboinikov has been put in the saloon and is being attended..."

I turned over several pages of the log and read an entry made in Yuzik's handwriting, but in very big, sprawling letters:

"It is getting light. I am on a spit of land. Surely it isn't the Belosaraiskaya Kosa? How I got here I don't know. Near me a life-boat is lying on the sand. There's a terrible row in my head all the time. Must be concussion. My hands are scalded. Did the boilers burst? I'm only writing down what I remember clearly.

"Yesterday, October 7, 1941, the market was still open at ten in the morning and I sent Grisha Gusenko there with all the cash we had. The other ships were taking wounded men and machinery on board. We were anchored in the bay waiting for our turn to go in for loading. At approximately 13.00 a column of enemy tanks and submachine-gunners suddenly broke through into the harbour itself.

"Seeing that the other ships had nearly finished loading, I started the engines at half speed to avoid running aground and engaged the enemy advance guard with all the fire power at my disposal. I wanted to draw enemy's fire and give our chaps a chance to get away. I saw several ships cast off and steam out into the bay. The Slava was hit eight times by fire from the enemy's tanks. We burnt two enemy tanks on the quay. I saw Nazi submachine-gunners falling under my machine-gun fire. Just as we were getting away, a direct hit in the engine-room put the ship out of action. I continued to engage the enemy while the ship sank.

"We didn't stop firing until our guns were under water. Then there was an explosion and I don't remember anything more..."

"The concussion was very serious," Lazarev said. "Starodonsky could scarcely hear anything even when he got here. And his face was scalded. His uncle, a forester, told me about that. It was his uncle who gave me this logbook. At the very end there is another remarkable entry. . ."

At the back of the log-book, separated from the official entries by a few clean pages, we read a passage scrawled in the unsteady hand of an old man.

"I curse myself for not being able to get through to the East because of this concussion. When I found myself in Yasinovataya I got a lift on a coal train and decided to hide with my family until I got better.

"The front is moving farther and farther away towards Moscow. Those dirty Hitlerite hirelings are trying to put the rumour round that we are beaten. It's not true! Russia can't be beaten. And neither can the Ukraine while she is with Russia! The gravestones of our ancestors will rise and fight if there are no Soviet people left alive.

"Whatever side you come from, you Hitlerites, you can't win! You'll drown in your own blood sooner or later..."

"Those lines were written in the winter of 1941-42," said Lazarev, and looked at the photograph from which our old friend smiled down on us.

In the glass case lay the mangled remains of the German machine-gun. There were dull spots on its black steel. Perhaps they were from the blood of Yuzik Starodonsky and his comrades who had been found dead beside the gun.

"When Starodonsky realized that he couldn't break through to the station," said Lazarev, "he and his friends mounted that machine-gun in the bushes by the fork and kept the enemy's motorized infantry back from the fortress. Think of it! Three of them alone, with hardly any cover, held up an avalanche of enemy troops! The people living round there say that the Germans had to use two batteries and their regimental mortars to crush them..."

We walked along the honeysuckle-covered fortress wall to the place where Yuzik had climbed into the fortress for the last time.

A yellowish biplane appeared over Dolzhetsky Forest and flew over our heads, deafening us with the roar of its engine. "That must be the professor flying here from Lvov in answer to Elena Lukyanovna's call," I thought.

The sight of the aeroplane in the sky brought Maremukha's thoughts to something he had told me before we met Lazarev.

"There'll come a time," Petka said dreamily, "when you, Valerian Dmitrievich, will make a place of honour in your museum for yet another of our old school-friends."

"Who?" Lazarev asked with interest.

"Alexander Bobir."

"I don't remember anyone of that name."

"How could you remember Bobir, if you could hardly remember us!" said Maremukha. "Bobir used to study at your school, then went on to the factory-training school. After that he went to the Azov Sea with us. While he was there, he got interested in flying. An airman came to their flying club and helped them put a damaged training plane in order, then up they went! Before we knew what was happening, Sasha was waving to us from the sky..."

"But that's hardly enough to gain him a place of honour in the museum," Lazarev said cautiously. "Hundreds of thousands of young people go in for flying nowadays."

"We don't mean that he ought to be remembered just for that first risky flight," Petka replied. "Sasha distinguished himself apart from that. In 1936 he volunteered to fight in Republican Spain. He flew in the 'snub-noses,' shot down two Savoias and three Junkers, I think, and was killed in an air battle over Teruel. There was an obituary about him in the Mundo Obrero. Some time afterwards I met a Spanish airman. A chap called Fernandez. Sasha had taught him to fly. Fernandez even showed me his photograph. There was our Sasha with his arm round that dark Spanish chap. Both of them in flying kit on the airfield. They were laughing. And there were mountains in the distance. What a pity I never asked Fernandez for that photograph! I could have given it to you."

"Don't frown, Petka," I said. "People meet each other in all kinds of places nowadays. Your Fernandez may be commanding a guerilla detachment somewhere right under Franco's nose. Perhaps he's still got that photograph with him. And perhaps there'll come a day when Fernandez and his guerillas will be able to show us Sasha's grave without fear of Franco's gendarmes..."

"If you do see his grave one day," Lazarev said, "be sure to bring me a handful of soil from it. I shall exhibit in the museum and write: 'Soil of Spain for whose freedom Alexander Bobir of Podolia shed his blood.'"

"Valerian Dmitrievich," Maremukha said after a pause, "get in touch with the Lvov historians. They'll tell you how the defenders of the Old Fortress liberated Lvov from the Nazis. The Urals tank men were the first to break through into the city. A tank man from the Urals, Alexander Marchenko, hoisted the red flag over the city hall of Lvov. All those facts would be very interesting for your museum. Make a special exhibition: 'Liberators of Podolia!'"

"Yes, that's quite a good idea," Lazarev agreed. "But as a matter of fact there were very few defenders of the Old Fortress left. Most of the garrison that Senior Lieutenant Stetsuk commanded were either killed or wounded. Those who were still fighting up to the last moment, when the First and Second Ukrainian fronts joined each other, were so tired that they had to go to the rear for a rest. Stetsuk, for example, as soon as he heard that the main forces of the Soviet Army had reached Podolia land the Nazis were shouting kaput, said to his comrades: 'Well, that'll do for now. We've done our job.' Then he

just dropped down on the wet earth under Karmeluk Tower and slept for fifteen hours without stirring. People tried to wake him, but it was no good. The brigade commander arrived, glanced at the sleeping man and said: 'Don't bother him, let him sleep. Even an eagle must rest sometimes.' "

"And what happened to Dima, Valerian Dmitrievich?" I asked.

"Dima was very unlucky," Lazarev replied. "On the last day of the defence a shell from a Tiger tank smashed the Archbishop Tower. Dima fell into the yard with the rest of the rubble, badly shell-shocked. He still can't say a word..."

"So it's for him the professor has been called in from Lvov?" I exclaimed. "Why didn't I think of it before!"

"Has he been called already? Oh, I am glad to hear that!" Lazarev said gladly.

"It may have been him who flew over just now," I said.

"Let's go and see Dima, what about it, Vasil?" Maremukha suggested suddenly.

"Yes, let's," I agreed. "If you're going to stay in town overnight, we've got plenty of time. Besides I know Elena Lukyanovna. She's in charge of his case, so I think she'll let us see him."

Lieutenant-Colonel Maremukha's truck whisked us down to the market, where we bought Dima some good things to eat—home-made pork sausage with a delicious smell of garlic and wood-smoke about it, eggs, a loaf of caraway bread, several fresh prickly cucumbers, butter wrapped in a damp pumpkin leaf, a bar of chocolate, and a bunch of fragrant dewy jasmine.

When Elena Lukyanovna saw us with all this she looked worried.

"What am I to do with you, I really don't know!" she exclaimed, spreading her arms. "The professor started examining Dima half an hour ago. Now he's gone out to telephone. He wants to get in touch with Leningrad. I can let you see the patient, but only for a minute."

We had expected to find a tough young dare-devil when we went to see Dima. That was how we had pictured the youngster from Siberia from the way Lazarev had described him. But before us, propped on his pillows, lay a very quiet, round-faced Russian lad smiling at us shyly.

The young hero looked at us with surprise and hope. Perhaps he thought we were professors from Leningrad, who had arrived so quickly on some specially fast plane.

To clear up the lad's bewilderment, Maremukha started telling him in an impressive bass voice who we were and why we had come to see him.

Dima's round face glowed with pleasure when he heard that Petka was lieutenant-colonel from the same tank corps in which Dima had fought his way into Podolia. He struggled into a sitting position and offered first Maremukha then me an unnaturally pale but still boyish hand with blue veins showing through the skin. To make us understand that he could not speak, Dima waved his hand in front of his mouth.

"Everything'll be all right, Dima, don't get downhearted!" I comforted him. "Scientists nowadays can restore the sight of people who have been blind for years, they'll find a way of curing you."

"Well, will you mistake a stuffed model in a museum for a live goat next time?" Maremukha asked smiling.

The lad wrinkled his smooth forehead in an effort to remember. A stubborn line appeared over the bridge of his nose... And suddenly Dima remembered the funny incident and laughed.

Steps sounded in the corridor. A tall man in a white gown entered the ward with the manner of one who feels himself at home in any hospital atmosphere, lit was the professor from Lvov. We moved away from the bed.

The professor glanced sideways at us and started examining an X-ray photograph. Elena Lukyanovna, who had followed him into the ward, stood respectfully at the head of the bed, holding cotton wool and test tubes.

"Now we shall test his responses," said the professor in a voice that sounded very familiar to me.

"Where have I seen that man before?" I thought, wracking my brains.

Paying no attention to Maremukha and me, the professor made a long and careful examination of the patient.

Elena Lukyanovna closed the windows looking out on to Hospital Square. The glass muffled the sounds coming from the Motor Factory that had just got going again after the war. I suddenly remembered how I had once lain in this hospital after being wounded by bandits. '

How trivial my old wound now seemed in comparison with what this lad had experienced. What courage it must have needed to crouch over a captured machine-gun at that loop-hole in the Archbishop Tower, watching the road and firing until a heavy shell struck the tower and threw him down among dust and rubble at the foot of the ruined tower!

"Well, old chap," the professor said when he had finished his examination. "We're going to operate on you. There are some pieces of bone and some small shell splinters pressing on your brain. That is what's depriving you of speech. I've called up the best surgeon in Leningrad. He'll be coming to Lvov on the first plane. So I'm going to take you with me to our clinic there. When we've removed those splinters, you'll be singing songs. Agree?"

We could not see Dima, he was concealed behind the tall figure of the professor. But apparently Dima nodded to him, for the professor gave a sigh of relief.

"Splendid! I knew you were a good lad."

When we called in at the office to see Elena Lukyanovna we found the professor pacing the polished parquet floor. He had removed his gown and I noticed two rows of medal ribbons on his grey suit.

The professor swept his hand down sharply, interrupting the conversation he had started before we came in. The gesture told me where I had first met him.

"I should like to introduce you, Professor," said Elena Lukyanovna. "This comrade is an engineer from Leningrad. . ." she motioned towards me.

"But we know each other already," I said smiling. "The professor's brief case brought me a lot of luck on one occasion. . ."!

"Do we know each other?..." the professor asked in a puzzled voice. "What brief case are you talking about?"

"Twenty years ago, in this very town, the pupils of the factory-training school elected a delegate to go to Kharkov. The delegate had to go there and save the school from being closed down by the Ukrainian Nationalist Zenon Pecheritsa. But the trouble was that the delegate had no brief case to keep all his papers in. So a request was made to the head of the instructors' department Panchenko, and he gave the delegate to the Central Committee his brief case... You're Panchenko, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am," said the professor. "And you... Just a minute. . . You must be Vasily Mandzhura!"

And although a friend of mine had once advised me that if I wanted to keep healthy I should always avoid all contact with doctors, I threw myself joyfully on the broad chest of the professor...

It was some time since the yellow aeroplane had roared away over the town and turned in the direction of Lvov, taking with it the professor and his new patient, but I still could not get over my unexpected encounter. Who would have thought that our favourite speaker and perhaps the most active of all the Komsomol members, Dmitry Panchenko, would twenty years later become a professor of medicine!

In the short time we had spent together in the office, the professor had managed to tell me quite a lot about himself. At the end of the twenties he had left his post as Regional Komsomol Secretary in a town on the Volga and with a Komsomol authority in his pocket gone to Leningrad to study at the Army Medical Academy. It had been his good fortune to see Academician Pavlov. From Pavlov personally, after a lecture, he had heard the famous words that the great physiologist afterwards included in his behest-letter to the youth of the country: "Consistency, consistency, and still more consistency!"

... As Maremukha and I walked round Zarechye, I recalled yet another incident in my life—the argument I had had long ago with engineer Andrykhevich.

From my far-off youth, on that sunny post-war day, crowded with so many chance encounters, the angry, bitter face of the old engineer floated into my mind. Even then he had been connected with spies and counter-revolutionaries of the industrial party who were waiting for the collapse of the Revolution and hoping to trick Soviet rule. And again I seemed to hear his cunning question: "Where will you get your educated people from? Going to teach yourselves, are you? 'One, two—see how she goes!' I doubt it... I doubt it very much!..."

Petka and I walked to the Old Estate where he had spent his childhood. But there, too, we found only ruins. The little house where Petka's father and mother had lived before the war was a heap of reddish rubble. Goose-foot and thistles watched over the ruins. Evidently the house had been destroyed by artillery fire in the first year of the war, when Hitler's armies, after capturing Ternopol, had advanced through our town towards Proskurov.

And the tall gates outside Yuzik's cottage had gone too. How many times had we stood by those gates yelling: "Yuzik! Yuzik! Weasel!"

At last he would appear, our stern quick-footed ataman, tapping a long stick as he walked, and we would set out for a raid on the orchards of Podzamche or to bathe near Paradise Gate. Never again would he respond to our call, our dear Yuzik...

Where their cottage had once stood a grey enemy blockhouse, quite recently built, rose from a deep clay pit. Twisted wire protruded from the concrete. The narrow horizontal embrasure of the blockhouse looked out to the East.

Evidently it had been one of the strong points built by the enemy on the Volyno-Podelian plateau.

Neither this blockhouse, nor hundreds of others like it had been able to save the Nazis!

Maremukha climbed on to the roof of the blockhouse, glanced down the ventilator that stuck out of the top like a railway engine's whistle, spat down it, and tapping his heel on the concrete, said: "Our guns have blasted out bigger things than this. Ever seen tree stumps being stubbed in the woods? That's just about what they did with these blockhouses."

Depressed by the sight of the ruins that surrounded us, we wandered in silence back to the Old Fortress through the suburb of Tatariski. It was guarded by a tall watch-tower rising on the bank of the Smotrich.

In the purple light of the sunset the Old Fortress looked particularly impressive silhouetted against the

evening sky. Half way across the bridge we stopped. Resting his elbows on the oak rail, Maremukha gazed down at Zarechye. From this high point the grey blockhouse looked quite small, like the turret of a tank buried in the earth.

"I say, Vasya," Petka said suddenly. "Do you remember our neighbour, the daughter of the chief engineer at the works? You were rather interested in her at one time... She went away to Leningrad, didn't she? You didn't see anything of her there, I suppose?"

"Of course I did, Petka!" I replied, "I don't mind admitting to you frankly that after I had got to know Angelika I did everything I could to help her become a new person. In the days when she broke with her family and went away to Leningrad against their will, I helped her. When H went into the army, we wrote to each other. In her letters she suggested I should come to Leningrad when my service was over. And that's what I did. I took a job at a plant there and settled down. We met as friends. I remember it as if it were yesterday; we went to the Philharmonic Hall together and heard Chaikovsky's Sixth Symphony.

Angelika had nearly finished at the conservatoire at that time. She married just before the war."

"Is her father still alive?"

"You know he was transferred from our place to the Agricultural Machinery Works in Rostov. She told me he had been arrested in Rostov for having contact with the industrial party, but he was released soon afterwards. He atoned for his guilt towards the country by good work. When war broke out, he was evacuated with his plant to the Urals. All through the war he worked as an engineer in the mortar shop. He's a very old man now."

"Perhaps he had Polevoi as his director?" Petka said. "You know Polevoi went to the Urals to manage a very big works after graduating from the Industrial Academy."

"I saw his name in the papers once or twice. I meant to write to him, but couldn't find out his exact address."

"Did Lika survive the starvation in Leningrad, do you know?" Maremukha asked.

"Of course she did!" I exclaimed. "Do you know where I met her during that winter of the siege? It makes me shudder to remember it. In the Wiedeman Hospital, on Vasilevsky Island! I was being treated there for starvation. One day I heard someone in the corridor say quietly: 'Vasya!' I looked round—and there was Angelika! She was terribly thin. There were black circles under her eyes. Her hands were so thin you could nearly see through them... 'Lika, dear, haven't you left?' I shouted. And she said, quietly: 'How can I leave my own city? My husband is still here, fighting on the Pulkovo Heights.' And she told me how she had refused to be evacuated with the Philharmonia... I remember how she looked at me and whispered: 'Heavens, Vasil, how you've changed! You must be having a bad time too, dear?' I was ashamed to say yes, because I was a man. So I passed it off with a joke: 'You'll be telling me next I haven't got the same look in my eye as Lieutenant Glan?' I said. 'What's Lieutenant Glan got to do with it!' she exclaimed. 'Don't you remember,' I said, 'one evening you compared me with a chap called Glan? And because I didn't know much about literature I asked you whether this Lieutenant Glan was a Whiteguard, by any chance. I wasn't far wrong, you know. At any rate, the man who wrote about him has become an out-and-out fascist...' We had a long talk. It was there, Petka, that I realized Angelika had changed right through and become a new person. And do you remember at one time we used to think her a useless creature?"

"Yes, time and environment change people," Maremukha said and glanced down over the bridge rail.

Below us, harnessed to the turbines of a power station, roared the fortress waterfall. It was calmer now that it gave most of its force to the machines housed in the white power house under the fortress cliffs. Soon—so we had learnt from one of the local people—some of the station's power would be used to supply a new trade school for metal workers. The new school was being built on the spot where our factory-training school had stood until it was blown up by the Germans.

I looked down and remembered my childhood years in this town. How many times after the spring floods had we searched the muddy banks of the river hoping to find the crown of some Turkish vizir, or at least a few gold ducats!

We had found no gold, but we had found great happiness, the happiness of having a country to live in that is the envy of honest working people throughout the world.

"Yes, time and environment change people. Those are true words of yours, Petka!" I said after a thoughtful pause. "And I'm sincerely glad that not only people like us who were brought up by the Komsomol and the Party, but even those like Angelika, who in the twenties were still wavering over what path to take, have found the experience of the past twenty-five years so beneficial."

"Is Angelika's husband alive?" Petka asked.

"Killed at Gatchina, when the siege of Leningrad was broken. He never came back after volunteering for the front in the first months of the war. He was a major when he was killed... By the way, you can hear her playing the piano on the radio sometimes from Leningrad. If you like it, write to her. Tell her, Tm Petka, that neighbour of yours whom Vasil introduced to you on the shore of the Azov Sea.' She'll be so glad to hear from you. She often speaks of that meeting. You see, it's our youth, Petka, those fine stirring days of our youth!..."

"How grateful we should feel to our Party and the Komsomol for that youth!" said Maremukha, gazing at our ancient town spread out before us, so small but still so pretty even now amid its green orchards and boulevards.

The west wind was bringing up a great grey-black cloud from the Dniester forests. Slowly it mounted to a peak, like the smoke of a distant fire, and its summit was purple and threatening in the light of the setting sun.

"How did that get here!" I said in surprise. "It was so sunny this morning... You know what that cloud reminds me of? The smoke from the fire of the Badayev warehouses in Leningrad. That was the biggest and, I think, about the worst raid we had. The smoke was so thick and heavy we thought at first it was a bank of cloud. Perhaps we'd better make a move, Petka? It looks like a storm."

"No hurry," Petka said, smiling and glancing westwards. "Rain's nothing to be afraid of! We've seen worse storms than this. They can't frighten us now. We're grown up..."

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