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THE MAKING OF A HERO

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TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN

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Undergraduate

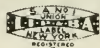


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THE MAKING
OF A HERO

knees. "And what are you standing there like a block of wood for?" The dark-eyed boy stared at the priest with lurking hatred, and in a flat voice said: "I haven't got any pockets," and ran his hands over the sewn-up openings.

"Oh, no pockets, eh? So you think I don't know who was capable of doing such a dirty little trick as to spoil the Easter loaf? You think that after that you'll still be a pupil here? No, my little beauty, you won't get off so lightly. Last time it was only for the sake of your mother you were not expelled, but this is the last straw. Get out of here!" He seized the boy's ear brutally and flung him out into the corridor and shut the door on him.

The class was deathly silent, all sitting huddled together. None of them could understand why Paul Korchagin should be expelled like that. Only Sergey Brouzzhak, who was Paul's bosom friend and companion, had seen Paul put a handful of tobacco siftings into the mixture ready in the priest's kitchen for the Paschal Cake, while the six of them who had failed in the exams were waiting for the priest to re-examine them.

Paul made his way outside and sat down on the bottom of the steps leading to the entrance to the school to think things over. How was he to go home and what was he to say to his mother, who worked from early morning till late at night as cook at the excise inspector's, and took everything so seriously? Tears choked him. What was he to do now? And all through that damned old priest. Why on earth had he put those siftings in the cake? It was Sergey who had prompted him. "I say," he had said, "let's give the rotten old beast a dose." And so they had given him a dose, and now Sergey was getting off and he would almost certainly be expelled.

The bad blood between Paul and Father Basil dated a long way back. One day Paul had had a fight with Mishka Levchoukov and he had had to "go without his dinner." And so as to make sure he wouldn't get into mischief, alone in the empty classroom, the teacher put him with the older ones in the senior class. Paul sat on the back bench and listened. The teacher was a bony little man in a black jacket, talking about the earth and the planets, and Paul drank it in and gaped from amazement to hear that the earth had been in existence many million years and that the stars were things rather like the earth. In fact, he was so astonished by what he heard that he nearly got up and said: "Please, sir, in Holy Writ it says different," but he was afraid of making a fool of himself.

The priest had always given Paul full marks for scripture. He knew all the prayer book by heart and the old and new testaments, too, and he knew precisely on which day God made each single thing. So Paul made up his mind to ask Father Basil about it. And at the next scripture lesson, as soon as even the priest had sat down, Paul held up his hand and, when he had got permission to speak, got up and said: "Father, why does the teacher in the seniors' class say that the earth is millions of years old and not what scripture said, five thous . . ." and then broke off short because of a hoarse yell from Father Basil: "What's that nonsense, you good-for-nothing boy? Is that how you learn your scripture?" And Paul had not had time to open his mouth to reply when the priest seized him by the ears and began banging his head against the wall. A minute later, beaten and cowed, he had been flung out into the corridor.

The next day his mother had gone to the school and

begged Father Basil to take her son back. From that day Paul had hated the priest with his whole being : hated him and feared him. He never forgave anyone the petty injuries he suffered, he certainly did not forget the undeserved thrashing the priest had given him, and he became sullen and morose. He had yet to suffer numerous smaller insults from Father Basil. The priest made him stand in the corner every day for weeks on end for the merest trifles and never once called on him to answer questions, and it was on this account that he had to go with the other dunces to the priest to be specially examined just before Easter—and then, while waiting in the kitchen, he put the stuff in the mixture ready for baking the Paschal Cake. Though nobody saw him the priest guessed immediately who was responsible.

The lesson ended at last and the children streamed out into the yard and surrounded Paul, but Paul remained stubbornly silent. Sergey Brouzzhak stayed inside ; he felt he was guilty, but could do nothing to help his friend. Then the head of the school, Ephrem Vassilievitch, appeared in the window of the staff room and his deep voice made Paul start. He shouted : “ Send Korchagin to me at once ! ” And with thumping heart Paul made his way to the staff room.

The proprietor of the Railway Station Buffet, a pasty-faced middle-aged man with colourless, washed-out eyes, shot a glance at Paul, who was standing to one side.

“ How old is he ? ” Paul’s mother said : “ Twelve.” “ Well, leave him here, he can have a try. Now I’ll give him eight roubles a month and board working days, and he’ll be on alternate days from seven in the morning

till seven the next morning, and no pilfering." Paul's mother cried anxiously: "Oh no, sir, oh no, sir, Paul won't touch a thing, I'll guarantee that." And the proprietor ordered: "Well, let him start right away," and he turned round to a sales-girl standing beside him behind the counter and said: "Zina, take this boy through into the scullery and tell Frossia to put him on the job in place of Grishka."

The girl put down the knife with which she was cutting ham and gave Paul a nod and went through the restaurant towards a side door which led into the scullery, and Paul followed her, while his mother hastened by his side whispering to him: "Now, Paul dear, do try your best, don't disgrace yourself, my dear." Then with sad eyes she followed him till he vanished and made for the exit.

The scullery was at work at full pressure. There was a monstrous pile of plates and forks and knives on a table and a number of women wiping them with towels flung over their shoulders. A ginger-haired snippet of a boy slightly older than Paul, with an unkempt mat of bristly hair, was busy with two huge urns. The scullery was full of steam from a vast cauldron of boiling water in which the dishes were washed, and at first Paul could not make out the faces of the workwomen, so he simply stood in the centre of the scullery without any idea of what he was to do or where he was to fit in. Meanwhile Zina went up to one of the women who were washing the dishes, took her by the shoulder and said: "Look, Frossia, here's a new boy for you in place of Grishka. You can tell him what he's to do." Then she turned to Paul and pointing to the woman she had just called Frossia said: "She's the boss here. You do whatever she tells you," then turned round and went back to her

buffet. Paul said : " All right," and looked enquiringly at Frossia, who was standing in front of him. Frossia wiped the sweat off her forehead and looked him up and down as if appraising his points, then she tucked up one sleeve, which had slipped over her elbow, and in a surprisingly pleasant, deep voice, said : " Your job, kid, is only a little one : see that copper ? Well, every morning you heat that in good time and see that it's full of boiling water, and of course you'll split the wood yourself, and those two samovars are your job, too. And then, whenever necessary, it's your job to clean the knives and forks and carry out the slops. . . ."

Paul said : " But what am I to do now, Auntie ? "

He heard one of the women—not so young—say : " Come over here, you can help me wipe these forks." Then she gave him a towel and said : " Here, take hold of this, one end in the teeth and pull the edge tight with one hand. There's a fork ; now rub it to and fro to get the prongs clean, and don't let there be a grain of dirt left. They're very strict about that here. The gentlemen always look at their forks and if they find the least dirt, there's trouble, and before you know where you are you'll have the missus giving you the sack."

" The missus ? " Paul could not understand. " Why, the man who took me on is the boss."

The woman gave a hearty laugh. " Oh, no, laddie, the boss here is only a bit of furniture, only a figure-head. The real boss here's the missus. Only she's out to-day—you do a bit of work and you'll soon see."

The door into the scullery opened and three waiters came in with piles of dirty dishes. One of them, a broad-shouldered squint-eyed fellow with a massive three-cornered face said : " Here, come along, get a move on.

The twelve o'clock 'll be in any minute and there you are fiddling about." Then he saw Paul and asked : " And who's this kid ? " Frossia said : " That's our new boy." " Oh," he declared, " that's your new boy, is it. Well——" and his heavy hand came down on Paul's shoulder and pushed him over towards the samovars, " those two samovars have to be ready any minute, and look, boy, one of them's out and the other's only a-glimmer. We'll let you off a bit to-day, but if it happens to-morrow you'll get a good box on the ears. See ? "

Without a word Paul turned to the samovars.

And so his working life began. Never before had Paul tried so hard as he did that first working day of his. He understood that this was quite different from home, where he could be disobedient to his mother. The squint-eyed waiter had made it quite clear that if you didn't obey you got your ears boxed. So the sparks began to fly out of the bellied ten-gallon samovars, with Paul taking off his shoes and putting them over the chimney and flaming the charcoal to a glow. Then he snatched up a bucket of slops and flew off to the midden, banked up wood on to the fire under the copper, spread out wet cloths on the boiling samovars to dry, and did everything he was told. Late that evening he was worn out when he went down to the kitchen. The elderly dishwasher, whose name was Anissia, looked at the door which had closed behind him and said : " There's something wrong in that kid's upper story, why, he works like a loony. There's something fishy about him, I'm sure, putting him out to work." Frossia said : " Well, he is certainly a worker, there's no need to be always on at him." But Dounia said : " It soon wears off, they all start like that. . . ."

At seven the next morning, absolutely worn out by his night without sleep and the endless toil, Paul handed over the two samovars well boiling to the boy who came to take his place. This was a boy with a pudding face and aggressive eyes. As soon as he had made sure that everything was in order and that the samovars were boiling, this boy stuck his hands in his pockets and then, forcing the spittle through tightly clenched teeth and shooting Paul a glance with his whitish eyes, said in a tone which forbade any objection: "Now, you, kid, look out you're here sharp at six to-morrow morning to take over." Paul said: "Why at six? Shift changes at seven." "Let those who want to change at seven do so, but you look out and be here at six. And if you don't keep your jaw shut better I'll soon put a blot on your phiz for you. Upon my word, you mug you, only started work to-day and already putting on airs."

The dish-washers who had handed over their work to the incoming shift followed the conversation of the two boys with interest. The aggressive voice and challenging manner of the other boy riled Paul, and he moved a step nearer to him and got ready to hit him, only fear of being dismissed on his very first day held him back. He flushed a deep red and said: "You calm yourself a bit and take care how you step or you'll get burnt. I'm coming to-morrow at seven, and I can fight quite as well as you can. And if you want to have a try, I'm ready." The other took a step back towards the copper and stared with amazement at Paul standing there angrily. He had not in the least expected such a definite refusal and he was rather at a loss, and he now muttered: "Oh, all right, we'll see."

Paul made his way out of the station together with the

women, and hurried home. The first day had passed off satisfactorily, and as he strode along he felt himself a man who has earned his rest. Now he too was a worker and nobody could say he was not an earner. The morning sun was already climbing above the roof of the timber works. The little cottage which was his home would soon appear, just another moment; he had only to pass the Leshchinskis' country house.

His mother was out in the yard preparing the samovar. As soon as she caught sight of her son she asked anxiously: "Everything all right?" "Not so bad," Paul said. His mother had something to tell him, he could guess; through the open window of the room he could see the broad shoulders of his brother Artem. This disturbed him and he said: "What, has Artem come home?" "Yes, he arrived last night, and he is going to stay here. He's going to work down at the railway yards."

Paul opened the door rather hesitatingly and went into the living-room. The massive figure seated at the table with back turned towards him looked round and his brother's severe eyes looked out from under his thick black eyebrows. "Ah, so here's the tobacco boy, eh? Well, well, how are you, kid?" Paul had nothing pleasant to expect from the forthcoming conversation with this brother who had just turned up. So he already knows all about it, he said to himself—and he knew Artem was capable of telling him off, if not of giving him a little more than a mere telling-off; Paul was a little afraid of Artem.

But evidently Artem had no intention of fighting; he simply went on sitting on the stool with his elbows on the table, and watched Paul with a fixed glance which might have been either mocking or contemptuous.

Then he said : " So I understand you've already finished your school studies, you've learned all there is to learn, and that's why you've turned to dish-washing ? "

Paul fixed his eyes on where the floor had cracked and painstakingly studied the head of a protruding nail. Then Artem unexpectedly got up from the table and went into the kitchen. Paul heaved a sigh of relief, and said to himself : " Looks like I'm getting off without a licking." When tea was ready Artem quite gently made Paul tell him all that happened in the school, and Paul told him everything. Paul's mother said sadly : " Whatever's going to happen to you, since you've turned into such a little hooligan ? " She said : " I can't make out who he takes after. Upon my word, all the trouble this little rascal has caused me."

Artem moved his empty cup away and turned to Paul : " Well, so that's that, little brother. No use crying over spilt milk. But from now on you take care, don't you try any monkey tricks at work, you do all you have to. You've given mother enough trouble already. When you've done a year at that job I'll try to get you taken on as apprentice in the yards, because it's no use your stopping all your life dish-washing. You want to be a man and learn a trade. You're too little now, but in a year I'll try, I may get you taken on. I'm being transferred here and I shall work here. Mother isn't going to work any more. She's done enough, bowing and scraping to all manner of scum, but you look out, Paul, my boy, and be a man."

He stood up to his full height, immense, put on the jacket which was hanging over the chair, and said shortly to their mother : " I'm going out a moment, there is a job I must do." He stooped under the door-lintel

and went out. As he went through the yard, past the window, he called out: "I've brought you some boots and a knife, mum'll give you them."

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The station restaurant was never closed. Five lines met at Shepetovka junction. The main station was always crowded, and it was only for two or three hours during the night, when there was a gap between trains, that it grew a little quieter. At their station hundreds of battalions assembled or dispersed, on their way from one front to another. From the front came the wounded, broken men, and thither flowed a constant stream of new men in monotonous grey army overcoats.

Paul worked two years in that place and all he saw in those two years was scullery and kitchen. In the huge basement the kitchen work was fevered—twenty-odd persons cooking and ten waiters a-scurry all the time. Paul rose from eight roubles to ten roubles in those two years, and grew taller and stronger. He went through a great deal in that time. He spent six greasy months in the kitchen as cook's assistant, then back to the scullery, turned out by the all-powerful chef, who did not like the taciturn lad and suspected that for two pins he'd knife him. He would long ago have lost the job altogether through his taciturnity, had not his inexhaustible ability for work saved him. He could work harder than anyone else and show no fatigue.

During the rush hours he worked like a madman, carrying trays, bounding down from buffet to kitchen or leaping back up the stairs with loaded trays. During the night, when work slackened off in both rooms of the

restaurant, the waiters would collect downstairs in the kitchen storerooms, and a reckless game of *devjatko* or *ochko* would begin. Many a time Paul saw large-denomination notes lying on the table, but he was not astonished by the sums he saw, because he knew that each of them in twenty-four hours' work earned thirty or forty roubles in tips, in half-roubles and roubles—it mounted up. Then they drank it away or played it away. Paul detested them. "Dirty scum," he would say to himself. "There's Artem, a first-rate turner, gets forty-eight roubles a month and I only get ten, and they get all that much in a single day—and what for? Carrying plates about. Then drinking and gambling it away." Paul considered them as much members of another world as he did the masters. He also knew that no dish-washer or waitress could work long there unless she sold herself for a few roubles to anyone who happened to have power and authority in the restaurant.

Thus Paul glanced into the very depths of life, the bottom, the dregs, and he scented the odour of decay which came from it, and he was full of thirst for anything new, anything fresh. Artem had not succeeded in getting him a learner's place in the yards, as they would not take anybody under fifteen, but Paul could think of nothing but the day when he should escape from that place, and he felt drawn to the huge building of smoke-blackened stone. He often went there to see Artem, and went with him when he inspected the trucks, and tried to help him.

It became particularly bad when Frossia left the place. Paul missed that laughing, happy girl, and he felt how closely he had been drawn towards her, and now when he came to the scullery in the mornings and heard the

cantankerous squabbling of the women, there was a blank in his life, and he felt lonely.

During the night-break, making up the fire under the copper, Paul squatted on his heels before he closed the grate and peered into the fire, blinking—the warmth was pleasant. The scullery was empty. Without noticing it his thoughts turned to recent events, to Frossia, and the following picture came vividly to his mind.

It was Saturday, and the night-break, and Paul went downstairs into the kitchen. At the turn of the stairs he climbed out of curiosity on to the wood-pile to look into the storeroom where the card-players usually gathered. The game was in full swing. Zalivanov was holding the bank and was purple with excitement.

Then Paul heard footsteps on the stairs; it was Prokhoshka coming down. Paul slipped under the staircase to wait for Prokhoshka to go through into the kitchen. It was dark under the stairs and Prokhoshka could not see him. Prokhoshka turned the corner and went on down, and Paul caught sight of his broad shoulders and enormous head. Then someone else came hurrying down the stairs with light tread and Paul heard a familiar voice: “Prokhoshka, wait just a moment,” and Prokhoshka paused, turned round and looked back up the stairs, and growled: “Now, what do you want?” The other person came down the stairs, and Paul saw it was Frossia.

She took the waiter by the sleeve and in a broken, faint voice she said: “Prokhor darling, where is the money that lieutenant gave you?” Prokhor snatched his arm roughly away. “What? Money? And didn’t I give

you anything?" he said, morose and harsh. "But, Prokhor, he gave you three hundred. . . ." And in Frossia's voice Paul heard repressed sobs.

Prokoshka said in a sniggering way: "Three hundred, eh? And you'd like to get 'em all? My fine lady, now don't you think that's coming a bit too strong for a dish-washer? I should say the fifty I gave you was quite enough. Good lord, and that's good money. Why, there's real ladies, a good bit cleaner than you are, who never get so much. You ought to be thankful for what you've got. Go to bed for one night only and fifty roubles clean in your hand. Men aren't all fools in this world, you know. Now look here, I'll give you ten more, no, twenty, I'll be generous, but nothing more, and if you'll stop this nonsense you'll come the way of some more. I'll fix things for you." With which final words Prokoshka turned round and went into the kitchen. Frossia shouted after him: "You dirty swine, you mean swine!" then she leant on the wood-pile and began to cry so that the sobbing shook her.

It is impossible to tell what Paul felt when he heard that conversation and stood in the darkness under the stairs and saw Frossia shaken there by sobs, banging her head too on the logs. But he did not show himself, he just kept silent and clutched fiercely at the iron struts of the stairs while the words flashed into his head and were burned there clearly for all time: "Even Frossia, even Frossia they've sold . . . Frossia, Frossia!" And his hatred for Prokoshka grew stronger than ever and ate into him, and everything around him grew chill and hateful. "Ah, had I only the strength," he thought, "I'd thrash the life out of that villain!" And he wished he was as big and strong as his brother Artem.

The fire in the stove was flickering, and the little tongues of flame died down and then quivered up again and combined into a long bluish spiral, and it seemed to Paul like something which was mocking him, challengingly putting out its tongue at him. It was quite quiet in the room ; there was no other sound but an occasional crackle from the stove and the even sound of drips from the tap. Klimka came in and placed the saucepan he had just cleaned glittering on the shelf and rubbed his hands. There was nobody in the kitchen. The cook and the women assistants who were on duty were sleeping in the cloakroom. For three hours of night the kitchen was quiet, and it was Klimka's custom to spend them with Paul. The kitchen-boy was now a fast friend of the scullion. Klimka climbed up and then saw Paul squatting in front of the opened stove. He said : " What do you think you're doing ? Casting a spell over the old stove ? "

It was only with difficulty that Paul stopped staring at the tongues of flame. Two huge glittering eyes then looked straight at Klimka, and in them Klimka saw inexpressible sorrow. This was the first time Klimka had seen such an expression in his comrade's eyes, and he expressed his surprise after a few moments by saying : " You're queer somehow, to-day, Paul. Anything wrong ? "

Paul got to his feet and went and sat beside Klimka. He answered in a dull voice : " Nothing has happened. Only I'm not happy here, Klimka." And his hands, lying on his knees, clenched hard.

Klimka raised himself on his elbows and said : " What has come over you to-day ? "

" Come over me to-day, you ask ? It's been over me

ever since I came here to work. You just give an eye to what goes on here. We work ourselves to death and what do we get for it? A blow from anybody's fist who chooses and no protection against it. The masters hire us to work for them, but anybody who's strong enough can knock us about. Why, however hard you try you can't please them all, and then you're for it. However hard you work, and try to do all you should so that nobody could complain, rushing in all directions at once, you're sure to be late taking somebody what he wants and there you are. . . ."

Klimka was alarmed and interrupted him, "Don't shout like that, if anybody comes in they'll hear what you say."

Paul leapt to his feet. "Well, and let 'em hear, I've finished anyway. Better be a crossing-sweeper than work here. A living grave. Rogues all of them. And they count us as rubbish and do what they like with the girls; if one of them happens to be good-looking and won't give in to them, out she goes at once. They get a collection of refugees, girls with no home, starving girls, and they snatch at the chance of food, at least they get fed, and they do anything out of fear of starvation."

He spoke with such hatred that Klimka was really afraid that somebody might hear them, and he jumped up and shut the kitchen door, while Paul went on pouring out what was in his mind. "Now take yourself, Klimka, when you get a hiding you don't say a word. Now, why don't you?"

Paul sat down on a stool by the table and rested his weary head on his hand. Klimka put some more wood on the fire and sat down at the table, too. Then he

asked Paul: "Going to do some reading to-day?" Paul said: "We've nothing to read, and the stall is shut." Klimka was surprised. "What, isn't it open to-day?" Paul said: "The gendarmes have taken the salesman away. They found something hidden there." "But what about?" "Politics, they tell me."

Klimka looked puzzled. "But what is this politics about?"

Paul shrugged his shoulders. "Damned if I know. As far as I make out from what I hear, politics means you're against the Tsar."

This scared Klimka, and he started back. "But are there really people like that?" he asked.

Paul said: "Can't say."

Then the door opened and one of the girls came sleepily into the scullery. "Why aren't you asleep, you kids? You can get an hour in now while there are no trains. Off you go, Paul, I'll keep an eye on the copper."

.

Paul's service there came to an end sooner than he expected—and what was more, in a way he had not anticipated. One very cold January day Paul was at the end of his shift and ready to go home, but there was no boy there to take his place, so he went to the mistress and said he was going home, but she refused him permission. So, tired as he was, Paul had to go on a second twenty-four hours, and by the next night he was quite at the end of his strength. Now, in the break, he had to fill up the coppers and get them boiling ready for the three o'clock train. He turned on the tap—and there

was no water. Obviously the pump was out of order. So he left the tap turned on and lay down on the wood-pile and fell asleep—fatigue got the better of him.

After a few minutes the tap suddenly gurgled and bubbled and the tank began to fill. It reached the brim and then ran over and the water began to flood over the tiled floor of the scullery which was as deserted as usual, at night. The water flowed faster and faster till it covered the floor and began to make its way under the door into the restaurant. The little rivulets found their way under the bundles and suit-cases of the travellers sleeping there. Nobody noticed it—and it was only when the water had begun to wet a traveller who was sleeping on the floor and he jumped to his feet and gave the alarm that everybody leapt for his or her things. Then there was confusion.

And all the time the water was rising. Prokhoshka, who was clearing a table in the second room, heard the shout and ran in. He leapt over the pools and rushed to the door and forced it open. Then the water which the door had been holding back flooded into the restaurant, and the din grew louder still. The waiters rushed into the scullery. Prokhoshka made for Paul—who was still sound asleep, and one after another blows rained on the head of the boy, till he was quite stupid from pain. He was not properly awake, and could make out nothing. He saw stars blazing in his eyes and felt stabbing pains through his whole body. He was so badly knocked about that he could scarcely get home.

The next morning Artem, grim, downcast, made Paul tell him everything. In a hollow voice Artem said :

“And who knocked you about?” “Prokhoshka.”
“All right—lie down again.” And Artem put on his leather jerkin and without another word went out.

.

A stranger, a workman, asked Glasha : “Can I see the waiter Prokhor?”

The girl said : “Wait a minute, he’ll be here in a moment.” And the huge body leant against the doorpost. “Right, I’ll wait for him.”

Prokhor kicked the door open and entered the scullery with a whole trayful of plates, and the girl pointed at him and said : “There he is.”

Artem took a step forward and laid a heavy hand on the waiter’s shoulder and looked straight into his face and said : “What have you been interfering with my little brother Paul for?”

Prokhor tried to free his shoulder, but a terrible blow from a fist sent him sprawling. He tried to get up, but a second blow, worse than the first, nailed him to the floor. The other waiters were scared ; they scattered to one side, as Artem turned and went out of the scullery, while Prokhor, with smashed and bleeding face, writhed on the ground.

Artem did not come home from work that evening, and Maria Korchagin learned that he was under arrest at the gendarmerie station. Six days later Artem came back ; in the evening it was, and their mother was already asleep. Artem went up to Paul, who was sitting up in bed, and asked : “Well, little brother, feeling better, eh?” He sat down beside him. “It might be worse.”

Then, after a few moments more without a word, he said : “ Don’t you worry, you’re going to the Electricity Power Station, I’ve already got it fixed. · You’ll learn the trade there.” And Paul took Artem’s huge hand in his own two hands and squeezed it hard.

CHAPTER TWO

A STUPENDOUS piece of news broke the quiet of the little town : “ They’ve deposed the Tsar ! ” Shepetovka found it hard to give credence to it. One day a train crept into the station through a snow-blizzard and two students with rifles over their uniform coats and a detachment of revolutionary soldiers with red armbands descended from it, and arrested the station gendarmes and the old colonel who was commander of the local garrison. Then the townsfolk did believe the news, and thousands of people made their way through the snow-covered streets to the main square, and thirstily drank in those new words : liberty, equality, fraternity.

Several days passed, tumultuous days, heady with excitement and delight. A calm followed, and all that remained of the change was the red flag flying over the Prefecture, where Mensheviks and representatives of the Bund were installed ; everything else was going on as before. Towards the end of the winter a regiment of the Horse Guards were quartered in the town, and every morning squadrons trotted down to the station to arrest deserters coming in from the south-west front. The horse-guards looked well fed ; they were stalwart men in the pink of health, and their officers were mostly counts and princes ; their epaulettes were golden, and the piping on their trousers was silver, just as in the Tsar’s time—there might as well not have been a revolution.

The year 1917 slipped by, and nothing in the life of Paul or Klimka or Sergey Brouzzhak changed. There were the same old masters still. It was not till rainy November that queer things began to happen. Strangers began to get busy at the station—the proportion of soldiers from the trenches increased, and they bore the peculiar name “Bolsheviks.” But nobody knew what that harsh cumbersome name really meant. It became rather more difficult for the guards to arrest the deserters coming in, and there were more and more cases of windows down at the station being broken by bullets. Men began to come in from the front in whole groups, and if anybody tried to stop them they used their bayonets. As December came in they began to arrive in whole train-loads.

The Horse Guards barricaded the station with the intention of putting a stop to that, but they got peppered by machine-guns, and men hardened to death poured from the trains. These grey men from the front drove the Horse Guards back into the town. This done, they went back to the station and the steady transport of deserters went on.

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One spring day in 1918 the three chums were on their way from Brouzzhak's house, where they had been playing “66.” On the way they dropped into the Korchagins' garden and lay down on the grass. They were at a loose end. They were sick of all their usual amusements and so they began to rack their brains what to do to while away the time. Then at their backs they heard the sudden tattoo of horse's hoofs, and a man on horseback appeared down the road. The horse leapt

the ditch which separated road from fence at one bound, and the stranger waved his riding-whip at Paul and Klimka and called out : “ Hi, there, you two lads, come over here.”

Paul and Klimka jumped to their feet and ran to the fence. The stranger was covered with dust ; there was a thick grey layer of it on his forage cap, and his khaki tunic and breeches. From his stout private’s belt dangled a revolver and two German hand-grenades. “ Bring me some water, please, you boys ! ” he cried, and while Paul ran off for the water, he turned to Sergey, who was gaping at him, and said : “ Tell me, young fellow, who’s in charge of this town now ? ”

Sergey made haste to tell the man all the news of the town. “ There’s nobody in command here for the past fortnight. Only the defence brigade. Ordinary folk take it in turns to be night watchmen. And what do you belong to ? ” Sergey now put his question. The stranger smiled and said : “ Steady on, my boy, if you get to know too much you’ll get old before your time.”

Paul ran out with a large mug of water, and the stranger thirstily drank it all down and handed the mug back. Then he chucked at the reins and cantered straight for a copse of pines which stood on a slight eminence.

Paul was puzzled and said to Klimka : “ Who can that be ? ” Klimka shrugged his shoulders and answered : “ How am I to know ? ” Sergey then decisively and firmly settled the political question and said : “ It must mean there’s to be a new change of government here. That’s why the Leshchinskis left the town yesterday. As soon as the gentry begin to clear out you can be sure there are revolutionaries coming in.” The logic of that was so

satisfying that Paul and Klimka accepted it at once. The boys had not finished discussing the matter when the sound of hoofs down the road again rang out and all three rushed to the fence.

From the woods, from behind the woodman's house which they could just distinguish, numbers of people had appeared with waggons, and quite near at hand were about fifteen men on horseback with rifles over their saddles. Two were leading, one of them a middle-aged man in a khaki tunic with officer's belt and field-glasses slung on his chest, and the other the horseman they had just seen. The middle-aged man had a red armband on.

Sergey jabbed Paul with his elbow. "Ah! what did I tell you? See, he's got an armband. They are Reds." He whooped with delight and was over the fence and off down the road in the twinkling of an eye. Both friends followed him, and the three stood together by the roadside to watch the men coming to the town. Soon they were quite close, and the one they had already seen nodded to them and then pointed to the Leshchinski's house with his whip and asked: "Who lives there?" Paul tried to keep up with the horse and told him: "That's where Leshchinski the lawyer lives. He cleared out yesterday. You can see he was scared of you. . . ."

The middle-aged man smiled and said: "And how do you know what we are?" Paul pointed to the armband and said: "And that? Anybody can see. . . ."

People poured out of their houses and joked with the detachment entering the town. The three boys stood by the roadside and watched the dusty, tired Red Army men go by. And when the only gun they possessed had lumbered by over the cobbles, and the waggons with machine-guns had passed, the boys followed the Red

army detachment and did not go home till the men had halted in the centre of the town and been dispersed to their billets.

That evening, in the large sitting-room of the Leshchinskis' house, which had been turned into staff quarters for the detachment, four men were seated at a massive table with carved legs: the commanding officer, the middle-aged man with hair streaked with grey, whose name was Boulgakov, and three of his staff. Boulgakov spread out a map of the province on the table and marked lines on it with his nail and, addressing the man opposite him, who had high cheek bones and powerful teeth, said: "Comrade Yermachenko, you say we shall have to fight at this point, whereas in my opinion we should retire. I should suggest retiring this very night, were the men not so tired. Our aim must be to get back to Kazatin before the Germans can reach it. To put up a fight with the forces at our disposal would be ridiculous. . . . The Germans are coming on like a flood of steel. We can only fight if we link up with other retiring Red detachments. Apart from the Germans, there are numerous counter-revolutionary bands about. My opinion is that we should abandon the town first thing to-morrow morning—blowing up that little bridge on the other side of the station before we go. It will take the Germans two or three days to construct a temporary bridge and that will hold up their progress by rail. Come, let us make up our minds."

Strouzhkov, who was sitting diagonally across the table from Boulgakov, bit his lips and studied the map, then looked at Boulgakov and at last, with some difficulty, managed to control the words choking him and said: "I . . . am . . . of the same opinion as Boulgakov." The young-

est, wearing a workman's blouse, said : " I agree, Boulgakov's talking sense." It was only Yermachenko, the one who had spoken to the boys, who still shook his head and disagreed. He said : " Then what the devil have we got this detachment together for? To retreat from the Germans without a fight? In my opinion this is just the spot we should put up a stand. I'm tired of running away. . . . If it was my decision I should have no hesitation in saying : ' Here we put up a stand '" He moved his chair sharply back from the table and began to stride up and down the room.

Boulgakov looked at him with disapproval. " It's no use fighting foolishly, Yermachenko. We simply can't throw men away on certain defeat and destruction. We've a whole division of heavy artillery, including armoured cars, against us. . . . Comrade Yermachenko, we can't do it." And then he turned to them all and said : " So it's decided—we evacuate the town to-morrow morning."

The next question was that of liaison. Boulgakov continued the council and said : " And as we shall be the last to leave, it is our job to organise work in the rear, behind the German lines. This is a very important railway junction, and this miserable little town boasts two railway stations. We must take steps to have a responsible comrade working at this junction. Let us decide now whom to leave here. Any proposals? "

Yermachenko went up to the table and said : " I think we ought to leave able seaman Fiodor Zhoukhraï. In the first place, he's from these parts. Secondly, he's a fitter and a turner, so he can get work at the station. Then again, he has not been seen in our company—he will not arrive till to-night. He's got his wits about him

too, and he'll do the job all right. In my opinion he's the most suitable."

Boulgakov nodded his assent. He said: "Quite right, I agree with you, Yermachenko." Then he turned to the others. "Have you anything against the proposal? No? So that's settled. We shall leave him a supply of money and instructions what to do."

Then Boulgakov said: "Now the third and last question, comrades. That's the question of the arms there are in this town. There's a whole store of rifles here, twenty thousand left over from the Tsarist war. They're stored in a peasant's barn and they're completely forgotten. I have this from the peasant whose barn it is. He wants to get rid of them. . . . Of course, too, it's out of the question to leave them over for the Germans. My opinion is that they should be burned, and that this should be done immediately, so that everything is ready by morning. Only it's going to be rather a risky business, as the barn is on the edge of the town, surrounded by poor houses. It might spread to other farm buildings."

Strouzhkov, a sturdy fellow with a face covered in bristles, as he had not shaved for some days, said: "Why . . . why . . . why destroy them? I th-th-think we ought to g-g-give them out t-t-to the p-p-population."

Boulgakov swung sharply round towards him. "Distribute them, is that your suggestion?"

But Yermachenko here called out with great enthusiasm: "And quite right too! Distribute them to the workers and the rest of the people, let who wants them have them. At least it will give the Germans something to worry about when they do get here. And when things become unbearable the lads will be able to use them. Strouzhkov is quite correct, we ought to distribute them. Even take

them out to some village nearby, as the peasants could hide them better for us ; and when the Germans begin to put the screw on, how useful they will be."

Boulgakov laughed. "All well and good, but when the Germans issue orders to give up all arms, they'll all hand them in."

Yermachenko could not agree with that at all. He said : "No, all of them won't give them up. Some will and others won't." The young worker took the side of Yermachenko and Strouzhkov and said : "Let's distribute the rifles, that's the thing to do." Then Boulgakov said : "Well, so let us distribute them. And that is all we have to decide." He got to his feet. "Now we can rest till morning. When Zhoukhraï arrives, see he comes to me, and I'll have a chat with him. Will you go round the sentries, Yermachenko ?" And Boulgakov, left alone, went into the bedroom adjoining the sitting-room, spread his overcoat on the mattress, and lay down.

.

When morning came Paul went off shift and made his way home from the power-plant, where he had been working as under-stoker for a whole year, and found the town in a state of tremendous bustle, which it was impossible not to notice at once. On his way home he met more and more ordinary folk with rifles in their hands, some of them with two or three each. He hurried home, as he could not make out what it was about. Outside the Leshchinskis' villa he found his yesterday's acquaintances just mounting.

He ran indoors and washed hurriedly. His mother said Artem was not home yet. He rushed off to see Sergey Brouzzhak, who lived at the other end of the

town. Sergey was the son of a railway fireman. His father had a little house of his own and a small-holding. But Sergey was not at home. His mother, a fat, white-faced woman, looked sourly at Paul and said: "And where he is, it's no use coming asking me. He's got the devil in him. He was up and out almost before it was light. He had some yarn about rifles being distributed somewhere, so I suppose that's where he is. What you want is a good hiding, you snivellers, thinking of rifles. You tell the little scoundrel that if he brings one single cartridge into this house I'll punch his head off him. . . ."

But Paul was already out of earshot of the irate woman and down the street. On his way he met a man carrying a rifle on each shoulder. He ran up to him and said: "Uncle, tell me where you got them!" "Why, they're giving them away over in Verkhovina Street." And Paul flew off as fast as he could run to the place the man had told him. When he had run down two streets he came on a boy dragging along a huge infantry rifle complete with bayonet. Paul stopped him with: "Where did you get that from?" The boy said: "The Reds are giving them out up by the schools, but they're all gone now, there's none left. But this is my second." Paul thought for a second and then swung round and with three leaps had caught up the other boy, who was a lot smaller than he was, and had wrenched the rifle away from him. In a tone which permitted no discussion he said: "You've already got one, that's enough for you. I'll have this one." The smaller boy was infuriated by such daylight robbery and he flung himself at Paul, but Paul stepped sharply back and levelled the rifle with the bayonet fixed and yelled: "You get back or you'll get stuck on this!"

The little boy burst into tears of mortification and turned and ran back, swearing helplessly as he went, while Paul ran home very satisfied. He leapt over the fence and ran straight to the wood-shed and propped the rifle up on the rafters just under the roof and with a merry whistle went into the house.

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Summer evenings in the Ukraine are lovely. In little towns like Shepetovka, where the heart of the town really is a miniature town, but the outskirts are still village, all the young people are out in the streets on calm summer evenings. All the girls show themselves on their porches or in their gardens or leaning over the fence, or even out in the street, sitting there on timbers prepared for building, in pairs or in groups, and it's laughter and song all the time. The air quivers, it is so dense with the scent of flowers. The stars twinkle ever so slightly right away in the depths of the sky, like fire-flies, and voices carry, oh, so far. . . .

Paul loved his accordion. How fine it was to rest his sweet-toned double-bank "real Vienna" instrument on one knee and let his nimble fingers play over the keys, running up and down, leaping here and there, with the bass sighing deep and the good accordion swirling off into a wild step-dance of song. . . . With an accordion throbbing away like that, how could anybody but dance? Your feet do it of themselves, and the accordion grows passionate, because life is good!

This particular evening was especially jolly. There was a whole gathering of young folk on some timbers outside Paul's house, light-hearted all of them, and the loudest laughter of all came from Galia, who was Paul's

neighbour. She was the daughter of a stonemason, and she loved to dance and sing with the boys. She sang alto ; a deep, velvety voice. Paul was even a little afraid of her. Her tongue was pretty sharp. She sat down beside him on the beams and flung her arm tight round him and laughed and cried : “ Oh, you lad with your accordion. What a pity you’re so young, what a fine little husband you would make me ! I’m that fond of accordion-players, they make my heart melt within me.” And Paul flushed to the roots of his hair ; he was glad it was dusk and nobody could see. He edged a little away from the spirited girl, but she held him close and would not let him.

“ Oh, my pet, where now, where now ? Trying to run away ! What a fine sweetheart you make ! ”

Paul felt her firm bosom against his shoulder and it sent shivers through him, it upset him, and the laughter which surrounded him rent the usual silence of that street. Paul put his hand on her shoulder and pushed, saying : “ You’re stopping me playing, move up a bit,” and that brought a fresh burst of laughter and teasing and jokes.

And now it was Maroussia, saying : Paul, play us something a bit sad, something really sentimental.”

Then the bellows slowed down and his fingers crept over the keys. It was a Ukrainian song they all knew ; a song of their district. Galia was the first to take it up ; Maroussia and the rest followed her. *Zibralissia vsi bourlaki*. . . . “ All the lawless came together. . . . ” And the ringing young voices carried into the far distance towards the forests.

“ Paul ! ”

It was Artem’s voice. Paul folded his accordion and

fastened the straps. "They're calling me. I must go." Maroussia begged him: "No, stay a little while longer, play us a little more. You've time yet." But Paul was in a hurry. "No. To-morrow if you like, but I must go now. It's Artem calling me." He ran across the street to their cottage.

When he opened the door he saw Artem's comrade, Roman, sitting inside at the table, and a third whom he did not know. "You wanted me?" he asked. Artem nodded at Paul and said to the stranger: "There he is, that's my little brother." The stranger stretched out a knotted hand.

"Now, listen, Paul," Artem said to him, "you were saying that one of the fitters down at the plant is ill. Find out to-morrow whether they would take on a man who knows the work well. And if they will, come and let me know."

But the stranger interrupted. "No, I'll go with him, and I'll have a word with the boss myself."

"Of course they want a man. Why, to-day the engines weren't working because Stankovich is ill. The boss came in twice looking for someone to take his place, and could not find anyone. And they didn't like to try running it with only a stoker. Our fitter's gone down with typhoid."

"If that's the case, we're well away," the stranger said. "Well, I'll come in here to-morrow for you, and we'll go down together." Paul said: "Right you are." Paul saw the stranger's eyes attentively examining him, and he met them with his own steady grey eyes. The grey jacket the stranger was wearing was buttoned from top to bottom. It was very tightly stretched over his shoulders. It was obviously too tight. The head was

joined to the shoulders by a bull neck ; and the man altogether was powerful and solid like an old knotted oak.

When the stranger left Artem said : “ Well, so long, Zhoukhraï. To-morrow the boy ’ll go with you and you’ll fix it all up.”

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The Germans entered the town three days after the Red detachment left it. Their arrival was announced by a train whistling in the station, which had been deserted for three days, and the news spread through the town that the Germans were coming. The town came to life like a stirred-up ant-hill, although everybody knew already that the Germans were bound to come. Yet somehow they had not quite believed it. But now those terrifying Germans were not just coming, but were right here, in the town. People lined their garden fences and stood at their gates ; they were afraid to go out into the streets. And the Germans marched on either side of the street, leaving the centre free. They were in dark-green uniforms, and were trailing their rifles, to which wide bayonets were fixed. On their heads were heavy steel helmets. On their backs were huge haversacks. They marched from the station to the town in an endless ribbon, moving cautiously, ready any moment to withstand resistance, although nobody had any thought of resisting. In front marched two officers with Mausers in their hands. In the centre of the street marched the Hetman’s man as interpreter ; he was dressed in a blue Ukrainian overcoat and high fur cap.

The Germans formed a hollow square in the market-place in the centre of the town. The drummers beat a

tattoo, and a tiny crowd of the braver inhabitants gathered. The Hetman's representative in his blue coat appeared on the high porch of the town dispensary and in a loud voice read out the order issued by the Commander of the Town—Major Korf. It ran as follows :

1. I hereby order all citizens of this town within 24 hours to hand over any firearms or other lethal weapons they may possess. The punishment for disregard of this present order will be death.
2. This town is declared to be under martial law, and curfew is ordered at eight o'clock every evening.

Signed : Town Commandant Major Korf.

The building which had once served as Prefecture and Town Hall, and which after the revolution had for a time housed the Soviet of Workers' Deputies, was now occupied by the German Military Command. At the parade entrance stood a sentry, no longer in steel helmet, but in parade cap with a huge imperial eagle. A space in the courtyard was marked off for the arms which were to be surrendered.

Throughout the day towns-people, scared by the threat of facing a firing-squad, brought in fire-arms. Grown-up people did not show themselves. The weapons were brought in by youths and boys. The Germans arrested no one. Others, who did not want to be seen, threw their rifles out into the street during the night, and in the morning a German patrol collected them, loaded them

on to an army waggon, and took them to the Town Command. At one o'clock, when the twenty-four hours was up, the German soldiers counted up their trophies. Fourteen thousand rifles had been given up. This meant that the Germans had failed to receive six thousand rifles. Household searches which they carried out gave very insignificant results. The next morning at dawn, outside the town, near the old Jewish cemetery, two railway workers were shot, because the search had revealed rifles hidden in their houses.

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Artem had hurried home when he heard the order issued. In the yard he met Paul, took him by the shoulder and asked, very quietly but insistently: "Did you bring anything home when they were distributing?" For a moment Paul thought of saying nothing about the rifle, but he somehow could not tell his brother a lie, so he told him the whole story.

They went to the shed together. Artem took the rifle from behind the rafters, removed the action, took off the bayonet, then took the rifle by the barrel and swung it with all his strength against one of the posts of the fence. The butt was smashed to pieces and the other parts were thrown away some distance out in the waste ground beyond the garden. Artem threw the bayonet and the action into the privy pit.

When he had finished he said to Paul: "You're no longer a baby, Paul, so understand that fire-arms are not to be played with. I'm talking very seriously—don't bring anything of that sort home. You must know that you might pay for it with your life. Now take care, don't deceive me, for if you do bring something in and they

find it the first thing they will do is shoot me. They won't touch you because they'll think you're only a kid. It's a dirty time just now."

Paul promised to bring nothing home.

As they were going back through the yard a fly drew up at the gates of the Leshchinski house, and the lawyer with his wife and children—Nelly and Victor—got out. Artem said savagely: "So the fine birds are back again. Ah! Now the fun's going to begin, curse him." And he went inside.

The whole day Paul was sore about his rifle. At the same time his friend Sergey worked hard in an old deserted shed with a shovel, scraping the soil away against the wall. At last the pit was ready, and Sergey put in it three fine new rifles which he had obtained. He was not going to give them up to the Germans; he hadn't worked hard the whole night merely in order to part with his booty, so he was burying it well wrapped in rags. He filled in the soil and beat it down hard and then covered the spot with a heap of rubbish and old junk. Having examined the results of his work critically, and found it satisfactory, he took off his cap and wiped away the sweat. "Well, and now let 'em look. If they do find it, who can tell them whose shed it is?"

.

Without noticing it Paul became fast friends with the morose fitter, who had now been working at the power plant for a month. Zhoukhraï instructed the understoker in the construction of a dynamo and taught him the trade. The sailor took a liking to the bright lad, and he began to be a frequent visitor at the house on off-days. Zhoukhraï was a level-headed, solemn ex-sailor, and he

would listen to all the long-winded yarns about petty incidents of the Korchagin family, even the mother's complaints about Paul's earlier monkey tricks. He had such a knack of calming Maria Korchagin when she got worked up, that she began to forget her trials and became altogether more cheerful.

One day Zhoukhraï stopped Paul as he was crossing the yard of the power plant and smiled and said : " Your mother tells me you like fighting. She says you're as bad as a little game-cock." Zhoukhraï laughed as if very pleased with something, and said : " Now, that isn't such a bad thing at all, if only you know whom to fight and why."

Paul did not know whether Zhoukhraï was laughing at him or not, and he said : " I don't fight for nothing, I always fight when it's right." Then Zhoukhraï most unexpectedly asked : " Would you like me to teach you to fight properly ? " Paul looked at him in astonishment. " What do you mean—properly ? " " You'll see." And Paul was given a little introductory lecture on boxing.

Paul did not learn easily, but he learned well. More than once he went flying from a blow of Zhoukhraï's fist, but he proved a steady and a patient pupil.

One hot day he came home from seeing Klimka, and after mooching about the house a while without anything to do, decided to get up to his favourite spot—the roof of the shed which stood in a corner of the garden at the back of the house. He crossed the yard and went into the little garden, and then, when he had reached the hut, he clambered up the wall on to the roof. He forged his way among the branches of the cherry tree, which overhung the shed, till he reached the middle, where he lay down in the lovely sunlight.

On one side the shed gave on to the Leshchinskis' garden—and if you climbed to the very end of the roof you could see the whole of their garden and one side of their house. Paul poked his head over the edge and saw part of the yard and a phaeton standing there. The batman of the German lieutenant who was quartered on the Leshchinskis was brushing his master's clothes. Paul had often seen the lieutenant at the entrance to the homestead. He was a squat rosy-cheeked little man with tiny close-clipped little moustache, pince-nez and a cap with a patent-leather peak. Paul also knew that the lieutenant lived in the side room, the window of which gave on to the garden and was visible from the roof. At this very moment the lieutenant was seated at the table writing. Then he took what he had written and went out. He handed the letter to his batman and then he went down the garden path towards the wicket which gave on to the street. But when he reached the rustic summer-house he stopped and was obviously talking to someone. Nelly Leshchinski came out. He took her arm and they went down the garden and out into the street.

Paul observed all this. And he was just going to doze off when he saw the batman go into the lieutenant's room and hang up his discarded uniform and then open the window and tidy up. Then the man went out and shut the door after him. A moment later Paul saw him at the stables, where the horses were waiting.

Through the open window Paul could see the whole room very clearly. On the table lay some straps and something which glittered. Paul was now driven on by curiosity and he climbed up the cherry tree and dropped down into the Leshchinskis' garden. He bent low and

a few quick strides brought him to the open window—it was on the ground floor—and he could see in. On the table lay a belt with a scabbard and a holster and in the holster a lovely twelve-chambered *Mannlicher*.

Paul caught his breath. For a few seconds there was an inward struggle, and then, spurred by desperate courage, he bent over, seized the holster, pulled out the highly-burnished new revolver, and jumped down from the window. He glanced quickly round, and then cautiously slipped the revolver into his pocket and rushed across the garden to the cherry tree. He clambered up like a monkey, on to the roof, and only then glanced back. The batman was peacefully chatting to the stableman. The garden was quiet. . . . He slipped off the shed and rushed home.

His mother was busy in the kitchen preparing dinner, and she took no notice of him. He took a piece of rag he found behind the chest and stuck it into his pocket, and then slipped out unnoticed and ran across the garden, over the fence, and along the road which led to the woods. Holding the heavy revolver, which was thumping against his leg, he made all speed to the old brick works, which were in a state of ruin. His feet scarcely touched the ground ; the wind whistled in his ears.

All was quiet at the old brick works. The roofs crumbled in in places and the piles of broken bricks and the ruined baking ovens made a mournful impression ; the whole was grown over with weeds. It was only the three boys who sometimes gathered there for their games. Paul knew a number of quite safe secret hiding-places in which he could preserve the stolen treasure.

Through a crack he clambered into one of the ovens, then looked cautiously round him ; the coast was clear. The pines were murmuring softly and a light wind was stirring the roadside dust. There was a strong odour of resin. Paul put the revolver, wrapped in rag, at the bottom of the stove, and then covered it with a little pyramid of old bricks. He went outside and filled up the entrance with bricks, noted their position, and then made for the road and went quietly home. His legs, though, were trembling at the knees.

He went to work earlier than he need, just to get away from home. He took the key from the watchman and opened the wide door into the engine-room. And while he was cleaning the bellows and pumping water into the boiler and lighting the fires, he wondered what was happening at the Leshchinskis. Quite late that night at about eleven, Zhoukhraï came in to him and called him outside and asked quietly : " Why have the authorities been searching your house to-day ? " Paul started in fear. " What search ? " Zhoukhraï after a moment's silence said : " They've been searching. I don't like the look of it. So you don't know what they were after ? "

Of course Paul knew quite well, but he saw he had better not tell Zhoukhraï about stealing the revolver. So, though he was trembling with alarm, he only said : " Have they arrested Artem ? " Zhoukhraï said : " Nobody's been arrested, but they've combed the house from top to bottom. "

When he heard nobody had been arrested he felt easier, but still he was very alarmed. For a few minutes both thought their own thoughts. One was alarmed because he knew what they were looking for—the other because

he did not know. Zhoukhraï thought: "Perhaps they have ferreted out something about me? Artem knows nothing about me—but yet why should they pick on his house to search?" And he decided in future to be more on his guard.

CHAPTER THREE

TONIA stood by the open window and looked dismally out at the familiar home garden and the straight tall poplars bordering it, now quivering faintly in the light breeze. It was hard to believe that it was a whole year since she had been there ; it seemed that she had left that scene familiar from childhood only yesterday—and come back by the morning train the next day. Not a thing had changed. There were the same neat and tidy rows of plants, the same geometrical scheme of paths with borders of her mother's favourite pansies. Everything in the garden was spick and span—not a weed to be seen. The persistent hand of the skilled forester—Tonia's father—left its mark, and the result was that Tonia was bored.

She took up the novel she was reading, opened the door on to the veranda, and went down the stairs into the garden. She pushed open the little wicket and went over to the lake beside which was the Shepetovka Junction water-pumping plant ; then over the bridge and out on to the road. The road was like an avenue in a park ; on the right was the stretch of water bordered by pollards and osiers ; on the left the forest began. She was thinking of going to the lake and the old quarry, but she caught sight of a float flying out over the water, and stopped short. She bent down over a gnarled willow, parting the foliage, and then saw a darkly tanned barefoot lad with his trousers hitched up over his knees,

and a rusty tin full of worms at his side. The youth was completely absorbed in his task and did not notice Tonia's eyes fixed on him.

"Are there really any fish to catch here?"

Paul swung round, angry. He saw a girl he did not know hanging on to a willow and bending right over the water. She was wearing a white sailor suit with blue stripes on the collar and a short light grey skirt: short stockings with clocks were tightly drawn over her well-made sun-burned legs and she had on little brown shoes. Her chestnut hair was plaited into one heavy rope. The hand holding the rod jerked ever so slightly and the goose-feather float dipped its head, and ripples circled away from it over the unruffled surface of the water. He heard her soft voice behind him: "There's one biting, look, there's one biting. . . ."

Paul quite lost his head and jerked hard at the line, he brought the hook with the worm on it flying into the air with a great deal of spray. "What a bore," he said to himself. "Now you're going to catch a fat lot, with this petticoat poking her nose in," and in order to conceal his clumsiness he cast his hook as far out as he could—between two burdocks, just the very place where he ought not to have cast, as the hook might easily catch in the roots. As soon as he noticed what he had done, without turning round he hissed back to the girl sitting above him: "Can't you hold your chatter! You'll scare all the fish like that." Whereupon from above he heard a mocking challenging voice say: "Oh, they've swum away long ago at the sight of your ugly face. Besides, who goes fishing in the afternoon? A fine fisherman you are!"

Paul was trying hard to preserve his dignity, but that

was too much. He got to his feet and pulled his cap well down over his forehead—always a sign he was riled—and then chose the most delicate words he could and said: “Now, miss, you might just go off somewhere out of the way, don’t you think?” Tonia’s eyes narrowed the merest trifle and sparkled for a moment with a smile and she said: “Am I really in your way?”

There was no taunt left in her voice, only something friendly and pacifying, and so Paul, who was quite prepared to be really rude, was disarmed, and said: “Oh, as for that, you can watch if you feel like it. I don’t grudge you the room.” And he sat down again and looked at his float. It was now close against one of the burdocks and it was obvious that the hook was caught in the roots. But he could not bring himself to try to pull it in. He said to himself: “If it catches, there’s no getting it free. And this girl of course will have the laugh of me. Why doesn’t she go away?”

But Tonia merely settled herself more comfortably on the bent willow which swayed a trifle, laid her book on her knees and gave herself over to watching the swarthy-eyed sun-burned hooligan who had given her such a rude welcome and was now deliberately ignoring her.

As for Paul, he could clearly see the reflection of the girl in the water. She was reading, so, on the sly, he began to tug gently at the line. The float dipped and the line grew taut. “Caught, damn it,” flashed his thought, and at the same instant a sidelong glance at the water revealed a pair of laughing eyes. Just then, over the bridge by the pumping station, came a pair of young men—lads in their last year or so at the public school. One of them was the son of the

stationmaster, Engineer Soukharko. He was a boy of seventeen with colourless hair and freckles, pock-marked, and a thorough waster; he was carrying a beautiful fishing rod and line, and had a cigarette rakishly tipped between his lips. With him was Victor Leshchinski, a tall effeminate youth.

Soukharko bent over to Leshchinski with a wink and said: "There's a peach of a girl, there isn't another like her about here, she's just full of romance. She's at school in Kiev—in the sixth form now; she's come home for the summer. Her father's the Chief Forester here. My sister Liza knows her. The other day I sent her a note, you know the sort of thing, full of fine phrases, to the effect that I was desperately in love with her and dying for her answer . . ."

"Well, and what was the answer?" Leshchinski asked with lively interest.

Soukharko was then rather at a loss. He said: "Oh, a lot of feminine nonsense, you know. Really, you know, I can't be bothered about it; such a lot of tedious courting would be needed. Far better to go down to the railway yards of an evening; for three roubles you can get such beauties they make your mouth water at the mere thought. And without all this romantic love business. I've been there with Valia Tikhonov—do you know him? Foreman on the railroad."

Victor Leshchinski frowned scornfully. Soukharko chewed at his cigarette with his lips and then spat juicily. He was going to say something else, but Leshchinski interrupted him and said: "Well, will you introduce me to this peach?"

"Of course. Let's hurry, before she slips away. Yesterday morning she was fishing here herself."

As they approached Tonia, Soukharko took the cigarette from his lips and bowed very ostentatiously. "How do you do, Mademoiselle Toumanov. Just a little fishing?"

Tonia said: "No, I'm watching somebody else fish."

Then Soukharko took Leshchinski by the arm: "You two don't know each other? This is my friend, Victor Leshchinski." In great confusion Leshchinski gave Tonia his hand. Soukharko tried to make conversation. "And why are you not fishing yourself to-day?"

Tonia said: "I forgot to bring my line."

Soukharko made haste to say: "I'll run back and get another. In the meantime, take mine. I'll be here in a minute." He had done as Leshchinski wanted—introduced them—now he was anxious to leave them alone.

But Tonia said: "No, we should only be in the way. There's somebody already fishing here."

"In whose way shall we be? Oh, that fellow?" And for the first time he noticed Paul sitting by a thicket. "Oh, I'll clear that fellow out in no time." And Tonia had not had time to say anything before he was on his way down to Paul. He said: "Now, come on, wind up your line, you, and clear out; quickly, when I tell you," he said, when he saw Paul sitting unmoved, "quickly, I say." Then Paul raised his head and gave Soukharko a glance which boded no good.

"Don't you make such a fuss; what are you gaping at, thick-lip?"

Soukharko was furious. "Wh-a-a-t! You've got the cheek to answer back, you miserable rascal. Clear off—at once!" and he launched a fierce kick at the tin

of worms, which went spinning away and splashed into the water so hard that Tonia was splattered all over. She called out: "Soukharko, you ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

Paul now leapt to his feet. He was well aware that Soukharko was son of the chief of the railway yards where Artem worked, and that if he now bashed in his rotten mouse-coloured jib, Soukharko would complain to his father and it would all come back on Artem. This was his sole reason for refraining from an immediate reckoning. As for Soukharko, as soon as he sensed that Paul was about to hit him, he rushed forward and with both hands pushed Paul, who was standing on the edge of the water. Up flew Paul's hands and he bent double, but he failed to regain his balance and fell into the water. Soukharko was anyway two years older than Paul and had a name as a first-class squabbler and bully. But that blow thoroughly roused Paul. "Oh, so that's it, is it," he cried, "well, come on then," and he gave Soukharko a short cut in the face, which, before Soukharko had time to collect himself, he followed by grabbing his jacket and jerking him forward into the water beside him: standing there knee-deep in the water, spoiling his brilliant boots and trousers, Soukharko tried hard to escape from Paul's iron grip.

A moment later, having thrust Soukharko down into the water, Paul clambered out on to the bank. Soukharko, furious, sprang after him, ready to tear him to pieces. But the moment he was on solid ground Paul swung round to face Soukharko and remembered: "Rest your weight on your left foot, let the right be a little bent and springy. Don't hit only with fist and arm, but with your whole body, aim at the chin and let the blow

start from your feet and go upwards." And so he did.

There was a harsh click of teeth. Then, squealing from the fearful blow on his chin and his bitten tongue, Soukharko clutched clumsily at the air and fell heavily back into the water. And on the shore there was Tonia laughing heartily.

"Bravo, bravo!" she cried, and clapped her hands. "Remarkable."

Paul seized his line, tugged at it till it broke, and ran back to the road. As he went he heard Leshchinski say to Tonia: "That is a notorious ruffian, Paul Korchagins is his name."

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The junction began to be uneasy. There was news from along the line that the railwaymen were coming out on strike. The men in the yards at the next large station had started it. The Germans had arrested two engine-drivers on suspicion of transmitting a call to revolt. At the same time the requisitions and the return of the landlords to their estates was causing great indignation among the workers directly connected with the villages. The lashes of the whips of the Hetman guards were furrowing the backs of the peasantry. A revolutionary movement was growing in the province, and there were already reckoned to be a dozen bands, partly organised by the Bolsheviks.

During those days Zhoukhraï had no rest at all. Since he had come to the town he had accomplished a great deal of organising work. He had got to know a large number of railway workers well and had become a guest at the evening gatherings of the young folk, and had

succeeded in building up a powerful group among the junction turners and the local timber-yard workers. He had tried to get Artem into it, but when he asked outright what Artem thought of the Bolshevik idea and the Bolshevik party, that hale and hearty fitter answered : "Well, Fiodor, you know, I'm not much good at these parties. But if I'm needed I'm always ready to help. You can count on me."

Zhoukhraï was quite satisfied by this answer. He knew that he could rely on Artem, and that if he were given any task Artem would carry it out. Otherwise he summed it up this way : As for the party, Artem had hardly grown up to that yet. "No matter," he said to himself, "in times like these he'll soon learn his A B C."

Meanwhile Zhoukhraï left the electricity plant and started working in the railway yards. It was better ; he was rather cut off from the railway before. The traffic through the junction was now very heavy. The Germans were busy transporting to Germany thousands of waggons of loot from the Ukraine : rye, wheat, cattle. . . .

Suddenly one day the Hetman's military police arrested the telegraphist Ponomarenko at the station. They took him to the Commissariat and beat him terribly, and evidently he told them about the agitational work of Roman Sidorenko, who was Artem's comrade in the station yards. Two Germans and the Hetman's lackey—the "Assistant Station Commandant"—came for Roman during work hours. They went up to the bench where he was working and without saying a word the Assistant Commandant lashed him across the cheek with his horse-crop. "Come with us, you scum ! There are

one or two little things for us to have a chat about." And then with an evil grin he jerked the fitter forward by the arm, and said : " We'll see what sort of agitation you do when we've got you."

Artem was working close by at the vice ; he threw his file down and bent towering over the Assistant Commandant and, restraining the fury boiling up in him, said hoarsely : " How dare you strike him, you swine ! " The Assistant Commandant fell back and unfastened his holster while a short, squat, short-legged German took his rifle with its broad bayonet from his shoulder, clicked the bolt and cried " Halt ! " and stood ready to fire at the slightest movement. The giant fitter stood helpless in front of the miserable little soldier, powerless to do anything.

Both were placed under arrest. Artem was released half an hour later, but Roman was locked up in the baggage room. Ten minutes later every man in the station shops had downed tools and assembled in the station park. Others joined them, shunters, pointsmen, store-workers. They were all in a state of great excitement, and a demand for the release of both Roman and Ponomarenko was written. The indignation grew still greater when the Assistant Commandant appeared outside the little park with a posse of his men and waved his revolver in the air shouting : " If you don't disperse this very minute I'll have every man of you arrested ; and some of you'll face a firing-squad, too."

But the savage shouts of the workers made him retreat to the station buildings. By this time lorries were already on their way from the town full of German soldiery summoned by the Station Commandant. The men then hurried home. They all left the station, even

those who were on special duty. Zhoukhraï's work was bearing fruit. This was the first mass demonstration at the station.

The Germans now mounted a large machine-gun on the main platform. It looked like a dog waiting on the leash. Beside it, hand ready on the handle, squatted a German corporal. The station was soon deserted. That night arrests began. Artem was among them. Zhoukhraï did not go home that night and they did not find him. The arrested men were taken to the main goods-shed and given an ultimatum : work or court-martial.

Practically all the railwaymen down the line were out. Not a single train went through that night, and seventy-five miles along the line fighting was going on with a large revolutionary detachment which had cut the track and blown up some bridges. During the night a detachment of German soldiers went to the station, but the engine-driver and his assistant and the stoker had run away and left the engine, and they could not leave. Besides that unit, two others were waiting to leave.

The heavy doors of the goods-shed swung open and the Station Commandant, a German lieutenant, his assistant, and a number of other Germans came in. The Assistant Commandant called out : " Korchagin, Politovski, Brouzzhak. You three are to leave at once with a train. The cost of refusal is immediate execution. Are you going ? " The three workers nodded sullen consent. They were taken to the train under guard, while the Assistant Commandant was calling out the names of another trio of driver, assistant driver and stoker, for another train.

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The engine savagely snorted spurts of gleaming sparks and breathed heavily as it crashed through the darkness and tore down the railroad into the night. Artem stoked up and slammed the iron door with his boot, took a gulp of water from a squat-nosed teapot standing on a box, and then turned to the driver, Politovski. Politovski was an old man. He said: "Well, daddy, so we're taking 'em." The old driver squinted angrily from under his overhanging brows. "So does anybody when he has a bayonet sticking in his backside." Brouzzhak said: "What about risking it and jumping off the train?" and he looked furtively at the German soldier seated on the tender. Artem grunted: "That's what I'm thinking about. Only there's that fellow watching us." "Ye-es," Brouzzhak said, indefinitely, and leant out of the window.

Old Politovski shifted nearer to Artem, and whispered very softly: "We can't take 'em. They're fighting away there. Our fellows who've raised the revolt have blown up the bridges. And here we are bringing these swine up; and they've the stuff to settle our fellows' hash in the twinkling of an eye. Don't you forget, my lad, even in the Tsar's time I never ran a train during a strike. And I won't now, either. It'd be a shame worse than death if I was the one to bring defeat for our own folk. Why, the engine teams have all gone off. They risked their lives, but they've done it. It's out of the question for us to deliver this trainload at its destination. What's your thought?"

"I'm agreed, but what are we going to do with *him*?"—and he shot a glance back to the soldier.

The old driver frowned, then wiped his sweating forehead with a handful of cotton-waste and shot a glance

at the manometer with bloodshot eyes, as if he hoped to find an answer to their agonising question there. Then his despair boiled over and he swore violently and savagely.

Artem took a drink from the teapot. Both were thinking of the one thing, but neither could bring himself to speak. Artem suddenly recalled Zhoukrai's question: "Old fellow, what do you think about the Bolshevik party and the Communist idea?" He recalled his own answer: "I am always ready to help, you can count on me." Fine help—transporting a punitive expedition.

Politovski bent down over the instrument case. He stood close to Artem. He said with difficulty: "Well, we'll have to do him in. See?"

Artem started sharply. Politovski grit his teeth and said: "There's no other way out. We'll bash his head in, put the regulator and the levers in the furnace, with the steam shut off, and slip quickly off it." And it was as if he had put down a heavy sack from his shoulders when Artem said: "Right you are." He then stooped down beside Brouzzhak and told him what they had decided.

Brouzzhak did not answer at once. They were all taking a tremendous risk. They each had a family at home. Politovski especially, he was leaving ten behind him. But they each knew that they could not take that train to its destination. And Brouzzhak said: "Well there's no other way, I'm agreed; only who's going..." He did not finish the sentence; Artem understood.

Artem turned back to the elder man, who was busy at the regulator and nodded to indicate that Brouzzhak was agreed too, but then, urged by a painful unsolved dilemma, he bent down nearer to Politovski and said: "But how shall we do it?" Politovski looked at him and said:

“You’ll begin it. You’re the strongest of us. One blow with a crowbar and it’ll be over.” But all the same, the old man was very upset.

Artem frowned hard. “I shall fail. Somehow I just can’t do it. After all, if you think of it, he’s a soldier, too, he’s not to blame. He, too, has come here at the point of the bayonet.”

Politovski’s eyes flashed. “Not to blame, says you? But neither are we, don’t you forget that, although we’re here. Don’t forget we’re transporting a punitive expedition. These innocent creatures will shoot down our revolutionaries, and those who are really guilty. . . . Oh, you milksop—strong as an ox and as much good as . . .”

Artem’s hoarse voice whispered: “Right you are,” and he picked up the crowbar, but Politovski whispered: “No, I’ll take it, I’m more reliable. If necessary you give him one with a shovel. I’ll make out I’m going to break up the coal.”

Brouzzhak heard what was said, and nodded and said: “You’re right, daddy.” And took his place at the regulator.

The German, wearing a peakless cloth cap with red border was seated on the edge of the tender with his rifle between his legs, smoking a cheroot. Every now and then he shot a glance at the workers in the engine. That was all.

When Artem climbed up to rake over the coal the guard did not pay any particular attention. When Politovski seemed to want to rake some larger cobs from the edge of the tender and by gesture asked him to move along a bit, the German quite obediently hitched lower down, towards the door which led to the cabin of the

engine. Suddenly a short, dull blow of the crowbar which crushed in the German's skull was heard by Artem and Brouzzhak and made them wince as if they had been burned. The German's body rolled limply on to the gangway between tender and cabin. His peakless grey canvas cap was quickly soaked with blood. His rifle clattered on the iron platform. Politovski whispered : "That's done," and threw away the crowbar. Then he shuddered himself and stood twisted, and added : "Now there's no way back."

His voice broke off, then he mastered the silence which had come over them all and shouted : "Come on, quick, strip that regulator off !"

Ten minutes later it was done and the train, deprived of any guiding hand, began to slow down. The dark outlines of the trees alongside the track flashed heavily into the fiery ambience of the engine and then vanished again into the eyeless darkness. The lights of the engine strove to pierce the darkness and flung their beams at its dense canvas, but never mastered more than a dozen yards ahead. The engine seemed to be losing strength ; its breath came slower and slower. Then Artem heard at his back Politovski's voice crying : "Jump for it, lad !" and he released the hand which was holding the lever. Inertia bore his heavy body through the air, till his feet struck the earth, which was wrenched away beneath them. He made two running steps and then fell head-long, turned a lumbering somersault. At the same instant two other figures leapt, one from each side of the engine.

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The Brouzzhak's house was in deep gloom. In the last four days Antonina Vassilievna—Sergey's mother—had

been completely distracted. There was no news whatever of her husband. She knew that the Germans had taken him, together with Korchagin and Politovski, for a special military train. The previous evening three of the Hetman's military police had come to the house and roughly examined her, asking questions about her husband. From the questions she had dimly grasped that something bad had happened, and as soon as the police had gone the poor woman, suffering from the terrible uncertainty, tied her kerchief over her head and decided to go to the Korchagins in hopes of finding out from Paul's mother what had become of her husband.

Valia—her daughter—was clearing up in the kitchen, and seeing she was going out, asked her: "Going far, mum?" And with eyes full of tears she answered: "To the Korchagins. Perhaps they will be able to tell me about your father. If Sergey comes home tell him to go down to the station, to the Politovskis."

Valia embraced her mother fondly and tried to calm her and went with her to the door and said: "Mummy, don't worry."

Paul's mother welcomed Antonina Brouzzhak with her usual warmth. Both women expected to hear something new from each other, but at their first exchange of words their hopes vanished. The Korchagins' house, too, had been searched the night before. They were after Artem. And when they left they told Paul's mother that as soon as her son Artem came home she was to report it to the Commandant.

Paul's mother was very frightened by that night visit of the military police. She had been alone. Paul, as usual, was on his night work at the power station.

Paul came home in the early morning. And when he heard his mother's story of the night visit and the search for Artem he felt his whole being fill with an aching worry about his brother. Despite the difference between their characters, and Artem's outward roughness, the two brothers were very closely attached to each other. It was a harsh love, with no declarations of affection, but Paul was quite clear that there was no sacrifice he would not make, and make without hesitation, if his brother required it. So without pausing to rest he ran down to the station to look for Zhoukhraï. But he could not find him, and none of the men he knew could tell him anything about any of those who had gone. Nor did the household of Politovski know any more. In the yard of their house Paul came on Boris, Politovski's youngest son, and from him he learned that their house, too, had been visited by the military police—looking for their father.

So Paul had to go home to his mother without any news, and, worn out, flung himself on his bed and sank into a restless flutter of sleep.

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There was a knock on the door. Valia Brouzzhak swung round. She cried out: "Who's there," and slid the bolt back. In the open doorway appeared the ginger touselled head of Klimka Marchenko. Evidently he had been running hard. He was red in the face and out of breath. He said to Valia: "Mother at home?"

"No, she's gone out."

"Where?"

"To the Korchagins, I think." But Valia then took Klimka by the sleeve—he was making off again—and held him back. He looked at her, undecided what to do.

Then he said : " I need to see her at once, something important."

But Valia still held him back. " About what ? Come on, don't waste time, tell me, you ginger-headed little bear you, tell me, I can't bear it." There was something commanding in her, and Klimka forgot all precautions and Zhoukhraï's categorical orders to give the note to none other than Antonina Vassilievna herself, and he pulled the grimy scrap of paper from his pocket and handed it to the girl. He could not refuse that fair-haired sister of Sergey's—because he never had been able to be quite sure where he was in his dealings with the girl. Of course the humble kitchen-boy would not for anything in the world have admitted that he was attracted by Sergey's young sister. But he gave her the scrap of paper and she read it quickly through.

" Dear Tonia ! Don't be worried. Everything is in order. We are alive and well. You will soon learn more. Tell the others that all is well, and they are not to worry. Destroy this note. Zakhar."

As soon as she had read this Valia rushed at Klimka. " You ginger bear," she cried, " you dear boy, where did you get this ? Tell me, you tongue-tied bear, you !" And she shook Klimka with all her force, and without knowing how or why he made his second mistake he said : " Zhoukhraï, down at the station gave it to me." And then, remembering that he should not have said that, he added : " Only he told me not to give it into anyone else's hands."

Valia laughed. " Oh, that's all right, I shan't tell anyone. Now, my pet, you run along to Paul. You'll find my mother there." And she gave the kitchen-boy a

light push in the back. And the next instant Klimka's ginger head had disappeared through the gate.

None of the three came home. That evening Zhoukhraï visited the Korchagins and told Paul's mother all that had happened on the train, and to the best of his ability he calmed the terrified woman and assured her that all three men had fixed themselves up well with one of Brouzzhak's uncles in an out-of-the-way village. He said they were in safety there, that of course they could not show themselves at present, but that the Germans were feeling the pinch and there might be changes any day.

All these events served to bring the families of the departed men closer together. They all read the rare notes they received with great delight, for their homes were very deserted and quiet.

One day, ostensibly by chance, Zhoukhraï dropped in to see old Mother Politovski, and gave her two Kerensky bank notes. "Here you are, Ma," he said, "here's something from your husband to keep you going. Only take care not to say a word to anyone." She shook his hand very gratefully. "Oh, thank you," she said, "we are so poor, there is no food even for the children."

The money was out of the fund left by Boulgakov. And Zhoukhraï, as he left the old woman, said to himself: "Well, well, we'll see what comes next. Though the strike did not come off, and the threat of death sentences keeps the boys at work, the fire is smouldering well, and they'll never put it out now. As for those three, what heroes, real proletarians."

In a miserable tumble-down old smithy with its smoke-blackened wall backing on to the road on the outskirts of

the village of Vorobiova Balka, Politovski stood by the fiery forge, and frowned slightly at the glaring coals, while with his pincers he turned the bar of iron which was passing the red stage. Artem weighed down on the bar of the bellows suspended from a rafter, and blew the fire. The engine-driver chuckled heartily into his beard and said: "Well, this shop won't go under in this village, there's more work than we can cope with. Another week or two and I reckon we'll manage to send our folk some bacon and a bag or two of flour. There's no getting away from it, lad, the peasantry have always got respect for a smith. Why, we'll get as fat as regular bourgeois here,"—and he chuckled again. "As for old Zakhar, he's a special case, he's very close with the locals, he's fairly dug himself in with that uncle of his. Well, I don't blame him. You and me, Artem, we haven't got any waggons or stackyards, only the sweat of our brow to keep us going, hundred per cent proletarians, you might say. But old Zakhar's between two stools, he's got one foot, you might say, in the engine-cab and the other in the cow-byre. . . ." He turned the iron bar again and then added in deep seriousness: "Only we don't stand too well, my lad. If the Germans don't get pushed off soon we shall have to make our way through to Ekaterinoslav or Rostov, or they'll get us by the gills and string us up half-way twixt heaven and earth before we can wink."

Artem muttered: "You're right there."

"And what about our folk there? How do they stand with those police bullies?"

"As for that, daddy, we've made our bed and we shall have to lie on it."

The old man took the bluish-white iron from the fire

and placed it quickly on the anvil. "Come on, lad, off we go!" And Artem seized the large hammer leaning against the anvil, swung it over his head and struck, and with a crisp sound the sparks flew in all directions about the smithy so that for a second the dark corners were lit up. Politovski kept the hot iron turning under the heavy blows and the iron flattened to each blow obediently as wax. The warm night wind blew in at the open door.

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The lake was below her, dark and vast; the pines which surrounded it swayed their lofty heads. Tonia was deep in the book which Leshchinski had lent her and so did not notice someone climb over the granite wall which separated the platform from the pine woods. It was only when the intruder dislodged a pebble, which fell on to her book, that she started in astonishment and looked up and saw Paul Korchagin standing in front of her. He was equally surprised by the unexpected encounter, and confused. He turned to go. He said: "What, did I frighten you? I did not know you were here. I didn't come on purpose."

"You are not in my way. If you like, we could even have a talk."

Paul stared at her in astonishment. "And what can you and I talk together about?"

She smiled. "Well, why don't you sit down? Look, you can sit here"—she pointed to a rock—"tell me what your name is."

"Paul Korchagin."

"And I am Tonia. There, you see, now we know each other."

Paul was shy and his hands nervously crushed his cap. Tonia broke the silence. "So you are called Paul? And do you often come here . . ." She nearly said "to bathe," but she did not want him to know she had watched him bathing, so she said: "for walks."

"No, not often, only when I happen to have time off."

"So you work somewhere?"

"I am a stoker at the electricity works."

And little by little Paul answered the girl's enquiries, till she said: "But tell me, why didn't you go to school longer?"

"I was expelled."

"Any why?"

He flushed. "Because I put some tobacco dust in the priest's *koulich*—so they turned me out. He was a bad-tempered old brute; made us all miserable." Paul told her the whole story, and she listened eagerly. And he began to lose his shyness and told her everything, as if they had known each other a long time; he told her, too, how his brother Artem had not come back. They were so engrossed in their talk that neither of them noticed that they had been there some hours. But suddenly Paul remembered the time and leapt to his feet.

"Why, it's time I was at work. What a talk we have had; I'd lost count of time, and I have to lay the fires; won't Danilo be furious now." He was all nerves again and said: "Well, good-bye, miss, I'll shall have to run for it."

Tonia got up quickly, too, and put on her jacket. "And I must be going, too; let us go together."

"Oh, no, I shall have to run hard, you couldn't keep up."

“ Oh, and why not? We can run together, we can have a race.”

Paul gave her a scornful look. “ Race? You race with me? ”

“ Well, let's see. Let's get out of here first.”

Paul jumped over the stone wall and helped Tonia over, and then they ran through the wood to the wide even forest track which led to the junction. Tonia stopped short and said : “ Well, now, come on, one, two, three . . . ” And off they rushed. The soles of her little boots flashed quickly and the tail of her jacket flew out in the wind. Paul raced after her. He said to himself : “ In two seconds I'll catch her up,” as he chased that fluttering jacket, but he only reached her at the end of the forest track, quite near the station. A sudden sprint and he flung his arm firmly round her shoulders, and cried triumphantly : “ There you are, the little bird is caught ! ” He was out of breath. She cried : “ Let me go, you're hurting.”

They both stood, quite out of breath, their hearts thumping, and Tonia was so exhausted by the wild race that she leant slightly against Paul—apparently without intention—and this made them closer friends still. It was only an instant, but it stuck in Paul's memory. Then she freed herself from his arms and said : “ You're the very first to catch me up.” Then they parted and Paul ran into the town, waving his cap back at her as he went.

When Paul went into the stoke-room the senior stoker, Danilo, swung round angrily. “ Oh, you needn't have bothered to come so soon,” he said, and then : “ So you think I'm going to lay the fires for you, do you? ” But Paul simply slapped him gaily on the shoulder and said good-naturedly : “ Don't you worry, old fellow, those

fires will be going in a jiffy." And he rushed at the wood-pile.

Towards midnight, when Danilo was lying on the bed snoring like an elephant, Paul finished his round with the oiler, wiped his hands clean on cotton waste, and then drew from his pocket the sixty-second instalment of *Giuseppe Garibaldi*, and was soon lost in that entrancing story of the endless adventures of the legendary leader of the Neapolitan "red-shirts." "*She shot a glance at the Archduke with her peerless blue eyes . . .*"—and Paul said to himself: "Yes, *she* has blue eyes, too. There's something special about her, too, she isn't like other rich girls. And can't she run!"

And Paul sank into deep thought, went over all the details of that afternoon's meeting, and simply did not notice the growing roar from the engine; it was vibrating from tension, and the huge fly-wheel was whirling at an insane pace, and the concrete platform on which it was mounted was quivering nervously. Then he glanced up at the manometer—the needle was some divisions past the red danger line!

"Oh, hell!" And he sprang down from the chest and flung himself at the lever controlling the steam-cock and gave it two whole turns, and through the stoke-room wall he could hear the steam hissing down the escape pipe into the river. Then he closed the cock and threw the belt over to the pump drive.

Only then did he look round at Danilo. Danilo was sleeping blissfully with wide open mouth, awesome sounds proceeding from his nostrils. Half a minute more and the needle of the manometer was back at its usual place.

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This first, still unconscious affection which had stolen into the life of the young fireman was extraordinarily new and so inexplicably disturbing ; the pugnacious, rebellious lad was definitely troubled.

Tonia was the daughter of the Chief Forester, and to Paul the Chief Forester was much the same as Leshchinski, the lawyer. Paul had grown up in poverty and starvation, and he was thoroughly hostile to anybody who was what he called "one of the gentry." So he was cautious and suspicious about this feeling he now had, because for him Tonia was something quite different from Galia, the stonemason's daughter ; he could not look on her simply as one like himself, somebody he could understand, and this put him on his guard against her, made him ready to resent any hint of mockery or scorn such a beautiful and educated girl might show towards a miserable stoker.

For a whole week he had not seen her, and now he made up his mind to go down to the lake. He deliberately took a path past her house, in the hope of meeting her. As he walked slowly along the fence round the house he espied the familiar sailor blouse at the end of the garden. He picked up a pine-cone lying against the fence and threw it at the white blouse. Tonia swung sharply round. When she saw him she ran to the fence with a happy smile and offered him her hand. She was really glad and she said : " So at last you have come Where have you been all this time ? I have been down to the lake. I forgot my book there. I thought you might come. Come in here, come into the garden."

But Paul shook his head. " No, I won't come in."

" And why not ? " Her eyebrows arched in query.

" Because I think your father would be very angry, and you would get into trouble on my account. They would

want to know why you'd brought such a ragamuffin into the garden."

Tonia was angry. She said : " Paul, you're talking nonsense. Come in at once. My father would never say a word, and you'll see that for yourself. Come on."

She ran and opened the gate, and Paul hesitatingly followed her in. When they had seated themselves at a round table in the garden she asked him : " Do you like reading ? "

Paul said : " Very much."

" What is your favourite book ? "

Paul thought a while and then said : " *Giuseppa Garibaldi.*"

" *GiuseppE Garibaldi,*" Tonia put him right—" do you like it very much ? "

He said : " Yes, I have read sixty-two of the instalments now. Every pay-day I buy five more parts. Oh, what a man that was ! " He spoke with enthusiasm. " There's a hero for you ! That's the sort of thing I like. What struggles he had against his enemies, but still he came out on top. He went to every country in the world. I'll tell you this—if he were alive to-day, I'd join him. He enrolled workmen in his company and struggled for the cause of the poor folk."

Tonia said : " Would you like me to show you our library ? " and she took him by the hand.

But he refused point-blank. " No, no, I won't go inside."

" Why are you so stubborn ? Are you really afraid ? "

Paul looked down at his bare feet. They were not any too clean. He scratched the back of his head, and said : " And your mum or dad really won't turn me out ? "

She flared up at that. "Oh, do stop that nonsense, or I shall really be angry."

"It's not nonsense. Leshchinski never lets people like us into his house farther than the kitchen. He goes into the kitchen to talk to the likes of us. I had to go to see him once on a job, and Nelly Leshchinski wouldn't even let me set foot in the house—I suppose, damn her eyes, she was afraid I should spoil the rugs." He smiled when he said that.

Tonia said: "Come on, Paul," and put her hands on his shoulders and in a friendly way pushed him up on to the veranda. She led him through the dining-room into a room with an immense oak cupboard. Tonia opened the doors and Paul beheld several hundred books ranged in even rows. He was astounded by such unheard-of riches. Tonia said: "Let's find you an interesting book at once, and you'll promise to come regularly and take books, won't you?"

Paul was overjoyed, and nodded assent. He said: "I do love reading."

They spent several hours together very happily, very content. She introduced him to her mother, and it turned out to be not at all terrible; Paul liked Tonia's mother. Tonia showed Paul her own room, her own books and her school books. There was a toilet table with a rather small looking-glass. Tonia led Paul up to it and laughed and said: "Why do you wear your hair so tousled? Don't you ever have it cut, don't you ever comb it?"

Paul said: "Why, I have it right off with the clippers when it gets too long; what else should I do with it?" He was rather put out by her question, and wanted to keep himself in the right. She only laughed and took a

comb from the table and with deft movements put his tousled hair in order.

“Now you look another being.” She examined and admired the result. “You should have your hair properly cut and not go about like a wild man as you do.” Then her eye fell critically on his faded yellow shirt and torn trousers, but she said nothing about those. Paul, though, noticed her glance, and this made him ashamed of his appearance.

When he left, Tonia did her best to persuade him to come in often, and made him promise definitely to go fishing in two days time. Paul left by way of the window—straight out into the garden. He could not bring himself to go through the house a second time and come across Tonia’s mother.

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With Artem gone things were difficult for the Korchagins ; Paul’s earnings were insufficient. Maria Korchagin decided at last to have a talk with her son, as to whether she should not start looking for work herself again—she had just heard that the Leshchinskis were looking for a cook. But Paul was against it. He said : “No, I’ll find some extra work myself. They’re wanting men down at the timber yard to lay planks. I can put in half a day there, and that ought to bring us in enough. I don’t want you to start going out again, or Artem would be angry with me. He would taunt me with not being able to manage without sending you out to work.” His mother tried to convince him that she should, but he would not hear of it, and at last she gave in to him.

The next day Paul was already at work at the timber yard, piling the freshly sawn planks on the drying

ground. There he found old friends—Mishka Levchouk, with whom he had gone to school, and Ivan Koushelov. The three of them made a bargain to work at piece rates, and they did not earn badly. Paul worked there every morning, and at night at the electricity plant. Ten days later he took home his first earnings there. When he handed the money to her he blushed and fidgeted about with his feet and then said: "Do you know what, you might buy me one of those blue sateen tunics—you know, like I had last year. It won't take more than half the money, and I shall earn more, don't you fear, and this one is so old . . ." He half excused himself. But she said at once: "Of course, of course, my dear, I'll get it to-day as ever is. It's quite true what you say, that one is shabby." And she eyed her son lovingly.

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Paul stopped outside the barber's and felt at the rouble in his pocket and then went in. The assistant was a sprightly young man, and as soon as he saw somebody come in he bowed him into a chair with his usual unction. Paul sat down in the roomy comfortable arm-chair, and then he saw his own confused, rather frightened face in the mirror.

"Clippers?" the barber then asked.

"Yes. No, that is. I mean, I want a trim. Isn't that what you call it?" and he helped himself out with a gesture of his fingers.

The barber smiled. "I understand, sir."

Quarter of an hour later Paul left the shop, wet with sweat and all confusion, but nevertheless properly cut and combed. The barber had had a long and tough job with his turbulent curls, but water and brush and comb had

won in the end, and his hair was mastered. Once outside, Paul heaved a sigh of relief and pulled his cap down further over his head. But he wondered what his mother was going to say when she saw him.

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Paul did not go fishing as he promised, and Tonia was hurt. She said to herself: "That grubby stoker isn't very polite," and she was annoyed. But when some days had passed without seeing Paul she began to miss him badly. One day she was just getting ready to go out when her mother half-opened the door and said: "A visitor for you, Tonia, can he come in?" And there stood Paul. But Tonia did not even recognise him at once. He was wearing a brand-new blue sateen tunic and black trousers. His shoes had been cleaned, and shone brightly, and—this is what Tonia first noticed—his hair had been cut, and no longer stuck up in all directions. The black stoker-lad was completely transformed.

She nearly expressed her astonishment, but she did not want to offend him, he was sensitive enough anyway, so she pretended not to notice the astonishing change. She simply scolded him: "Aren't you ashamed of yourself! Why didn't you come fishing? Is that how you keep promises?"

"I have been working in the timber yards and so I could not come." He could not tell her that he had worked himself to exhaustion those days to buy himself a new tunic and trousers. But Tonia guessed the truth, and her annoyance with Paul vanished without a trace. She said: "Let's go into the garden," and they went into the garden and thence down the road. And then,

as a great secret, treating her as a real friend, Paul told Tonia the story of how he stole the lieutenant's revolver, and promised her one day soon to take her to the woods and shoot with it.

"Now take care," he said, "don't you give the secret away." And without noticing it, as he said that, he passed from speaking to her in the polite plural "you" and said "thou."

Tonia said proudly: "I shall never give you away to anyone."

CHAPTER FOUR

A FIERCE and merciless struggle of class and class was gradually engaging the whole Ukraine. More and more people were taking to arms, and every clash produced new fighters. Those tranquil days when one just "jogged along" receded into a distant past. A tempest had sprung up and was making the dilapidated homes of comfortable people tremble, and those comfortable people were clinging to basement walls or home-made dug-outs.

The whole province was covered with a flood of Petlioura bands of all possible colours and shades: there were leaders—great and small, all manner of Goloubs and Archangels and Angels and Gordis and a myriad others. There were ordinary highway robbers, bands of ex-officers, right-wing and left-wing Ukrainian Socialist Revolutionaries—absolutely every possible kind of adventurer who could collect a band of cut-throats and declare himself "Hetman" or "Ataman" and unfurl a yellow-blue standard and say he was "for Petlioura," and so obtain such authority as his resources and following could establish. In fact, it was out of such a motley mob, reinforced by the richer peasant-farmers and the Galician regiments of Ataman Konovalyetz's army of occupation, that "Chief Ataman Petlioura" actually made up his "regiments" and "divisions." It was in that stormy sea of Socialist revolutionary and rich peasant turmoil that the Bolshevik partisan bands, compact of steel and scarlet, were struggling, and the very earth shook

with the hundreds and thousands of hoofs and Ukrainian waggons and gun-carriages.

And that April of 1919, a stormy year, those folk we may call the comfortable folk, frightened to death and stupid with their fright, would open their windows and peer out with sleep-laden eyes, and tremulously ask some neighbour who might be up a little earlier than they were, "Avtonom Petrovitch, in whose hands is the town to-day?" And Avtonom Petrovitch would hitch up his trousers and peer about him timorously and say: "I don't really know, Afanas Kirillovitch. There were some soldiers came into the town during the night. Let's wait a bit and see; if they start pillaging the Jews we shall know its Petlioura's men, and if it's the *tovarishchi* we shall know at once by their talk. I've been watching myself and wondering whose picture I ought to hang up to-day so as not to get into trouble myself. You've heard what happened to Gerasim Leontievitch, my neighbour, haven't you, he didn't keep his eyes open enough. The silly fellow went and hung up Lenin, and in ran three fellows—Petlioura's men, so it turned out—and the moment they saw that picture Gerasim Leontievitch was done for. They gave him twenty strokes, if you please. . . . They said: 'You bastard, we'll flay your ruddy Communist skin right off you.' And in spite of all his cries and protests there was no helping it."

And then, seeing some bands of armed men about, the fellow closed his window and hid. Troubled days these. . . .

As for the workers, they looked on the yellow and blue flag of the Petlioura gangs with hatred. They were powerless against that wave of the chauvinistic "Independent Ukraine" movement, and they came to life

only when a wedge of Red detachments, working in the neighbourhood, entered the town, fighting fiercely against the yellow-and-blues hemming them in on all sides. Every few days their own working-class Red Flag fluttered over the town prefecture, but the detachment would have to retire again, and darkness would return.

At the present moment the master of the town was one Colonel Goloub, the "ornament and pride" of the Trans-Dniepr Division. The previous evening his band of two thousand cut-throats had made a triumphal entry into the town. Milord the Colonel had ridden at the head of his men on a magnificent black three-year-old. Despite the hot April sun he was wearing a heavy Caucasian *bourka* reaching from neck to heels, a Zaporozhian cossack lambskin busby with flaming red lining, a *cherkesska* cloak tightly belted at the waist, and full equipment of arms—curved short sword, and long sabre, the hilt ornate with beaten silver. A fine fellow, Milord the Colonel Goloub: brows raven black, face ivory white with a faint tinge of yellow—from innumerable carousals. Milord the Colonel had often read about the Zaporozhian folk, and knew all the local Zaporozhian customs, and now he was playing the pure-blooded Zaporozhian as well as any actor of a travelling company. Between his teeth was a pipe. Prior to the revolution Milord the Colonel had been manager of the sugar-beet farm attached to the sugar refinery. But that life had been somewhat dull—not to be compared with the position of Ataman, and so here was Mr. Sugar-beet-manager bobbing about on the troubled waters which were flooding the country, tricked out as Milord Colonel Goloub.

In the one theatre the town boasted, a magnificent

banquet was arranged in honour of the incoming army. The "flower" of the Petlioura intelligentsia was all here: Ukrainian teachers, two sisters, the senior a beauty named Anna, and the younger, Dinā, various lesser ladies, former members of the household of Count Potocki, and a whole swarm of middle-class folk who, in the best Ukrainian tongue, gave themselves out as members of the "free order of Cossacks," and finally the dregs of the Ukrainian Social Revolutionaries.

The theatre was absolutely crowded out. The ladies—schoolmistresses and all the other small fry—were decked out in Ukrainian national costumes, very brightly coloured and lavishly embroidered with flowers, and with great show of multi-coloured necklaces, and they were surrounded by a grand suite of superior ranks with clicking spurs and accoutrements perfectly copied from old pictures, and representing "Zaporozhian cossacks."

The regimental band thundered out, and on the stage feverish preparations for showing the "national" play *Nazar Stodolia* went ahead. But the electric light was off—there was no current. This was reported to Milord the Colonel at his headquarters. Milord had the intention of gracing the performance with his presence, and he heard what his adjutant, who had the Ukrainian title "Khorounzhi Palyanytzya" (i.e. Lieutenant Polyantzev) had to say, and then in a lofty but decisive way said: "Let there be light. If it costs you your life, find a fitter and have the electricity turned on." Lieutenant Palyanytzya did not die and did find a fitter. An hour later two of his men were conducting Paul to the electricity plant. In like manner fitter and engine-man were found. Palyanytzya said curtly: "If there is no lighting by seven this evening, I shall have all three of you strung up," and

he pointed to an iron girder. Such brief indications worked, and by the appointed time there was light.

The evening was in full swing when Milord the Colonel and his woman appeared. His woman was the daughter of a bar-keeper in whose house he had lived ; a female with voluminous breasts and hair the colour of rye. The bar-keeper had been able to afford to have her educated in the largest high school in the province.

They took their places of honour up against the stage, and Milord the Colonel indicated that the performance might begin, and the curtain rose at once. The audience saw the back of the stage-manager as he hurried off the stage. During the play the superior ranks with their "wives" filled up with liquor supplied to the buffet by the indefatigable Palyanytzya, and with all manner of delicacies obtained by means of requisitioning. Towards the end of the play they were all very drunk. Then Palyanytzya most theatrically leapt on to the stage and waved his hand and declared in Ukrainian : "Noble seigneurs, very shortly dancing will begin." There was general applause, and everybody went out into the courtyard to give orders to the soldiery mobilised as guards for the evening, to carry out the chairs and clear the hall.

Half an hour later there was a general din in the hall. Petlioura's officers were quite drunk and were dancing the *hopak* wildly with local beauties crimson from the heat, and the thunder of their stamping feet made the very walls of the rotten old building tremble. Meanwhile from out by the windmill a detachment of armed horsemen drew near to the town. On the outskirts a Petlioura sentry-post with machine-guns noticed the oncoming cavalry and were alarmed and rushed to their guns and

there was a click of springs setting and the cry broke through the night : " Halt ! Who goes there ! "

Two dark figures came forward out of the darkness and one of them went up to the outpost and bellowed in a deep drunken voice : " I am Ataman Pavliouk with my detachment—are you Goloub's men ? "

" Yes," the officer who had gone out in front answered.

" Where can I quarter my men ? " Pavliouk asked.

" I'll ask headquarters immediately, by telephone," the officer in charge of the outpost answered and he disappeared into the tiny watch-house beside the road. A minute later he came out and said : " Well, lads, get the gun out of the way and let Ataman Pavliouk pass in." Pavliouk did not rein in till he had reached the lighted theatre, about which there was a great stir of people walking up and down. " Oho," said Pavliouk, " having a little amusement here, eh," and turned to the captain at his side. " Dismount, old fellow. We might as well have a fling too. Let's find ourselves a couple of wenches, there's ample choice here. Hi, Stalezhko, you see our lads are quartered properly. We're staying here. Personal guard follow me." And he sprang heavily to the ground.

At the entrance to the theatre two armed guards demanded his ticket. " Ticket ? " He merely looked contemptuously at them and shouldered one of them aside. The twelve men of his personal bodyguard did likewise. They left their horses outside, tied to the railings.

The newcomers were noticed at once. Pavliouk in particular stood out—a huge figure in officer's tunic of good cloth, blue guards' breeches and shaggy tall busby ;

a strap with revolver over his shoulder and a hand-grenade in his belt. And among those standing to one side of the dancers—at the moment Goloub's second-in-command was executing a wild dance—the question was asked: "Who is this?" The partner of Goloub's second-in-command was the elder daughter of the school-master. As she whirled round much too fast her skirts rose so high that, to the delight of the warriors round, her silk knickers showed. Pavliouk shouldered his way through to the heart of the ring. Then his clouded eyes lit on the girl's legs, and his tongue curled round his dried lips and he made straight for the orchestra, leant over the barrier, waved his plaited crop and cried: "Play a *hopak* and make it hot."

The conductor took no notice of him. Then Pavliouk's arm shot out and the whip lashed the conductor's back. The conductor jumped as if he had been stung. The music broke off immediately, and there was deathly silence in the hall. The bar-keeper's daughter cried: "What impudence!" and then: "You should not allow this," and she clutched nervously at Goloub's elbow—he was seated next to her.

Goloub rose heavily to his feet, kicked aside the chair in front of him, and in three strides reached Pavliouk. He stopped close against Pavliouk; he recognised him at once; Goloub had a number of accounts to settle with that rival claimant to local power. Only a week ago Pavliouk had done Goloub the dirtiest possible trick. In the heat of a fight with a Red regiment which had already given Goloub's men a tying-up a number of times previously, instead of striking the Bolsheviki in the rear, Pavliouk had forced his way into the local town, swept away the trifling Red units there, put a strong

guard round the place, and organised an incredible pillage. Of course, as befitted one of Petlioura's adherents, the victims were the Jews. And while this was going on the Reds made mincemeat of the right flank of Goloub's forces and got clean away. And now here was that impudent arrogant sergeant-major forcing his way in and having the impudence to strike his—Milord the Colonel's—bandmaster. Of course Goloub could not allow that. Goloub could see quite clearly that if he did not settle the matter once and for all there and then, his own prestige in the regiment would not be worth a farthing. And so the two men stood a few seconds, without a word, merely glaring one at the other.

Then, gripping the hilt of his sabre firmly in one hand and getting hold of the revolver in his pocket with the other, Goloub barked: "You ruffian, what do you mean by laying hands on one of my men?"

Pavliouk's hand crept slowly down to the butt of his Mauser. "Steady, Colonel Goloub, steady there, or you might find yourself tripping over. Take care of my favourite corn, I'm touchy about it."

This was the last straw. Goloub yelled: "Arrest them, take them outside and give them five strokes each!" His men rushed at the Pavliouk crowd like a pack of hounds. There was the flat sound of a shot—like an electric bulb bursting—and the fighting men began to swirl round and round the hall, in a blind scrimmage, slashing at one another with their sabres, grabbing at each other's hair or throats, while the women ran from them in all directions, squealing like pigs. After a few minutes they were kicking and striking and dragging the disarmed Pavliouk and his men out of the hall into the yard and into the street. In the scrum Pavliouk had lost

his tall busby, his nose had been bashed in and he had been disarmed. He was beside himself with fury. He and his men jumped on their horses and galloped away down the street.

The evening was broken up. Nobody felt like merry-making after such an event. The women categorically refused to dance and wanted to be taken home. But now Goloub became obstinate, and gave orders: "Not a person is to leave this building. Put the guards at the doors." Palyanytzya hastened to carry out the order. To the many protests Goloub had only one answer: "Dancing till daylight, worthy ladies and gentlemen. I myself shall lead off with a waltz."

Again the music struck up, but nevertheless there was to be no enjoyment. The Colonel had not got half-way through one round of the waltz with the parson's daughter when the sentries came running in shouting: "The theatre has been surrounded by Pavliouk's men." At that moment the window by the stage which gave on to the street crashed in and through the empty frame stuck the startling snub snout of a machine-gun. It turned stupidly to and fro, as if picking out the scattering crowd and everybody shrank back from it as if it was the devil himself. Palyanytzya suddenly fired at the thousand-candle bulb in the roof of the hall which burst like a bomb and covered them all with a rain of finely broken glass. Darkness fell on them. Somebody outside shouted: "Everybody come into the courtyard"—and accompanied it with foul and fearful language. Then the wild, hysterical cries of the women, and the maddened commands of Goloub, who was rushing about in the dark trying to assemble his disorganised men, and shots and yells from outside, all mingled into an incredible pande-

monium. Nobody noticed Palyanytzya make a flying leap through a window into the quiet back street at the back of the hall, and so to Goloub's staff headquarters.

Half an hour later a regular pitched battle was going on in the town. The silence of the night was broken by an uninterrupted string of shots and the neat tattoo of machine-guns. The comfortable folk were beside themselves with alarm ; they left their warm beds and clung to the windows of their house. But at last the shots died down, and all that remained was one machine-gun still persistently barking, like a begging dog, on the outskirts of the town. The battle was coming to an end. Dawn was glimmering. . . .

There were rumours in the little town that there would be a pogrom. The rumours crept about the miserable Jewish quarter with its low-pitched, poverty-stricken dwellings, with crooked little windows, clustering somehow above the cliff down to the river. In those boxes which were known as houses the poor Jews lived in unbelievable crowding.

In the printing works where Sergey Brouzzhak worked the compositors and workers were all Jews. Sergey had got to know them intimately ; they were one family together, solid against the master, who was a satiated self-satisfied fellow named Blumstein. There was incessant struggle between the master and the workers in the press. Blumstein's one aim was to get as much work as possible and to pay as little as possible for it, and as a result more than once the press had been closed for two or three weeks at a time. There were fourteen hands, and Sergey,

the youngest, had to turn the handle of a cropper for twelve hours at a time.

This particular day Sergey noticed the uneasiness of the men. During the past few troubled months the press had worked without knowing ahead what it was going to print ; it had been printing proclamations of the Ataman in command. Mendel, one of the men, who was consumptive, called Sergey aside. He looked at Sergey with his sad eyes and said : “ I expect you’ve heard there’s going to be a pogrom ? ” Sergey looked sharply at him, surprised. “ No, I had not heard.” Mendel laid his yellow, bony hand on Sergey’s shoulder and in a paternal way said confidentially : “ Yes, there will be one, that is certain. They will maltreat us Jews. What I want to ask you is whether you would help your comrades in this misfortune ? ”

Sergey said : “ Of course I will if I can. Tell me what to do, Mendel.”

The compositors were listening to their conversation. Mendel said : “ You’re a fine lad, Sergey, we trust you. After all, your father is a worker, too. Now run home at once and have a word with your father ; ask him whether he would consent to shelter a few old men and women ; and we’ll decide among ourselves who is to go to you. Another thing, find out where else we can hide some of us. So far these bandits don’t interfere with Russians. Run, Sergey, there’s no time to lose.”

He said : “ All right, Mendel, don’t fear, I’ll go and see Paul and Klimka too, at once—I am sure they will take some too.”

But Mendel was worried by something. “ Wait a moment,” he said, and stopped Sergey, who was off at

once. "Who are these two you mention, Paul and Klimka. Do you know them really well?"

Sergey nodded confidently. "Of course I do, they're my own pals; Paul Korchagin's brother Artem is a fitter."

This calmed Mendel. "Oh, Artem Korchagin. I know Artem Korchagin. I once lived in the same house. You can tell him. Well, off you go now, and hurry back with the answer." And Sergey made off at all speed.

The pogrom began the third day after the fight between Pavliouk and Goloub's detachments. Pavliouk was defeated and beaten off. He then occupied a smaller neighbouring town. In that night brawl he had lost two dozen men. Goloub the same. The dead were hastily carried out to the cemetery and buried the same day, without any ceremony—because there was nothing exactly to boast of. Two atamans had met and fought like curs; the least heard about it the better. The fracas caused some discontent in Goloub's regiment, particularly in Goloub's own division, which suffered the heaviest losses, and it was in order to silence that discontent and "improve the morale" of the men that Palyanytzya suggested to Goloub "a little diversion," as he cynically called the pogrom. He assured Goloub that the pogrom was essential because of the discontent among their men. So the Colonel—who was at first loth to disturb the peace of the town just before his own wedding to the daughter of the bar-keeper, submitted to Palyanytzya's menaces.

The riot began early in the morning. The town was

still floating in a grey night haze. The deserted streets, which surrounded the crazily piled Jewish quarter, were like sodden strips of canvas, and showed no signs of any life. All windows were blind, curtain-covered, all shutters tightly closed. From outside it looked as if those streets were deep in the unbroken sleep of early morning, but inside those miserable houses the folk were not sleeping. Every family was dressed and ready. They were all huddled in one of the rooms of each house ; only the little children who understood nothing of it all still slept their untroubled sleep at their mothers' breasts.

That morning the captain of Goloub's own body-guard—Salomyga, a swarthy fellow with gypsy features and a purplish sabre-scar on one cheek, had great difficulty in wakening Palyanytzya. He could not get free of a most idiotic dream, in which a grinning hunchback devil scratched at his throat. This had gone on all night and he had been unable to fight the devil off.

"But wake up, blast you," Salomyga said, as he shook him by the shoulder. "It's getting late. It's high time we began. You didn't have enough to drink!"

Palyanytzya now wakened completely and sat up, writhing from heartburn. His senseless eyes bulged at Salomyga. "Begin what?"

"What do you mean, asking 'what'? Gutting the Yids. Forgotten?"

Then Palyanytzya remembered. Why, yes, he had quite forgotten. They had drunk a damn lot last night out at the manor where the Colonel and his bride and a handful of bosom pals had gone.

It suited Goloub to be out of the town during the pogrom. That would make it possible for him to say

afterwards that it had all been due to a misunderstanding during his absence, and Palyanytzya would have a fair chance of doing the job thoroughly. Oho, a great man, Palyanytzya, at "diversions." And Palyanytzya now poured a jug of cold water over his own head and the power of thought returned and he strode about the headquarters and issued a string of orders.

The special division was already mounted. Palyanytzya, meticulous and far-seeing, in order to avoid any complications, had a flag put out to mark the boundary between the working-class houses and the railway workers' settlement and the Jewish quarter. In the Leshchinskis' garden he had a machine-gun mounted, to command the main road, so that if the workers started to interfere he could welcome them with lead. And when all preparations had been made, Salomyga and his assistant mounted their horses. And they were just setting out when Palyanytzya remembered something he had forgotten. "Wait a moment, I had forgotten. Get two carts as well. We must try to find old Goloub a wedding present. Ha . . . ha . . . ha . . . The first booty, as always, goes to our Commandant, and—ha-ha-ha—the first wench to me as adjutant. Get that, you old blockhead?"—the last epithet being for Salomyga. Salomyga leered at him with yellowed eyes. He said: "We shan't go short." And they set out. In front went the adjutant and Salomyga, and behind—their disorderly band of men.

The day was breaking and the haze melting. When they reached a two-floored house with a sign outside: "Fuchs—Draper and Haberdasher," Palyanytzya reined in. His slender-legged grey mare pawed uneasily on the cobbles. Palyanytzya dismounted. "Well," he said,

"D.V. here's where we begin." He turned to the men behind him and cried: "Well, you fellows, dismount. The performance begins. Boys, don't crack any skulls, we've plenty of time for that sort of thing. As for the girls, hold yourselves in till this evening."

One of the men bared his white teeth and protested. "Well, sir, but what if they themselves want a bit?"

A cascade of guffaws met this, and Palyanytzya shot a glance of real approval at the fellow who had spoken. He said: "Of course, if there's agreement, get on with the job, nobody has the right to forbid that sort of thing." He then approached the locked door of the stores and gave it a tremendous kick, but it was of good oak and did not even shake. The start had to be elsewhere. He went round the corner and made for the door to Fuchs' house, hand on sabre. Salomyga followed him.

Inside the house they had at once heard the horses' hoofs, and when the sound died down outside the shop and they heard the men's voices, their hearts seemed to be torn from their bodies and their bodies seemed to die. There were three in that house. Fuchs himself, a rich man, had fled from the town the previous evening with his daughters and his wife, and had left their servant Riva to look after the premises—Riva was a quiet, brow-beaten, nineteen-year-old girl. And so that she should not be frightened in the empty flat he had on his own suggestion brought her old father and mother to keep her company till he came home. Now all three listened to every movement in agonised hope. Perhaps they would go past, perhaps those they heard had not stopped at their house, perhaps it only seemed so. Then, as if to dash those hopes once for all, there came the heavy thump on the shop door.

The old man Peisakh, silver-headed, with the frightened eyes of a child, was standing by the door leading into the shop, and he now began to mutter a prayer. He prayed to All-mighty Jehovah with all the passion of a convinced fanatic, and he begged Jehovah to divert misfortune from that house. And his old wife standing beside him was not able to make out the sound of approaching footsteps at once, because of the noise of his prayer. Riva hid away in the farthest room behind the huge oak sideboard.

Then a crashing, harsh blow on the door of the house was reflected by a spasmodic trembling of the two old bodies. "Open this door!" There was a still stronger blow and the infuriated men outside swore fiercely. But the old people could not find the strength to raise their hands and loosen the bolt. Now there was a regular rain of blows of rifle-butts on the door, which began to dance against its bolts and at last gave way and fell in.

Immediately the house was filled with armed men rushing about into every corner. One blow of a rifle-butt smashed in the door which led from house to shop and they poured into the shop and undid the bolts of the main entrance. Then the looting began. When at last the two carts were filled with cloths and footgear and other booty, Salomyga set out for Goloub's quarters. He was on his way back again to the house when he heard a wild shriek.

Palyanytzya had left it to his men to gut the shop. He himself had gone back to the house. He cast a baleful glance over all three with his greenish lynx-like eyes, and then said to the old people: "You clear out." But neither the old man nor the old woman would budge.

Palyanytzya stepped towards them and began slowly to draw his sabre from its sheath. The girl uttered a piercing cry: "Mother!" This was the cry Salomyga heard.

Palyanytzya then turned to his mates who came in at the shriek and snapped out: "Take these two away!" and pointed to the old couple. And when they had gone he told Salomyga, who had arrived, to stand in the doorway "while this lass and I have a word."

When the old man, at a new shriek, rushed at the door, a heavy blow in the chest flung him back against the wall. He fainted from pain, but then old Toiba, who had always been a quiet old woman, seized hold of Salomyga like a fierce wolf vixen and Peisakh came to and rushed to her aid. "Let her go, let her go, oh my daughter!"

Between them the old couple succeeded in forcing Salomyga back from the door. Then he scowled and drew his revolver and struck the old man on the head with the butt and without a word Peisakh sank to the ground. Meanwhile Riva's cries came rending from the room. And when they dragged old Toiba out into the street, the old woman was out of her mind, and the street was filled with inhuman shrieks and prayers for succour.

The shrieks in the house had now ceased. Palyanytzya came out of the room. Then, without even looking at Salomyga, whose hand was already on the handle of the door, he said: "Don't go in there, she's passed out; I silenced her a bit too much with a pillow." As he stepped over the old man's corpse he trod in the thickening pool of blood. Through clenched teeth, as he went outside, he muttered: "This has begun all wrong."

The others followed him without a word, and as they

went, their feet left bloody footmarks on the floor and the stairs.

The town generally was now in desperate confusion. Brief savage skirmishes between bands which had to divide the booty were beginning, and sabres were flashing. Nearly everywhere there was hand to hand fighting. Barrels of beer were rolled out of the brewery. Then they started going through the Jewish homes. They met with no resistance. They plunged through the low-pitched little rooms and searched the dark corners and left burdened with booty. Behind them they left piles of rags, and down from ripped-up pillows and beds. The first day there were only two deaths—Riva and her father, but the night which was to come carried heavy sacrifice with it.

Towards nightfall the whole rag, tag and bobtail crowd of villains got blind drunk, and, stupefied by liquor, awaited the darkness. Night loosed their hands, as in the darkness it is easier to murder one's fellow-creatures. Even the jackal prefers the night, though jackals, after all, only attack carrion.

Many were never to forget those two terrible nights and three days. Innumerable lives were mutilated and ruined, innumerable young heads turned grey during those bloodstained hours, uncountable tears were shed, and it is even doubtful if those who remained among the living were happier, with their spirit laid waste from the ineffaceable shame and mockery they had suffered, with that ache of the heart which cannot be described, with that ache of the heart for the near ones lost. Young maiden bodies torn and tortured and twisted lay in the narrow alleys indifferent now to everything.

It was only down on the very edge of the town, at the

river, when they came to the cottage of a blacksmith named Naoum, and attacked his young wife Sarah, that they met fierce resistance. The athletic smith, in the full flower of strength of his twenty-four years, with the steel muscles of the anvil, would not give up his mate. There was a terrible and brief struggle in the little cottage, and two of the villians' heads were smashed in like rotten water-melons. Naoum was terrible in his fury, awesome because he was condemned, and he defended their two lives ferociously. For a long time the dry little reports sounded from by the river, where the Petlioura men, scenting danger, had collected. And when Naoum was at the end of his ammunition, he shot Sarah first, and then himself rushed to death with bayonet ready. He fell, mown down by a hail of bullets, on the top step of his house, and crushed the earth with his heavy body.

Meanwhile miserable peasants from neighbouring villages rode in on well-fed horses and loaded up their carts with whatever took their fancy, and then, accompanied by their sons and relatives from Goloub's regiment, returned two and three times to the village and back with booty.

Sergey Brouzzhak and his father had hidden half the printers in their attic and in the cellar. Coming back to their yard by way of the orchard he espied a man running along the highroad. It was an old Jew in a long-skirted, much darned and patched kaftan. As he ran he waved his arms desperately. At his heels, gaining rapidly, and bending ready for the blow, galloped a Petlioura man on a grey horse. When he heard the hoofs right at his heels the old man turned round and raised his arms as if to protect himself. Sergey rushed out into the road and

straight at the horse, shielded the old man with his body and cried : “ Don’t dare touch him, you swine ! ” But the Petlioura man did not attempt to stay the blow and merely brought it down broadside on to the fair young head.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE Reds began to press the forces of Chief Ataman Petlioura hard, and Goloub's regiment was summoned to the fighting line. Only a small force attached to the military command of the town was left behind. And then people began to get busy. The Jewish population took advantage of the temporary calm to bury their dead, and signs of life appeared again in the tiny houses of the Jewish quarter. In the evening quiet day after day a confused distant rumble could be heard—fighting somewhere.

The railway workers began to swarm from the junction over the country-side looking for work in the villages. The high school was closed. The town was under martial law.

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It was a sombre night, of impenetrable darkness, one of those nights when however wide one opens one's eyes one can see nothing, and everybody went feeling his way about blindly, liable at any moment to fall into a ditch and break his neck. And comfortable folk knew that the thing to do on nights like this was to sit snug at home, and not light a lamp either, unless they absolutely had to, because the light might attract unwelcome guests. Complete darkness was best, more secure. It was one of those nights, and a man was making his way through the inky darkness.

He reached the Korchagins' house and cautiously tapped on the window-frame. Then, getting no response, he tapped again, louder and more insistently. Paul dreamed that a strange creature quite unlike a human being was aiming a machine-gun at him and he tried to run away, but there was nowhere to go and the machine-gun hammered away terrifyingly. The very glass shook from the persistent tapping. Paul sprang out of bed and went to the window and tried to make out who it was knocking there, but he could make out no more than a hazy, dark outline.

He was alone in the house. His mother had gone on a visit to his elder sister, whose husband worked as engine-man at the sugar factory. And Artem was working in a near-by village as a smith; wielding a hammer for his board. It must be Artem at the window. He decided to open the window. "Who is there?" he asked the darkness. Then a shape outside moved and a harsh, deep voice whispered: "Me, Fiodor." Then two hands were laid on the sill and Zhoukhraï's face rose up beside Paul's. "I've come to you for a night's shelter. Will you take me in, boy?" he whispered. Paul answered warmly: "Of course, why ever do you ask. Scramble in through that window."

Fiodor Zhoukhraï's ponderous body squeezed in through the window. Zhoukhraï pulled the window to, but stood beside it for a few moments, listening carefully. Then the moon broke through the clouds for a moment, and lit up the road. Zhoukhraï looked carefully down it and then turned to Paul. "We shan't wake your mother? I expect she's asleep?" Paul told Zhoukhraï that he was alone in the house. Zhoukhraï then felt more at ease and in a louder voice said: "The swine

are on my track, lad, and hard on it. They're probing into that last affair at the station. If only the lads had been more compact during that pogrom we could have given them a hot time. But you know, the trouble is, the fellows still can't make up their minds to fight. So it fell through. And now they're close on my heels. Twice they've had a round-up and nearly got me. This morning I all but got caught. I come home, of course round the back-way, and I stop a bit by the shed—then what do I see but somebody waiting in the garden, squeezed up against a tree—his bayonet gave him away. Of course I did a bunk. And here I am. I think I'd better anchor here a few days. Anything against it? Well, that's first-rate." And Zhoukhraï wheezed as he pulled off his mud-spattered high-boots.

Paul was very pleased to see Zhoukhraï. Of late the Electricity Plant had not been working and Paul found time heavy in the empty house. The two of them went to bed. Paul fell asleep at once, but Zhoukhraï lay a long time smoking. Then he got up again and tiptoed on bare feet to the window. He peered down the street a long time, and only then went back to bed and succumbed to exhaustion and fell asleep. His hand was thrust under his pillow and lay on a heavy Colt and kept its handle warm.

Zhoukhraï's unexpected night arrival and a week's life with him had a great influence on Paul. For the first time the young stoker heard from the sailor much that was new and important and disturbing, and those days were decisive to him. The sailor was caught there as in a mouse-trap, and he utilised his forced inactivity

to communicate to Paul—who drank it all in thirstily enough—all the fire of his fury and his scorching hatred for the “yellow-and-blues” who were oppressing their Ukraine. Zhoukhraï spoke vividly and understandably, in simple terms. Everything was clear to him. He knew the road he had to follow well, and Paul began to understand that the whole tangle of various parties with fine-sounding names—Social Revolutionaries, Social-Democrats, Polish Socialists—were really implacable enemies of the working class, and the only unshakable revolutionary party, which steadfastly struggled against the rich, was the Bolshevik party. Hitherto Paul had been confused by it all.

And so that giant, a convinced Bolshevik, weathered by ocean storms, member of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party (Bolsheviks) since 1915, A.B. of the Baltic Fleet, Fiodor Zhoukhraï by name, told the young stoker all the harsh truths of life, and the young stoker held him fixed with fascinated gaze. Zhoukhraï said: “When I was a kid I was a bit like you, boy. I didn’t know to what to apply the life-force beating out of me, I was full of rebellion. I was brought up in poverty. I knew what it was to feel envy take possession of me when I caught sight of the well-fed sons of town gentry. I often used to fight them, but I never got anything out of it beyond a fearful drubbing from my father. You don’t change the shape of things by single combat like that. Paul, lad, you’ve everything in you for the making of a fine fighter for the working-class cause, only you’re still very young and you haven’t much of a notion of what the class struggle means. Now, boy, I’ll put you on the right road, because I know you’ll come to something. I can’t stand the smug sort. The whole world’s afire now. The

slaves have risen and they've got to put the old life under. But to do that we must have an organisation of tough fellows. We want people who won't run for cover like cockroaches out of the sun as soon as they see a fight, but who'll fight without mercy." And his heavy fist came crashing down on the table. Then he rose to his feet and thrust his hands in his pockets and started pacing up and down the room with a frown on his face. The inactivity weighed heavy on him. He very much regretted having stayed in that rotten little town, and as he was of the opinion that further stay there would do no good he was definitely decided on getting through the fighting-line to join the Red forces.

In the town he would leave behind him a group of nine party members, and they were to carry on the work. And as he paced up and down his thoughts were: "You'll get on without me, and anyway I can't stay on here doing nothing. As it is I've buried nine months."

One day Paul had asked him, "What exactly are you, Fiodor?"

Zhoukhraï had not grasped the meaning of the question at once. "Don't you know?"

Paul had answered quietly: "I think you are a Bolshevik or Communist."

Zhoukhraï had roared with laughter and thumped his massive chest in its tightly drawn striped jersey and said: "That's clear, boy. That's a fact of the same nature as the fact that Bolshevik and Communist are one and the same thing." Then he suddenly became very serious and said: "Since you have grasped so much, mark this—unless you want them to disembowel me, not a word to anyone about it. Understand me?"

"I understand," Paul answered firmly.

And now they suddenly heard voices outside and without a knock the door was flung open. Zhoukhraï's hand slipped quickly to his pocket, but was immediately withdrawn again. Sergey came into the room. He was very thin and pale, and his head was in bandages. He was followed by Valia and Klimka. Sergey shook Paul's hand. "What cheer, you blighter," he said with a grin. "We've all three come to pay you a visit. Valia wouldn't let me go alone, she's afraid for me. And Klimka won't let Valia go alone, for the same reason. Though he is ginger-headed he does at least understand whom it's dangerous to let go alone."

Valia laughed and sealed his mouth with her hand. "There's a chatter-box for you. He's been giving Klimka no peace at all to-day." And Klimka laughed good-naturedly and revealed a row of white teeth. "We have to make allowances," he said, "the poor fellow's brain-pan's a bit bashed, that's why he's like that."

Meanwhile Sergey, who had still not quite recovered from his wound, made himself comfortable on Paul's bed, and there was soon a lively conversation between the friends. Sergey had before always been jolly and cheerful under all circumstances, but now he was very silent and listless. He told Zhoukhraï how the Pctlioura soldier had struck him.

Zhoukhraï knew them all. He had often visited the Brouzzhak family. He liked those young people who had not yet found their path in the whirlpool of the struggle, but who were very symptomatic of the general urge of their class, and he heard with great interest how each of them had helped to hide Jewish families in their houses, to save them from the pogrom. That evening he told

them a great deal about the Bolsheviks, and about Lenin, and helped each of them to get a clearer understanding of what was happening. It was quite late when Paul's visitors left.

Zhoukhraï used to go out every morning, and get back during the night ; he was busy arranging with the comrades who were remaining in the town as to the work they were to do. This very night he did not come home. When Paul wakened the next morning he saw an empty bed. A vague foreboding seized him and he dressed quickly and went out. He locked the house and hid the key in the usual place and went to see Klimka, hoping to get some news of Fiodor from him. Klimka's mother, a squat broad-faced woman, all pock-marked, was washing, and when Paul asked her if perhaps she knew where Fiodor was she answered very shortly : " What are you thinking of, as if looking after your Fiodor is all I have to do ? It's on his account, damn him, that Zozoulikha's had her house turned inside out. And what are you needing him for, may I ask ? What's this all mean, you all stick together, a fine band you are, Klimka and the rest of you. . . ." And she crushed her linen furiously into the water. Klimka's mother was a bit that way, quarrelsome, you might say.

Paul then dropped in on Sergey. He told Sergey his worry. Valia came into the conversation. She said : " Why worry ? Perhaps he's stayed the night with friends." But her voice did not sound so very assured.

Paul was too uneasy to stay at the Brouzzhaks'. Despite their attempts to keep him there for dinner he left them. He hoped to see Zhoukhraï as he drew near the house, but the door was still locked. He stood still, his heart heavy ; the empty house was not inviting. And

for some minutes he hesitated thus in the yard and then, guided by a vague impulse, went into the shed. He clambered up under the roof where the *Mannlicher* was now hidden. He brushed the lace of cobwebs aside and drew out the heavy, rag-wrapped revolver. When he left the shed and could feel the weight of the revolver in his pocket, he went down to the station.

But he could get no news of Zhoukhraï. On the way back he lessened his pace as he passed the familiar homestead of the Chief Forester, and stared at the windows of the house with a hope he partly hid from himself. However, there was no sign of life in either house or garden. When he was already past, he looked back at the garden paths, still deep under last year's rusty leaves. It looked deserted, neglected. Clearly the hand of its careful owner had not touched it for some time, and that silence and the deserted look of the large old house made him still more miserable.

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His last meeting with Tonia had been the most serious he had ever had with her. It happened unexpectedly, nearly a month before this. And as Paul made his way back to the town, with hands thrust deep into his pockets, he recalled how they had fallen out. They had met in the street by chance and Tonia had invited him into the house. She had said, "Dad and mum are going to the Bolshanskis' to a party and I shall be alone at home. Come to see me, Paul dear. We can read a very interesting book by Leonid Andreiev—*Sashka Zhigouliov*. I have already read it once, but I should love to read it again with you. We'll have a lovely evening together. Won't you come?" And her large eyes watched him in

expectation from under the little white cap which confined her thick chestnut hair. He had said: "I will come." And they had parted.

He had hurried back to his engines, and the thought that he was going to spend a whole evening with Tonia made the furnaces—or so it seemed—burn brighter and the logs crackle more merrily.

That evening at his knock the wide front door was opened by Tonia. She was a little confused and said: "I have visitors. Paul dear, I didn't know they were coming, but you needn't go away." He turned towards the door to go. But she had then taken him by the arm and said: "Come on, Paul, it will do them good to meet you." And she put an arm round him and led him through the dining-room to her own room. As she went through the doorway she turned to some young people and smiled and said: "Haven't you ever met? This is my friend, Paul Korchagin."

At the little table in the centre of the room three persons were sitting. These were Liza Soukharko, a pretty brunette with a whimsical little mouth and her hair—although she was a schoolgirl—dressed in a coquettish way; a long-jowled youth with grey eyes and a bored expression whom Paul had never seen before, who was wearing a most correct black jacket and hair exquisitely plastered and shining with lotion, and then, between them, in a very smart high-school tunic—Victor Leshchinski. Paul saw him first, as soon as Tonia opened the door. Leshchinski recognised Paul at once and his thin pointed eyebrows rose in astonishment.

Paul stood still in the doorway a few seconds without a word, burning Leshchinski with a scornful glance. Tonia then tried anxiously to interrupt the awkward

silence and asked Paul to come inside, and turned to Liza and said : " Meet Paul Korchagin. . . ." Liza Soukharko had been watching Paul with curiosity: She now rose to her feet.

But Paul turned swiftly round and strode away through the half-lit dining-room towards the hall-door. He had reached the porch before Tonia caught him up and seized him by the shoulders and in great alarm said : " Why go ? I really did want them to get to know you." But he took her hands from his shoulders and answered harshly : " There's no reason why I should be made an exhibit of for that fellow ; they aren't people I can associate with. You may like them, but I detest them. I had no idea you were friends with them or I should never have come here."

Tonia restrained her indignation and cut him short and said : " Who gave you the right to speak to me like that ? I don't ever ask you who your friends are or who goes to see you."

Paul went down the steps into the garden. As he went he snapped back : " It's all the same to me if they come here, only I'm not coming any more." And he ran to the gate.

From that moment they had not seen each other. During the pogrom, while he and the fitter he worked with were busy concealing Jewish families at the electricity works, he forgot all about the quarrel. But now he felt he wanted to see Tonia again. Zhoukraï's disappearance and the loneliness he would now have to face in the house depressed him. The grey ribbon of the highroad, still not dried after the spring rains, and with the potholes full of brown liquid mud, bore round to the right. There was a house with crumbling and flaking wall sticking

out right into the road, and round the corner the road forked.

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At the road-fork, by the ruined kiosk, with its smashed-in door and a board saying "MINERALS", upside down, Victor Leshchinski bid Liza good-bye. He kept her hand in his and gazed meaningly into her eyes and said : " You will come, you won't deceive me ? " And Liza answered coquettishly : " I really will come, really. Expect me. " And as she went she smiled at him with promise in her misty hazel eyes.

When she had gone about a dozen paces Liza observed two men coming towards her from round the corner. In front was walking a stalwart deep-chested worker in unbuttoned jacket, under which could be seen a striped jersey, and a dark cap pulled well down over his forehead. She could see too that one of his eyes was blackened. He was striding firmly ; on his feet were yellow boots ; he was slightly bandy-legged.

Three paces behind him, with bayonet nearly pricking his back, marched a Petlioura soldier in grey tunic with double bandolier crossed over his chest. From under his shaggy sheepskin busby his narrowed anxious eyes stared at the back of the arrested man's head. His yellow moustache, dark from tobacco-stain, spread on either side. Liza lessened her pace a little and crossed to the other side of the street. Behind her Paul now came out on to the highroad, and as he turned to the right towards his home, he too saw the two men and his legs froze to the ground, because in the arrested man he recognised Zhoukhraï. So that was why Fiodor had not come home !

Zhoukhraï drew nearer and Paul's heart thudded with

terrible force, while his thoughts raced so fast that he could not get hold of them and shape them to clarity. There was too little time for meditation. One thing only was clear : Zhoukhraï was a lost man. And Paul gazed at him and his guard and was lost in a confused struggle, thinking what he should do.

It was at the last moment that he remembered the revolver in his pocket. . . . as soon as they were past him he could shoot the man with the rifle in the back and Fiodor would be at liberty ! And at that instantaneous decision the dance of his thought stopped short. He clenched his teeth so hard they hurt him. Why, it was only the previous day that Fiodor had said to him : " We must have an organisation of tough fellows. . . . "

Paul glanced quickly behind him. The street leading towards the town was empty, there was not a soul in sight. In front was a small woman or girl in a short spring coat hurrying along. She would not be in the way. He could not see the second side street counting from the road junction. It was only in the far distance, towards the main station, that some human figures could be seen.

Paul went to the edge of the path. Zhoukhraï saw him when he was a few paces away, and shot a glance at him with one eye. His thick eyebrows quivered a second. He recognised Paul and for a second he halted, and his back came up against the point of the bayonet and his escort cried out in a strained falsetto : " Come on there, come on, get a move on, or you'll feel this rifle-butt. "

Zhoukhraï lengthened his steps again. He had thought of saying something to Paul, but he restrained himself and merely made a gesture of greeting with one hand. Paul was afraid of attracting the attention of the guard, so he turned away to one side and let Zhoukhraï pass,

as if the pair were of no interest whatsoever to him. But now his head was being bored into by a troublesome thought—if he fired and missed the bullet might get Zhoukhraï. . . . And was it possible to think with that Petlioura fellow level with him?

And this is what actually happened: the ginger-whiskered convoy drew level with Paul, and then quite unexpectedly Paul threw himself on the man and grabbed his rifle and bent it sharply down towards the ground. The bayonet rang and scraped on a stone. The Petlioura fellow was not expecting the attack and for a moment he was quite flustered. But the next instant he was trying with all his might to free the rifle. He turned it round, twisted the lad's arms, but Paul would not let go. Then with a sharp movement the enraged guard brought Paul to the ground. But even that attempt to free the rifle failed, and as he fell to the pavement Paul pulled the soldier down on to him, and there was no force on earth that could have made him release the rifle at that moment. With two bounds Zhoukhraï was at his side, his iron fist swept through the air on to the soldier's head, and a second later the man had been dragged away from Paul and had received two tremendous blows in the face so that he rolled heavily into the ditch beside the road. The same powerful arms put Paul on his feet.

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Victor Leshchinski had gone some hundred paces from the road-fork. He was half-whistling to himself the song of the moment *Beauty's heart is ever fickle*. He was still under the influence of his recent meeting with Liza, and her promise to come to a deserted workshop the next day to meet him. Liza Soukharko had a name among

the womanisers of the high school as a girl of some daring in matters of love. One Semyon Zalivanov, an arrogant cocksure lad, had once told Victor Leshchinski that he had had Liza. And although Leshchinski did not quite believe him, Liza nevertheless was an intriguing and seductive "piece of goods," and it was Leshchinski's intention to find out the next day whether Zalivanov had lied or not. He was saying to himself: "If she comes at all I shall not hesitate. After all she lets you kiss her. And unless Zalivanov was lying . . .

Then his meditation was interrupted, and he drew to one side to let two Petlioura men pass. One of them was mounted on a dock-tailed pony and was swinging a canvas bucket—evidently on his way to water the horse. The other was wearing a short peasant's smock and extraordinarily wide blue trousers and had his hand on one knee of the mounted man, and was telling him some amusing yarn. Leshchinski let them pass and was about to go on himself when he heard a rifle bark somewhere down the road and swung round, in time to see the man on the pony jerk at the reins and gallop off towards the place whence the shot came and the other run after him waving his sword. Leshchinski ran after them too and when he had nearly reached the main road he heard another shot. Then round the corner straight towards him came the mounted man at a mad pace, kicking the horse and lashing it with his canvas bucket and rode into the first gateway and yelled to those in the yard: "To arms, lads, they've just killed one of our men." And a minute later a number of them ran out of that house with rifles clicking to the "ready" as they ran. Leshchinski was arrested.

By this time a number of people had gathered in the

main road, in the midst of them Leshchinski—and Liza too, detained as witness. Fright had kept her chained to the spot when Zhoukhraï and Paul ran past her. She had been amazed to see that the youth who had attacked the soldier was none other than the youth to whom Tonia had wanted to introduce her. One after another the two leapt over a garden wall. The very next instant the man on horseback came galloping into the high road. He was just in time to catch sight of Zhoukhraï making off with the rifle and the escort struggling to get to his feet, and he rode straight for the wall. Zhoukhraï swung round and raised the rifle and fired at him and he galloped back.

The escort could hardly move his bruised lips. He told what had happened. "You blockhead, what do you mean by letting a prisoner get away right under your nose? This'll mean twenty-five strokes on your backside for you. . . ." The man snarled back: "A lot you understand, that's clear. Let him get away under my nose! How was I to know that that other swine would suddenly spring at me like a madman?"

Liza was cross-examined. She told the same story as the escort, but she concealed the fact that she knew the man who had attacked the escort. They were then all taken to the Town Military Command, and were not released till the Commandant gave the word that evening. He offered to conduct Liza home himself, but she refused. He smelt of vodka, and his offer boded no good. Leshchinski took her home. It was a long way to the junction, and as he went arm in arm with Liza, he was grateful for the incident.

They were near the house when Liza said: "And do you know who it was set the prisoner free?"

"Of course not, how should I?"

"Do you remember that evening when Tonia wanted to introduce us to a certain young fellow?"

Leshchinski stopped short. "Paul Korchagin, you mean?" he asked in amazement.

"I think that is his name. Remember how strangely he left? Well, that's who it was."

Leshchinski was astounded by this. "Are you sure you have not made a mistake?" he asked Liza.

"Quite. I remember his face very clearly."

"Why didn't you tell the Commandant that?"

Liza was indignant. "Do you think I could do such a dirty thing?"

"What do you mean by dirty? So in your opinion, telling who attacked an escort is dirty?"

"Well, do you think it honourable, then? You have forgotten the sort of things they do. Don't you know what a number of Jewish orphans there are in the school, and you want me to tell them about Korchagin? Really, I should never have thought it of you."

Leshchinski had not expected such an answer. Yet he did not want to quarrel with Liza, so he tried to turn the conversation. "Don't be angry, Liza," he said, "I was only joking. I did not know that you were so full of high principles."

She answered very curtly. "A not very successful joke on your part." And when they reached her home and parted and Leshchinski said: "You will come, Liza?" he heard an indecisive: "I'm not quite sure yet."

As he made his way back to the town, he said to himself: "Well, if you call it dishonourable, I don't. Of course it's all the same to me who freed whom. . . ."

To him, a petty Polish nobleman by birth, both sides were equally distasteful. The legions of Poland anyway were sure to arrive soon and then there would be a real Government, a real aristocratic Government, a Rzeczpospolita. But what interested him in the incident was the definite possibility of finishing off that scoundrel Paul Korchagin. They—the Petlioura forces—would soon wring his neck for him.

Leshchinski was alone in the town. He was living in the house of an aunt, who was wife of the under-manager of the sugar factory. His father and mother and Nelly were living in Warsaw, where Sigismund Leshchinski (his father) now held quite a prominent post.

Leshchinski reached the Town Commandant's headquarters and went inside. Shortly afterwards he was on his way with four Petlioura men to the Korchiagins' house. "Here we are," he said, and then turned to the cornet at his side: "I can go now, I suppose?" "Of course," was the answer, "We'll manage the rest. Thanks for your services." And Leshchinski strode swiftly away.

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When Paul received the final blow in the back he fell forward, arms outstretched, against the wall of the dark room where he was brought. He felt something like a bunk, and on this, in pain from the beating he had received, and deeply depressed, he sat. He had been arrested when he least expected it. How had they managed to learn about him? Why, nobody had seen him! What was going to happen now? And where was Zhoukhraï? He had parted from Zhoukhraï at Klimka's. Then he had gone to see Sergej while Zhoukhraï waited

for darkness, to get out of the town. "What a good thing I hid the revolver in the raven's nest," he said to himself. "If they had found that all would have been up. But how did they find out?" That question puzzled him and agonised him.

The Petlioura men had not got much out of their house. Artem had taken his clothes and the accordion to the village. His mother had taken her chest, and though they combed through the house they did not get much. But Paul could not get out of his head the journey from his home to the military headquarters. The night had been pitch dark; the sky had been wrapped in cloud, and he had blundered along blindly and half-dazed, driven by blows from one side and another and from behind.

Voices sounded through the door. The military guard was in the neighbouring room. There was a bright streak of light under the door. Paul got up and felt round the walls to explore the room. Opposite the bunk his fingers found a window with a stout toothed grill. He tried it—it was solidly built in. Evidently this had once been a store-room. He reached the door and stood there a while listening. Then he tried the handle gently. It squeaked disgustingly. He swore: "It isn't oiled."

Through the narrow crack of the door as he opened it he saw somebody's horny feet with spreading toes dangling over the edge of a bunk. A little more pressure on the handle and the door began to open. Then a half-asleep, tousled-headed body got up from the bunk, scratching a lousy head with all five fingers. There was a flood of abuse, and when the eight-storeyed oath, pronounced in a monotonous measured voice, was ended, the man laid his hand on the rifle and said phlegmatically: "Shut

that door and if you so much as poke your nose in here again, you'll feel my fist. . . .”

Paul pulled the door to and there was a guffaw from the other room.

He turned over a good many things in his mind that night. His first attempt to take part in the struggle had not ended successfully. At the first step there he was, caught and shut up like a mouse in a trap. And when, as he sat there, he sank into a troubled half-sleep and his mother's face—her poor thin wrinkled face with those so familiar loving eyes—floated before him, his thought was : “ It's a good thing she's gone, that's less suffering anyway.”

There was now a grey angular patch on the floor— from the window ; the darkness was gradually retreating and daylight coming.

CHAPTER SIX

THERE was a light showing in only one of the rooms of the large old house. The dog Trezor on a chain in the yard suddenly barked in a deep voice. Through half-sleep Tonia heard her mother's quiet voice : " No, she is not asleep yet. Come in, Liza." There were light footsteps and then the impulsive loving embrace of her friend dispersed the last vestiges of sleep. Tonia smiled, a tired smile. She said : " You've come just at the right time, Liza, we're all in great spirits—Daddy passed the crisis last night and he's slept peacefully all to-day. Mummy and I, too, have been resting after sleepless nights. Well, Liza, what's happening in the great world ? " And Tonia drew her friend down beside her on the divan.

Liza laughed and looked slyly across at Tonia's mother. " Oh, there's a great deal to tell you. Only some things are for your ear alone." Tonia's mother, a very presentable lady in spite of her thirty-six years, with the lively movements of a young girl and wise grey eyes and a face which though not beautiful was pleasing and energetic, smiled at this and said : " Of course, I'll leave you two alone in a few minutes. But first let's have what news we can all hear," and thus teasing Liza, she moved her chair towards the divan.

" The first thing is that we've broken up. The school management has decided to issue to the seventh form certificates equivalent to matriculation. I am very pleased.

I was so tired of all that algebra and geometry. Why do we need to learn all that stuff? It's quite possible the boys will go on further, though they don't know where yet. There's fighting going on everywhere. Terrible. . . . We shall get married, and who wants his wife to know algebra?" And Liza laughed loudly at this.

After a few minutes with the girls Tonia's mother left them. Then Liza moved closer to Tonia and put her arms round her and told her all about what had happened at the road-fork. "And, Tonia dear, just imagine my amazement when I recognized the man as he ran away . . . now who do you think it was, guess!" Tonia, who had listened to the story with great interest, just shrugged her shoulders in complete bewilderment. And then Liza blurted out: "Paul Korchagin!"

Tonia started and shrank away as if hurt—"Paul Korchagin?"

Liza was satisfied with the impression she had made, and now proceeded to relate her quarrel with Leshchinski. And so wrapped up in the story was she that she did not notice the pallor which covered Tonia Toumanov's face, or the nervous way in which her fingers were plucking at the material of her blue blouse. Liza knew nothing about the terrible cramp gripping Tonia's heart, or why the lashes of her lovely eyes trembled so. Tonia, for her part, heard absolutely nothing of the story about the drunken Petlioura officer. She had only one thought—"Victor Leshchinski knows. . . . Why ever did Liza tell him?" And without thinking she put this question out loud. Liza did not grasp her meaning. "What's that?" she asked. "Why ever did you tell Leshchinski about him, I mean about Paul? Why, Leshchinski is sure to betray him. . . ."

Liza was rather indignant. "Oh no, he won't! I shouldn't say so. After all, why should he?"

Tonia sat down suddenly and her hands gripped her knees till they hurt. She said: "Liza, you just don't know anything about it! Why, Korchagin and Leshchinski are enemies, and there is another circumstance to take into account. . . . You've made a great mistake, telling Victor Leshchinski about Paul."

Only now Liza noticed how disturbed Tonia was, and the way in which Tonia had unguardedly spoken just of "him" opened her eyes to things she had not in the least suspected. And she felt rather guilty and was ashamed and subdued. "So that's it, is it," she thought. How strange of Tonia to fall like that—for a common workman. . . . She would very much have liked to discuss that very aspect of it, but a sense of delicacy restrained her. She wanted somehow to rectify her mistake, and she seized Tonia's hands. She said: "Tonia, my darling, are you very worried." Tonia answered in an absent way: "No. Perhaps Victor Leshchinski is more decent than I think."

A few moments later Demyanov, a gawky quiet youth in the same form as they were, came in. They had not said another word. And when at last her schoolmates left, Tonia stood alone a long time leaning on the gate looking down the dark strip of road leading to the town. The wind, the ever restless wind, breathed against her with its spring evening mistiness and damp chill. In the distance the windows of other houses on the outskirts of the town showed morose, dull-red twinkling lights. There it was, that miserable town she hated, and in it, under one of those roofs, ignorant of the danger threatening, was her rebellious chum. Perhaps he had even forgotten all

about her. How many days had passed since they last met! He had been unjust then, but that was all long forgotten, and if to-morrow she saw him again, the old friendship, so lovely and so disturbing, would return. Tonia was sure of that. If only the night did not betray them. Somehow such a sullen night, as if it was crouching and waiting to spring. . . . It was cold, too, and with a last glance down the road she went indoors. Once in bed and wrapped in the bed-clothes she contrived to fall asleep with the one thought—that night should not betray them.

Early the next morning, while the house was still asleep, Tonia awoke and quickly dressed, and then quietly, so as not to wake anyone, went outside, untied Trezor, and took him with her to the town. Outside the Korchagins' house she paused a minute, undecided. Then she pushed the gate open and went in. Trezor ran in front with wagging tail. This same morning, early, Artem had come back from the village. He had arrived on a peasant cart together with the smith for whom he worked. He shouldered the sack of flour he had earned and went into the yard, and the smith followed him with his other goods. When he reached the wide-open door he slipped the sack off his shoulders and called "Paul!" But there was no answer. The smith came up. "Get it indoors, what are you hanging about for?" he said. Artem put the things in the kitchen and then went through into the living-room. His eyes started from his head; everything was upside down; the floor was littered with old rags and garments.

"What the devil!" he grunted, in astonishment, and turned to the smith. "Yes," the smith said, "it is a bit upside down, isn't it?" Artem began to be angry.

"Where can that boy have gone?" he said. But the house was empty, and there was nobody to answer. He went outside and looked all round. He could not make it out. What nonsense was this—the house wide open and no Paul.

Then he heard footsteps behind him and turning round saw a huge shaggy dog facing him with ears pricked up, and coming towards the house from the gate was a strange girl. This girl looked him up and down and said very quietly: "I want to see Paul Korchagin." Artem said: "I, too, want to see him. I'm damned if I know where he's got. I've just arrived, and the house was wide open and no sign of him. You want to see him, you say?"

As answer he heard a question: "Are you his brother Artem?" He said: "Yes, what can I do for you?"

Then the girl instead of answering him stared with fear in her eyes at the open door. She was thinking: "Why did I not come last night. Is it possible, is it possible?" And the burden within her was heavier than ever. Then she asked Artem, who was staring at her all this time: "You say you found the house open and no Paul?"

Artem said: "Now half a minute, what exactly do you want with my brother?"

She said: "I don't quite know. But if Paul is not at home he has been arrested."

Artem started. "For what?"

Tonia said: "Come inside a moment."

Without a word Artem obeyed her. When she had told him all she knew he was despairing. "Oh curse it, three times curse it!" he muttered, brokenly. "As if things were not bad enough without this. . .

Now it is clear why the house is in the state it is. It's the work of Satan himself mixing that child up in all this. And where am I to find him now? And you, who may you be?"

She said: "I am the daughter of Toumanov the Chief Forester. Paul is a friend of mine."

"Oho . . ." Artem said, and it was not clear what he meant to say by that. "All the trouble there's been bringing that boy up, and to end like this. . . ."

Tonia and Artem watched each other without speaking. Then she said quietly: "I'll be going. You may find him. I'll come round this evening to find out."

Without a word Artem nodded assent.

A sluggish fly, wakened from its winter sleep, was buzzing in one corner of the window. On the edge of an old well-worn sofa sat a young peasant woman. Her elbows were resting on her knees and she was staring with aimless fixed glance at the filthy floor. The Town Commandant bit at his cigarette with the corner of his mouth and finished his writing with a grand flourish and then under the stamp "Commandant of the Town of Shepetovka," had great pleasure in placing an ornate signature ending with a very fanciful flourish. Then there was a rattle of spurs in the doorway and he raised his head. Salomyga, with one arm bandaged, stood before him. The Commandant greeted him with: "Where did you spring from?" Salomyga said: "I've sprung from having my arm cut right to the bone, that's where I've sprung from." And without any regard for the presence of a woman, he swore pungently. The Commandant said: "Oh, and so you've come here to

convalesce, is that it?" Salomyga said: "There'll be time for that in the next world. They're squeezing us at the front fit to make the pips squeak." But the Commandant nodded towards the woman and said: "There'll be time for all that later."

Salomyga sat down heavily on a stool and took off his cap with its cockade on which was a little enamel trident, the state emblem of the Ukraine Nationalist Republic. He said in a low voice: "Goloub sent me. There's to be a division of the Sichevy Sharpshooters pass this way. And anyway there's going to be doings here which I shall have to clear up. The great man himself may even come, so nobody here had better say anything about that little pogrom affair. What's that you're writing?"

The Commandant slipped the cigarette from one corner of his mouth to the other. He said: "I've got a youngster in there—remember that scoundrel Zhoukhraï we had collared down at the junction—the fellow who got the railwaymen against us?"

"Oh, ho, what's this?"—and Salomyga moved nearer in his excitement.

"Well, that dolt Omelchenko, who was commanding at the station, sent him here with a single Cossack as guard, and this young fellow I've got here just mastered him in broad daylight. The pair between them disarmed the Cossack and knocked his teeth out for him and were gone. We've lost all trace of Zhoukhraï, but we collared this one. That's the full story, read it"—and he pushed over a bunch of papers. Salomyga ran quickly through it, turning over the pages with his unwounded left hand. Then he looked the Commandant straight in the face and said: "And you mean to tell me you can't get anything out of him?"

The Commandant jerked nervously at the peak of his cap. "I've been struggling with him for five days now. And he still holds his tongue. Says: 'I know nothing at all about it, I didn't set him free.' A regular brigand. Understand, the Cossack recognised him, nearly strangled him to death, the little swine. Only got him off by force. Omelchenko ordered the Cossack twenty-five strokes when he got back to the junction, so he was a bit keen on settling the account. There's no point in keeping the little beggar here any longer, so I'm sending to headquarters for permission to finish him off."

Salomyga spat scornfully. "If I had him in my hands he'd find his tongue all right. You know, you don't know how to cross-examine. Whoever heard of a theological student making a Town Commandant? Have you had him thrashed?"

The Commandant blazed up. "You're going a bit too far. You can keep your sneers to yourself. I am Commandant here, so may I ask you to mind your own business?"

Salomyga shot a glance at the Commandant trying to be high and mighty and burst into roars of laughter. "Now then, don't you puff yourself up so, in case you burst. To hell with you and your business, better tell me where I can get a couple of bottles of vodka."

The Commandant smirked. "That might be possible."

"As for that fellow," and Salomyga pointed to Paul's name on the form—"if you really want to settle him, you alter that sixteen years old to eighteen years old. Look here, round the top of the six off and bring the line down nicely or they may refuse to pass it."

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There were three of them in that store-room. There was an old man with a long beard, in a threadbare caftan, lying on his side on the bunk with his spindly legs, in their wide canvas trousers, drawn up under him. He was there because the horse of a Petlioura man quartered on him had disappeared from his stables. On the floor was squatting a middle-aged woman with crafty, tiny thieves' eyes, and a sharp chin. She was an illicit vodka-maker charged with stealing watches and other objects of value. In the corner under the window, with his head on a folded forage cap, lay Paul Korchagin, in a half-conscious state.

A young woman with her head covered peasant-fashion in a coloured kerchief was led into the store-room with staring frightened eyes. She stood a moment looking about her and then sat down beside the other woman, who looked her carefully all over and then in a quick glib way asked: "You, my girl?" And as she did not get any answer she said: "What are you in for, eh? Is it anything in the vodka line?"

The peasant girl then got to her feet and looked at the persistent old woman and said quietly: "No, I'm here because of my brother."

The woman kept at it—"And what has he done?"

The old man intervened. "Why do you keep pestering her? Perhaps she's feeling bad, and you plaguing her."

The woman swung round towards the bunk. "And who appointed you to teach me my business? Was I speaking to you?"

The old man spat. "Hear what I say, leave her alone."

There was silence in the room. The woman spread out her large kerchief on the floor and lay down and

rested her head on her arm. The moonshining woman began eating. The old man lowered his feet to the floor, rolled a cigarette and lit it. Clouds of acrid smoke coiled through the room. The woman champed away with full mouth and then growled: "You might let me eat in peace, without that stink. You do nothing but smoke."

The old man sniggered and said: "Afraid of getting thin? Why, soon you won't be able to get through the door. You might give that lad a bite, you go on stuffing yourself."

The woman was offended and retorted: "I wanted him to, but he won't. As for you, shut your old mouth; it's not your food I'm eating."

The young woman turned to the other, and nodding towards Paul Korchagin, asked: "Do you know what he's in for?"

The other was pleased somebody had spoken to her at last and was glad to say: "He's the youngest son of Maria Korchagin, the cook." Then she bent down and whispered: "He freed a Bolshevik. A sailor. He's boarded with Masha Zozoulikha, she is my neighbour."

The younger woman then remembered the words, "So I'm sending to headquarters for permission to finish him off."

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One after another the troop trains poured into the junction, and out of the station the battalions of the Sichev Sharpshooters (Cossacks) poured in a disordered medley. The armoured train known as the *Zaporozhetz*—consisting of four coaches encased in steel, slowly crept up and down the tracks. Guns were dragged off, open trucks and

horses were unloaded from horse-boxes, saddled, and mounted on the spot, then the cavalry shouldered the shapeless crowds of infantry out of the way and got out into the station park, where they were forming up. Non-commissioned officers were bustling about shouting the numbers of their particular units. The station was a-buzz like a swarm of bees. Out of the shapeless mass of many-voiced confused men rectangles of battalions were gradually formed, and soon a broad stream of armed men was pouring into the town. All through the day till dusk the waggons were rattling through the streets with the stream of camp-followers of the sharpshooters who had entered the town.

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Paul raised himself to the little window, and through the dusk of early evening he heard the rattle of wheels along the street and the mutter of innumerable marching feet and endless songs. Somebody behind him said: "Well, so the army's come into the town." Paul turned round. This had been said by the girl who had been brought in the day before.

She told them all about herself. The vodka-moonshiner had had her way in the end. The girl was from a village about five miles from the town. Her eldest brother Gritzko was a Red Partisan, leader in the Committee of the Poor. When the Reds retired Gritzko had gone too, with a machine-gun cartridge belt round him. And now the family had no peace. They had had only one horse—it had been taken away. The girl's father had been taken away to the town and he had suffered severely while imprisoned. The village head was one of those on whom Gritzko had put the screw

and now he had his revenge by billeting all manner of people on the family, so that in the end they were reduced to beggary. The day previous the Shepetovka Commandant had appeared there rounding up men, and the village head had directed him to their house. He had taken good stock of her and set his eye on her, and the next morning he had taken her to town to be "cross-examined."

Paul could get no sleep. Repose had vanished for ever. He had only one thought in his mind, and he could not get away from it. "What was going to happen to him next?"

Already his beaten and bruised body was aching all over. The Cossack guard had beaten him with savage hatred. In order to keep his mind away from hateful thoughts he began to listen to the conversation of his fellow prisoners. The girl was telling them quite quietly how the commander had wanted her, had threatened and tried to talk her round, and then, when she still refused, had gone stark mad with rage. "I'll have you put in the cellar," he said, "and you'll never get out of it."

Darkness was beginning to envelop the corners and the stifling restless night was coming on them. Again Paul's thoughts turned to the unknown morrow. This was his seventh night there, and it seemed as if months had passed; it hurt cruelly to lie down, the pain was constant. Now again there were only three of them in the cellar. The old man was snoring on his bunk just as if at home—by his stove. The moonshine woman had been let out by the officer to forage out some vodka for him. Christina and Paul were lying on the floor, practically side by side. The previous day Paul had seen

Sergey out in the street. He had stood there a long time looking sadly at the windows of the house. Evidently they knew that he was there.

For three days chunks of sour rye bread had been handed in. Who had sent it they were not told. For two days the Commandant had plagued him with questions as to what it meant. He never admitted anything under cross-examination, but denied everything. Why he kept silence he did not quite know. He wanted to be brave, wanted to be strong, like those others of whom he had read in books, but when they had taken him and were leading him away through the darkness, when they were beside the hulk of the windmill looming in the dark and one of the escort had said: "Why bother to take him along, sir? Give him a bullet in the back and finish with it," it had been terrible. Yes, it was terrible to die at sixteen. Why, death meant an end to all living.

Christina too was busy with thoughts. She knew more than the lad beside her. Evidently he did not know yet. . . . But she had heard.

He did not sleep. He tossed about all through the night. And Christina was sorry for him, but she had her own sorrow too—she could not get out of her head the Commandant's terrible words: "I'll settle with you to-morrow. If you don't want me I'll turn you over to the guards. The boys won't say no. You've got your choice now." Oh, how hard it was to bear the thought of it, and there was no quarter to expect mercy from. What fault of hers was it that Gritzko had gone to the Reds? Oh, how hard life was! Mute pain clutched at her throat, helpless despair seized her, fear lashed at her, and Christina broke into subdued sobbing.

Her young body quivered from her crazed misery and despair.

A shadowy shape stirred in the corner by the wall. "Why are you crying so?" From Christina came a hot flood of whispering as she poured out her misery to her morose cell-comrade. He listened without a word, only his hand lay on hers. She gulped down her tears and with a horror she could not even know to the full she whispered: "Curse them, they will misuse me; I am in their power, I am ruined."

What could Paul say to the girl? He could find no suitable words. What was there to say? Life was hemming them in. Keep her from going out of that cell when morning came, fight? Then they would beat him nearly to death or bring their sabres down on his head and it would all be over. And then, at least to give that misery-poisoned girl some consolation, he stroked her arm gently, till her sobs died down. From time to time the sentry at the entrance challenged passers-by with: "Who goes there?" and again silence. The old man was sound asleep. Slowly the elusive minutes slipped past them. He did not at first understand what was happening when her arms laced tightly round him and drew him to her. "Listen, dear boy," her hot lips were whispering, "I am lost anyway; if it isn't the officer, those others will misuse me. Take me, dear boy, take me, just so that hound doesn't get me virgin."

"Christina," he cried, "what are you saying?"

But her strong arms held him. Her lips were hot and full and it was difficult to escape them. The girl's words were simple and tender, and after all he knew why. All the hard facts of the moment vanished, and he forgot the lock on the door and the ginger-haired Cossack and

the Commandant and the bestial thrashing and the seven choking sleepless nights, and for an instant there were only warm lips and cheeks damp from tears—and then suddenly Tonia came to his mind. He wondered how he could ever forget her, and her wonderful, dear eyes! And then he found the strength to break away from Christina. He got to his feet as if he were drunk and took hold of the grill. Christina's hands found him. "Why not, why not?"

What depth of feeling there was in the question! He bent over her and crushed her hands in his and said: "Christina, I can't. You are so fine . . ." and something else he said, only he forgot it immediately after. Then he stood upright and in order to break the unbearable silence went to the wall-bunk and sat on the edge and shook the old man and said: "I say, grand-dad, let's have a smoke, please." The girl sat huddled in the corner and sobbed.

At dawn the Commandant came to the cell and Cossacks led Christina away. She bid Paul farewell with her eyes, and there was reproach in them. The door banged behind her and the world was darkened and more hateful than ever to him. The whole day long the old man did not succeed in getting a single word out of him. The guard was changed and the officers on duty were changed. A new prisoner was brought in in the evening, and Paul recognised Dolinnik, the carpenter from the sugar factory. He was a well-built, squat man, dressed in a faded yellow tunic and a threadbare jacket. He examined the cellar with a stocktaking eye.

Paul remembered him in 1917, when the revolution first reached the town. He had heard only one Bolshevik speak during those noisy demonstrations—and it had

Big set scene

been Dolinnik. Dolinnik had climbed on to the wall alongside the high road and spoken to the soldiery. Paul had not forgotten his final words: "Lads, stick to the Bolsheviks, they will not sell you!" Since then he had not seen him.

The old man was glad to see a fresh face; it was evident that he found it difficult to sit through the whole day without a word. Dolinnik sat on the edge of his bunk and they had a smoke together and Dolinnik questioned him about everything. Then Dolinnik sat down beside Paul. "And what good news have you got for me?" he asked. "How did you get in here?" As he got monosyllabic answers Dolinnik felt that Paul did not trust him, but when he learned of what Paul was accused he stared at him in amazement.

"So it was you freed Zhoukhraï, was it? Well I'm damned. And I didn't know they'd got you."

Paul was so surprised he raised himself on his elbow. "What Zhoukhraï are you talking about?" he said. "I don't know anybody of that name. There's no end to the things I'm supposed to have done."

But Dolinnik smiled and drew nearer to him. "Right, boy," he said. "You needn't keep so mum with me. I know more about it all than you do." And then softly, so that the old man could not hear, he said: "It was I saw Zhoukhraï off, and he's through the lines now. He told me all about it." Then, after a minute's silence, thinking things over, he added: "It seems you're the right sort, lad. But you know, this business, being arrested, and them knowing all about it, it isn't any too good, in fact, it's damn rotten."

He pulled off his jacket and spread it on the floor and sat down, leaning his back against the wall, and began to

roll another cigarette. His last words had told Paul everything. Clearly Dolinnik was to be trusted. Once he had seen Zhoukhraï on his way. . . . Towards evening he learned that Dolinnik had been arrested while agitating among the Petlioura Cossacks. He had been caught red-handed, distributing leaflets issued by the provincial revolutionary committee calling on the soldiers to cross over to the Reds. But Dolinnik was cautious, and told Paul very little. "Who can tell," he said to himself, "they may flog him with gun-sticks and he's young yet."

Late that evening, when they were getting ready to sleep, he expressed his fears in a few words. He said: "Korchagin, you and I are in a pretty tight corner. We'll see what comes of it all."

The next day a new prisoner appeared in the cellar, Solomon Seltzer, a barber known to the whole town, a fellow with enormous ears and a thin neck. He was excited, and with much gesticulation said to Dolinnik: "And so you see, those creatures Fuchs, Bluwstein and Trachtenberg are going to give him a welcome. I said to them, if you want to, you do it, but who's going to answer for the support of the whole Jewish population? Begging your pardon, nobody. It pays *them*. Fuchs has got his shop and Trachtenberg has got his mill, but what have I got? And the other poverty-stricken Jews? Those beggared people have nothing. I at least have a long tongue. To-day I was shaving one of their officers, one of the new lot, sent in the other day. 'Tell me,' says I, 'does Ataman Petlioura know about the pogrom or not? Will he receive the delegation?' Oh, dear, how often have I not got myself into trouble through this tongue of mine! What do you think that officer did when I had finished shaving

him and powdered his face and done him well? He gets up and instead of paying me, he has me arrested on the spot for agitating against the Government!"

Seltzer banged his chest with his fist. "Agitation? What nonsense! What did I say anyway? I only asked the man a question—and they arrested me for it. . . ."

Seltzer worked himself up and as he spoke he twisted one of the buttons on Dolinnik's shirt or plucked at one or other of his arms. And Dolinnik smiled in spite of himself as he listened to the indignant Solomon. When Solomon had finished he said: "Well, now, Solomon, you're a clever fellow, but you have made a fool of yourself. A fine time to let that tongue of yours get busy. I should never have advised you to go getting yourself arrested just now."

Seltzer looked sharply at him, with understanding in his eyes, and then made a despairing gesture. The door opened and the moonshine woman Paul had already seen was thrust inside. She was furious and roundly swore at the Cossack who brought her: he slammed the door on her and they could hear the lock turned.

She sat down on the bunk, and the old man tauntingly greeted her. "What, here again?" She shot him a malevolent glance, took her bundle, moved over and sat down next to Dolinnik. The soldiers had got a number of bottles of vodka out of her and then brought her back.

They suddenly heard shouts through the door, in the guardroom, and quick movement, and a harsh voice issuing commands. They all turned their heads to listen.

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On the open ground by the simple little church with its antiquated bell-tower there were proceedings which

were novel to the town. Battalions of the Sichevy Sharpshooters, in full field kit, had made a hollow square to the full extent of the space available; in front, starting from the approach to the church, in ranks pressed against the school fence, reached the chequered squares of three foot regiments. The soldiers of the best fighting division of Petlioura's "Directory" stood with rifles resting against their feet, and clumsy Russian tin hats, like pumpkins split in half, on their heads, making a dirty grey mass. This division, well equipped in the remains of the former imperial army's uniforms, and more than half consisting of rich farmers who fought purposefully against the soviets, had been transferred to Shepetovka to protect the very important railway junction at that point. The glittering rails ran in five directions from the town, and if Petlioura lost it it meant losing everything. As it was, the territory left under his "Directory" was pretty dock-tailed, and could not boast a better capital than the very humble little town of Vinnitza.

The Chief Ataman had decided to review all units, and everything was ready for his reception. The regiment of new recruits had been placed in the rear ranks, in a corner of the square, farthest from sight. It consisted of young fellows dressed in any fashion and barefoot. Not one of those young village lads, dragged by night from their stoves by press-gangs or seized in the street, had any desire to fight. They said: "We've no enemies." The most the Petlioura officers had succeeded in doing was bringing them to town under guard and sorting them out into companies and battalions. The very next day a third of them had disappeared and every day there were less of them. It would have been worse than folly to issue them with boots, as the store of

boots was not so great, anyway. An order was issued for them to parade with "proper footwear," which had astonishing results. Where on earth had they found such a collection of rubbish which could be kept on solely by the use of pieces of wire and string? They were paraded barefoot therefore.

Behind the infantry stretched Goloub's cavalry regiment. The cavalry were keeping back the dense crowds of gapers, for everybody wanted to see the parade. Why, the Chief Ataman himself was to come. Such events were rare in Shepetovka, and nobody was anxious to miss the free show. On the steps of the church was a posse of colonels and other brass-hats, both the priest's daughters and a bunch of Ukrainian school-teachers, a group of "free" Cossacks, and the slightly hunchbacked chairman of the town council—in short, all the cream of Shepetovka, those who constituted Shepetovka "society," and among them, in *cherkesska* cloak, the Chief Inspector of Infantry. He was in command of the parade.

In the church, Father Basil decked himself out in his Paschal robes. They had prepared a really fine reception for Petlioura. A blue-and-yellow standard had been brought and erected, for the new recruits were to take the oath of allegiance. The Divisional Commander set off for the station to meet Petlioura with a ramshackle coughing old T-Ford. Meanwhile the Infantry Inspector beckoned Colonel Cherniak to him—Colonel Cherniak was a finely built fellow with a small moustache very nattily twirled. The Inspector said: "Take somebody else with you and go and inspect the rear command, see that everything is spick and span. If there are any prisoners, examine them all and get rid of the rubbish."

Cherniak's heels clicked and he took a Cossack Captain standing at hand, and hurried off.

The Inspector then turned very graciously to the elder daughter of the priest and asked: "How about the banquet, is everything in order?" "Oh, yes," she said, "the Town Commandant is looking after that," and she stared at the Inspector, who was a handsome man. Suddenly there was a stir and a rider came galloping down the road, flat on his horse. He waved his arm and shouted: "They're coming." The Inspector bellowed: "To your places!" and the officers rushed to join their men. When the T-Ford chugged up to the main porch of the church the band struck up the Ukrainian nationalist song.

Out of the car, at the heels of the Divisional Commander, clumsily climbed the Chief Ataman—Petlioura himself, a man of medium height with a block head squarely planted on a purple neck. He wore a blue Ukrainian coat of fine Guards cloth, drawn in by a yellow belt with a dainty little Browning in a soft leather holster attached. On his head he had a shrapnel-proof tin hat with a cockade bearing an enamel trident.

There was nothing exactly military in Simon Petlioura's appearance. He looked a real civilian. He was displeased by something as he listened to the Inspector's brief report. Then the chairman of the town council addressed a greeting to him. As Petlioura listened he stared over his head at the paraded men. He nodded to the Inspector. "Let's begin." He mounted a small tribune erected by the standard and made a ten-minute speech to the effect that they were to fight the Bolsheviks to their last gasp, as the Bolsheviks had destroyed the free Ukraine, and he, Petlioura, was the sole defender of the Ukraine—

of course, together with them, the soldiers. There was something unpersuasive in the speech. Petlioura spoke without any particular enthusiasm. He was obviously wearied by his journey. The end of his speech was drowned by the soldiers shouting—to command, of course—“Hail, hail!” Then he got down from the tribune and wiped his sweating forehead with his handkerchief, and, accompanied by the Inspector and the Divisional Commander, he inspected the various units. As he passed down the ranks of the new recruits he frowned scornfully and bit nervously at his lips.

At the end of the review, when the new recruits, company by company, were marching past the colours beside which stood Father Basil with a New Testament in hand, kissing first the testament and then a corner of the colours, there was an unforeseen incident. A delegation appeared on the scene and reached Petlioura, nobody knew how. There was the wealthy timber merchant Bluwstein in front, with a dish of the traditional bread and salt, emblems of hospitality, in his hands, and behind him the haberdasher Fuchs and three other larger business men. Bluwstein bowed and scraped like any flunkey and offered Petlioura the bread and salt. An officer standing by Petlioura took it from him. Bluwstein said: “The Jewish section of the population wishes to express its deep gratitude and respect for you, as head of the State. Will you please accept a list of signatories of this welcome.”

“Right,” Petlioura grunted, and swept his eyes over the list.

Then Fuchs spoke up. “We most humbly solicit the possibility of opening our shops and your protection against pogroms”—he squeezed the ticklish words out

with difficulty. Petlioura frowned savagely. He said: "My army does not deal in pogroms. You had better take note of that." Fuchs made a helpless gesture with his hands. Petlioura jerked one shoulder nervously. He was furious about the delegation coming like that just at the wrong moment. He spun round. At his back stood Goloub, biting at his black moustache.

"Here's a complaint against your Cossacks, Colonel. Find out what it means and take measures accordingly," Petlioura said, and then turned to the Inspector: "Let's begin the parade." The unhappy delegation had not in the least expected to come up against Goloub, and they withdrew with all possible haste.

Now everybody's whole attention was concentrated on the preparations for the ceremonial march. Sharp words of command snapped through the air. Goloub made for Bluwstein with a face which was completely calm, and whispered very clearly: "You get out, you damned heathen, or I'll make mince of you."

The orchestra blared and the march past began. The soldiers mechanically cried "Hail!" as they reached the place where Petlioura stood, and then they turned out of the main road into side streets. In front of their battalions strode the officers, waving their swagger sticks, very jaunty in brand-new khaki uniforms. The Sichevy Sharpshooters were the regiment which introduced the swagger-stick fashion.

The bare feet of the recruits rustled softly. Their officers made tremendous efforts to get them in order, but without success. As the second company drew near, the lad on the right, a young fellow in a linen shirt, gaped so persistently at the Chief Ataman that he put his foot in a pothole and fell headlong in the road, and his rifle

clattered over the cobbles. He tried to get up, but those following him bore him down again. A ripple of laughter sprang up among the onlookers. The columns got mixed up and the men began to cross the parade ground just anyhow while the unhappy youth collected his rifle and ran to catch up his own company.

Petlioura turned aside not to see this displeasing scene. He did not even wait till the end of the march past, but went to the car. The Inspector followed him and cautiously asked if he was not going to stop for the banquet. Petlioura snapped : " No ! "

Behind the high churchyard wall, among a crowd of other onlookers, were Sergy Brouzzhak, Valia and Klimka. Sergey clung ferociously to the rails and watched the men below him with eyes full of hatred. Then he tore himself away from the railing and turned to Valia and said in deliberately loud challenging tones : " Come on, Valia, they're putting up the shutters." Other people simply gaped at him, but without taking any notice of them he made for the gate, with his sister and Klimka after him.

Colonel Cherniak and the Cossack Captain galloped up to the Town Military Command and leapt from their horses. They handed the bridles to an orderly and strode swiftly inside. Cherniak asked the orderly sharply : " Where's the Commanding Officer ? " The man stammered : " Don't know, sir, gone out, sir. "

Cherniak examined the filthy guard-house. It had never been cleaned up. The beds were unmade and the Cossacks of the guard were sprawling carelessly on them, and did not even make an effort to get to their feet when officers entered. Cherniak bellowed : " What sort of a

pigsty do you call this? What do you mean by wallowing about like that, like a lot of hogs?" and made for the sprawling men. One of them sat up, belched comfortably, and growled in a morose voice: "And what are you blowing off like that for? We've got our own blower here."

Cherniak leapt at him. "What's that? Who do you think you're talking to? I am Colonel Cherniak. Ever heard of me, you lousy b——? To your feet at once, or I'll have you all flogged," and Cherniak ran round the guard-room. "Let this filth be cleaned up at once and have the beds made and put your own dirty faces in human order. What do you think you look like? Not Cossacks, but tramps." There was no end to his fury, and he kicked the large slop tub standing in his way. The Captain kept close by his side and swore roundly at them too, and persuasively waved his riding whip about, with its three thongs, and drove the lazy scoundrels off the beds. "The Chief Ataman is reviewing the parade, he may come here. Look alive!"

Seeing that things were looking serious, and might easily come to a flogging—Cherniak's name was well known to them all—the Cossacks began rushing about as if they had gone mad, cleaning up. The Captain said: "We'd better have a look at the prisoners. How are we to know whom they've got here? If the Chief looks in it might be pretty black." Cherniak asked the sentry who had the key: "Open that door at once," he said. A sergeant flustered up and unlocked the door. "And where's the Commandant here? Do you think I'm going to wait all day for him? Find him at once and send him here. Have the guard paraded in the courtyard. Why aren't the bayonets fixed?" The

sergeant said : " We only came on duty yesterday." He rushed off outside to find the Commandant.

The Captain kicked open the cellar door. A number of figures got to their feet, others remained lying down. " Open those doors," Cherniak ordered. " It's dark in here."

He peered into the prisoners' faces. He asked the old man on the bunk sharply : " What are you here for ? " The old man half got up, hitched up his trousers and, frightened by the sharp order, stammered a little : " I don't know myself. They arrested me, that's all I know. A hack disappeared out of my yard, but that was not my fault."

" Whose hack ? " the Captain put in.

" Why, a Government hack. My billets drove it away and then put the blame on me."

Cherniak shot a swift glance over the old man, from head to foot, and then gave an impatient shrug of his shoulders, and shouted : " Gather up your traps and clear out of here ! " and then turned to the moonshine woman. But the old man could not believe at once that he was being freed, and he turned to the Captain, his half-blind eyes blinking as he said : " So I really can go?" The Captain nodded : " Yes, clear out, as fast as your legs will take you." The old man hurriedly untied his bag from the bunk and quickly slipped out sideways through the door.

By this time Cherniak was questioning the woman : " And what are you in here for ? " The woman was eating a pasty, but she started to talk at once. " Injustice, sir, upon my word, sir. I'm only a widow, and they drank my home-made vodka and then they put me in here."

Cherniak said : " What, do you trade in illicit vodka ? "

“Trade, sir?”—the woman was hurt—“you can hardly call it trade, sir. Took four bottles from me and not a penny did they give me. What sort of trading do you call that? That’s what they all do, drink your vodka and then don’t pay. What sort of trade do you call that?”

Cherniak stopped her with: “That’s enough of that, clear out of here.” She did not want telling twice. She snatched up her basket, dropped a deep curtsey and backed out from their presence, crying: “Good health, to your honours, may you live long.”

Dolinnik simply gaped at this comedy. None of the prisoners could understand what was afoot. The only thing that was clear was that the strangers were some kind of superior officers with real authority. Cherniak took Dolinnik next. “And what’s your crime?” The Captain barked: “Stand up when the Colonel speaks to you.” Dolinnik got up slowly and heavily from the floor. “What’s your crime, I ask you?” Cherniak repeated. Dolinnik looked hard for a few moments at the Colonel’s finely twirled moustache and his smooth shaven face, and then at the peak of his new headgear and the enamel trident, and suddenly the dizzy thought flashed through his mind—what if it came off?

He said the first thing that came into his head. “I was arrested for being about in the town after eight at night.” And waited with agonising tension. “And what were you doing messing about in the night?” “It wasn’t in the night, it was only about eleven.” And when he had said this he could hardly believe his wild good fortune, and his knees shook when he heard the curt: “Be off with you!” He made for the door without even thinking to take his jacket. The Captain was already questioning the next.

Paul was the last. He was sitting on the floor, completely at a loss to understand what was happening, and had not even realised that Dolinnik had been discharged. He could not grasp what was happening. They were all being let go. But Dolinnik, Dolinnik. . . . He had said that he had been arrested for being out after curfew. . . . And then Paul understood. . . .

The Colonel began his examination of scraggy Seltzer with his usual: "What are you here for?" and the pale, troubled barber blurted out: "They say I have been carrying on agitation, but I can't see that I have been agitating. . . ."

Cherniak was on his guard at once. "What's that? Agitation? Agitation about what?"

Seltzer made a helpless gesture with his hands. "I don't know. I only said that signatures were being collected for a petition to the Chief Ataman from the Jewish inhabitants."

Both Cherniak and the Cossack Captain moved nearer to Seltzer. "What's this petition you are talking about?"

"A petition to put a stop to further pogroms. You know there was a terrible pogrom here. The folk are afraid."

"I understand," Cherniak broke in, "we'll draw up a petition for you, you dirty Jew." And he turned to the Captain and said: "This beauty had better be put in as safe a place as possible. Take him to headquarters. I'll have a little chat with him myself and find out who's thinking of collecting signatures." Seltzer tried to argue, but the Captain raised his hand in a flash and lashed him across the back with his horse-crop. "Hold your tongue, you swine!" Seltzer writhed from pain and fell back into the corner, and his lips quivered; he could scarcely keep from breaking into hysterical sobs.

While this was happening Paul got to his feet. There were only Seltzer and himself left. Cherniak stood in front of him and looked him all over with his black eyes. "Well, and what about you?"

The Colonel received a rapid answer to his question "I cut the side piece of the saddle up for soles."

"What saddle?" The Colonel was at a loss.

"We have two Cossacks quartered on us, well I took an old saddle and cut the leather up for soles, and then the Cossacks brought me here for doing it." And a crazy hope of getting out seized hold of him and he added: "If I'd known it was wrong, I shouldn't . . ."

The Colonel shot a scornful glance at him. "What this Shepetovka Commandant has been doing I can't make out; what a batch of prisoners, my god!" And he turned towards the door and yelled: "You can go. And tell your father to blow you up properly. Come on, quick!"

Paul could hardly believe his luck, but with a heart that was nearly bursting out of his body he snatched up Dolinnik's jacket lying on the floor, and made for the door. He passed through the guardhouse and slipped out into the yard behind Cherniak's back and so to the gate and out into the street.

In the cell the unfortunate Seltzer alone remained. He looked round with agonising misery and made a few steps without thinking towards the door, but at that moment a sentry came into the guard-house, shut the door, put the bolt across and sat down on the stool beside it. Meanwhile Cherniak, well pleased with himself, turned to the Captain and said: A jolly good thing we did look in here. Just think what a lot of rubbish . . .

we'll give that Commandant a fortnight or so. Well, we'll be off, eh?"

The sergeant was parading his men in the yard. When he saw the Colonel appear he ran up to him and reported: "All present, sir."

Cherniak set his foot on the stirrup and sprang lightly into the saddle. The Captain had a little trouble with his own high-spirited horse. Cherniak drew the reins in tight and said to the sergeant: "Tell the Commandant I have let all that harmless scum go. Tell him he's going to get a fortnight himself for the things he's done here. And bring the fellow under arrest there over to the staff headquarters at once. Keep the guard ready." The sergeant saluted and said: "Yes, sir." The Colonel and the Captain spurred their horses to gallop back to the parade, which was already over.

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When Paul had climbed over the seventh courtyard fence he paused, as he could run no farther. The days of starvation in that stifling, unaired cellar had completely weakened him. He could not go home; and if he went to the Brouzzhaks and anybody learned of it, the whole family would be made to suffer. So where was he to go?

He did not know what to do and so he ran on through the orchards and gardens and back-yards of the villas on the edge of Shepetovka, which was quite a country town. He only collected his wits on finding himself opposite a familiar fence. He realized that on the other side of this high fence was the garden of the Chief Forester. That was where his weary legs had taken him! Had he thought consciously of running there? No. But then how was it he had come just there and nowhere else? He could not tell.

He needed first to rest somewhere and then only to think what came next. In the garden there was a wooden summer-house ; nobody would see him there. He gave a spring, reached the top of the fence with one hand, clambered up and rolled over into the garden. He cast a glance at the house, partially visible through the trees, and then made for the summer-house. It was open almost all round. In summer it was walled in by a wild vine climbing over it—but now it was quite bare.

He turned back towards the fence, but it was too late : at his back he heard a furious barking. Down the leaf-covered path from the house a huge dog was rushing. Paul made ready to defend himself. The first attack he beat off with one kick. But the dog prepared for a second. And who could say how the fight would have ended had not a ringing voice Paul knew well cried : “Come here, Trezor, come here !” and Tonia came running down the path. She pulled Trezor off by his collar and turned to Paul standing against the fence. “However did you get here ? The dog might have bitten you badly. Lucky I . . .”

She stopped short and her eyes opened wide. How extraordinarily like the Paul she had known was this lad who had come into her garden in some unknown way. Then the lad by the fence moved and said softly : “You . . . you recognize me ?”

Tonia cried out and stepped impulsively towards him.

“Paul, darling—you !”

Trezor interpreted her cry as a signal to attack and leapt furiously forward.

“Go home !” And after a few kicks from Tonia the dog tucked his tail disgustedly between his legs and slunk

off towards the house. Tonia crushed Paul's hands in hers, and said : " You are freed ? "

" Then you know about it ? "

And without giving a thought to her own excitement Tonia said : " I know everything. Liza told me. But however did you get here ? Have they let you go ? "

Paul answered wearily : " By mistake only. I have run away. I am sure they are already looking for me. I found myself here without thinking. I thought I could rest in the summer-house." And then, as if to apologise, he said : " I am very tired."

For a few instants she looked at him, and then came a flood of pity and warm tenderness for him, she was overcome with delight and squeezed his hands. She said : " Paul, my darling Paul, my dear, my darling . . . I love you. . . . Do you hear me ? . . . My pig-headed boy, why ever did you run away that day ? Now you're coming to us to stay, to me. I should never think of letting you go. It's quiet here, and you can stay as long as you like."

But Paul shook his head. " And if they find me here ? I must not."

Her hands pressed his fingers harder than ever, her lashes quivered and her eyes gleamed. She said : " If you don't come you shall never see me again. Artem is not here, you know, he has been taken under guard to drive a train. All the railwaymen are being mobilised. Where are you to go ? "

He understood her trouble, but it was the fear of endangering this girl he loved that held him back. All he had gone through bore him down ; he so badly wanted rest. His hunger pained him and he gave in. While he sat on the sofa in Tonia's room there was the following

conversation in the kitchen between Tonia and her mother. "Listen, Mummy. Paul Korchagin's in my room. Do you remember him? My pupil? I don't want to hide anything from you. He was arrested for setting a Bolshevik sailor free. Now he has got away and has nowhere to hide or rest." Her voice shook. "Please Mummy, let him stay here for a while." Her eyes pleaded, while her mother tried to learn what was in her mind.

Her mother said: "Very well, I have nothing against it. But where can you put him?"

Tonia flushed scarlet, and in great confusion said: "In my room on the divan. For the present we needn't tell Daddy."

The mother looked into Tonia's eyes and said: "And this is why you have been crying so much?"

"Yes."

"But he's still only a boy."

Tonia plucked nervously at the sleeve of her blouse. "Yes, but if he had not escaped, they would have shot him just the same as they would any grown man."

The presence of Paul in the house worried Tonia's mother. She was worried by his being arrested and by Tonia's unquestionable affection for him; moreover, she really knew nothing about him. Tonia played a trump card and said: "Mummy, anyway he must have a bath. I'll fix that up at once. He's as dirty as a real stoker. He has not been able to wash for so long." She ran off and got things ready, heated the water and found fresh linen. Then she rushed in to her room and avoided any discussion by taking Paul by the hand and dragging him off to the bath-room.

"You must take everything off. There's a suit for you. Your things will have to be cleaned. Put on this", and

she pointed to a chair where a sailor blouse with a striped white collar and a pair of bell-bottomed trousers lay neatly folded. Paul stared about him in bewilderment. Tonia smiled and said: "It's my fancy-dress costume. It will fit you. Well, get along with it, I'll leave you. While you're bathing I'll get something ready for you to eat." And she banged the door. There was nothing for it but to undress and get into the bath. An hour later all three—mother, Paul and Tonia, were making a meal in the kitchen.

Paul was starving, and without noticing it he took a third helping. At first he had been shy of Tonia's mother, but when he saw how friendlily disposed she was towards him he became more at home. After the meal they went to Tonia's room, and at the request of Tonia's mother he told all he had been through. Mme Toumanov asked what he now intended to do. He thought a while, then he said: "I want to see Artem and then get right away from here."

"Where will you go?"

"I'll make for Ouman or perhaps Kiev. I hardly know myself yet, except that I must get away from Shepetovka."

He could hardly believe the rapid change in his circumstances—that morning he had been in the cell, and now he was cleanly dressed with Tonia beside him, and, principal thing of all, he was free. Life was like that—first all cloud, and then the sun breaking through. Had it not been for the menace of re-arrest he would at the moment have been quite happy. But it might easily happen that they would come on him even while he was in that large, peaceful house. He had to get away, not stay there. And yet he found he did not in the least want

to get away ! How interesting it had been to read about his hero Garibaldi—how he had envied him—and yet Garibaldi's life had been a hard one, he had been harried about all over the world. And he, Paul, had spent only a week in frightful misery, and it seemed a year. Evidently he was not going to be a very great hero himself.

Tonia bent over towards him and asked him what he was thinking of. Her eyes seemed bottomless, so deep blue were they.

He said : " Tonia, shall I tell you about Christina ? "

" Tell me, do tell me," she said.

He ended : " And that was the last we saw of her." He had difficulty in speaking. The clock in the room ticked very loudly. Tonia's head was bent and she was on the point of tears ; she was biting her lips fiercely. Paul looked at her, and said : " I must go away immediately, to-day." Tonia said : " No, no, you shan't go away to-day, nowhere."

Her warm slender fingers quietly crept into his tangled hair and straightened it, caressed him. . . .

He said : " Tonia, you will have to help me. I must find out in the station yards what has happened to Artem, and I must get a note to Sergey. I have a revolver hidden in a raven's nest. I can't go for it myself, but Sergey will have to get it. Can you do that for me ? "

Tonia got up at once and said : " I'll go immediately ; I'll find Liza Soukharko, and go to the yards with her. You write me the note for Sergey. Where does he live ? And if he wants to see you am I to tell him where you are ? "

Paul thought a while and then said : " Let him come to the garden to-night."

It was not till late that Tonia returned. Paul was sound

asleep. At the touch of her hand he wakened at once. She was smiling happily. "Artem will be here any minute. He has only just come back. Liza's father is going to answer for him and so they'll let him go for an hour. The engine is in the yards. I couldn't tell him you were here. I said I had something very important to give him. But there he is!" Tonia ran to the door. Artem was standing dumbfounded in the doorway, unable to believe his eyes. Tonia went out and shut the door, so that her father, who was lying convalescent after typhoid in his room, should not hear them.

When Artem's arms encircled Brother Paul, Paul's bones cracked. "Brother! Paul!" he cried.

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At last they made up their minds: Paul was to leave the very next day—Artem was going to arrange for him to ride in Brouzzhak's engine on a train going to Kazatin. Artem, by nature so dour, lost his balance; he had gone through such agony about his little brother, worrying about his lot, and now he was boundlessly happy.

"So," he said, "you come to the stores yard to-morrow morning at five, and while they're loading wood into the tender, you get aboard. I should like to have a longer chat with you, boy, but I must be getting back. I'll be there to-morrow morning to see you off. They're going to make a railwaymen's battalion of us—we shall have to work as we did under the Germans—with an armed guard."

He said good-bye and went.

Darkness deepened rapidly, and the time came for Sergey to come to the garden fence. While he waited Paul paced up and down the garden. Tonia and her

mother were with her father. It was dark when the meeting with Sergey took place and they shook each other's hands firmly. Valia had come, too. They spoke in low voices. Sergey said: "I haven't brought the revolver. Your yard is full of Petlioura's men. It's a base for their waggons, and they've lit a fire there. It was out of the question to climb the tree. What rotten luck." Paul said: "Forget it. Perhaps it's all for the best. They might find the revolver on me on the journey and that would be the end of me. But you look out and get it for yourself."

Valia asked: "When are you leaving?"

"To-morrow morning, Valia, at break of dawn."

"But however did you get away, tell us?"

In a rapid whisper he told them all he had been through.

Then they bid each other a fond farewell. Sergey was unable to make light of it; he was very upset. "All the best, Paul, and don't forget us," Valia said with difficulty. Then they turned to go and the darkness swallowed them up at once.

It was silent in the house. Only the clocks were afoot, their steps clearly marking their motion. Neither of the two young people thought of sleep, since in six hours time they were to part, perhaps never to see each other again. In that short space of time could all the millions of thoughts and words each had ready ever be said? Youth, infinitely beautiful youth, when lust is still not understood, and can only be hazily sensed by one's rapid heart-beats, when one's hand trembles in fright and moves quickly away to one side if by accident it touches the other's breast, while the friendship of youth holds one back from the final step! What can be nearer and dearer than the arms of one's love round

one's neck and a kiss which thrills like an electric shock ! In all their friendship this was the second kiss. Nobody had ever caressed Paul but his mother ; blows he had known enough of. Tonia's caress was the dearer for that. In his cruel and oppressed life he had not known there could be such joy. This girl who had come his way was an immense delight. He could smell her hair and seemed to see her eyes in the dark. He said : " Tonia, I love you so much. I cannot tell you how much—I don't know how to tell you."

His thoughts were scattered . . . how responsive her lissom body was . . . but the friendship of youth was more to be prized than anything else. He said : " Tonia, when all this turmoil is over I am sure to be a master fitter. If you don't reject me, if you really are in earnest, and not just playing, I will make you a good husband. May I perish if I ever do anything to hurt you."

They became afraid of falling asleep in each other's arms—in case Tonia's mother came in and came to a wrong conclusion. So they separated. It was already beginning to grow light when they swore solemn oaths not to forget one another, and fell asleep. Early in the morning Tonia's mother wakened Paul. He jumped to his feet. When he had dressed in the bathroom, in his own clothes and Dolinnik's jacket, Tonia's mother wakened Tonia too.

They hurried through the damp morning mist to the junction. They skirted the station to the wood piles. Artem was impatiently awaiting them beside a tender loaded with wood. A powerful locomotive crept slowly up to them, surrounded with clouds of hissing vapour. Brouzzhak was looking out through the cab

window. Artem and Paul bid each other a hasty good-bye. Paul took a firm grip of the iron rail beside the steps to the engine cab and climbed up. He looked back. The two familiar figures stood at the crossing. The wind was tearing angrily at the neck of Tonia's blouse and whipping the locks of chestnut hair. She waved to him.

Artem turned to look at Tonia, who could only just hold back her sobs, and he thought: "Either I'm a complete idiot, or these two young people have a screw loose. Paul, Paul, my lad, you young rascal. . . ."

When the train had rounded the curve, he turned to Tonia and said: "Well, I suppose we two are going to be friends, eh?" And Tonia's tiny hand was lost in his huge paw, while from afar off came the rumble of the train gathering speed.

CHAPTER SEVEN

FOR a whole week on end the little town, belted by trenches and tangled in a net of barbed wire, wakened and went to sleep to the bark of field guns and the snapping of rifles. There was silence only in the darkest hours of the night, and even that was broken every now and then by frightened rifle reports as one side tried to wrest secrets from the other. Every morning at daybreak the men would begin to swarm round the guns and their black snouts coughed unpleasantly and savagely, while they were hastily fed with new shells. Every time a gunner plucked at a cord the earth trembled, and a charge was carried whining two miles away from the town over the village in which the Reds were entrenched, to burst deafeningly and throw tattered masses of earth into the air.

The Red battery was established in the courtyard of an old Polish monastery which stood on a lofty hill in the very centre of the village. The Military Commissar of the battery, Comrade Zamostin, woke suddenly and got up—he had been sleeping with the barrel of the gun as a pillow. He drew his belt tighter with the heavy Mauser hanging from it, bent his ear to listen to the flight of a shell, and then waited for the explosion. The yard rang with his sonorous voice shouting: “Up comrades, we’ll have time to finish off our sleep to-morrow. Time to get up!”

The men on the battery were asleep all round the guns, at hand. They rose as smartly as the military

commissar. Only Sidorchouk dawdled, and was unwilling to raise his sleepy head. "Damn you fellows—hardly light and already squawking about. What a rotten crowd you are!" Zamostin roared with laughter. "You're right, Sidorchouk, the boys are not properly sleep-conscious yet; they don't appreciate people like you who are." Sidorchouk got up, grousing all the time. A few minutes later the guns in the monastery yard were roaring and shells were bursting in the town. On the tremendously tall chimney of the sugar factory, on a hasty platform of planks, were a Petlioura officer and a field telephonist. They had climbed up the iron stairway inside the chimney. The whole town was then laid out beneath them, and they were able to direct their gun-fire, as they could see every movement made by the Reds besieging the town.

This particular day there was great activity on the Red side. Through their binoculars they could see the movement of the Red units. An armoured train was steadily making its way along the line towards the Podolski Station, keeping up a steady gun-fire all the time, and behind it came chains of infantry. The Reds made a number of attacks, trying to take the town by storm, but the Whites had dug themselves in on the slopes approaching the town. The trenches belched forth furious fire, and the air was dense with the rattle of rifle-fire. The sound grew to one continuous roar as the moment for an attack drew near. And then, under the streams of lead, unable to stand such superhuman strain, the lines of Bolsheviks withdrew again, leaving motionless bodies behind them.

But this day the blows directed against the town were fiercer than ever, and more and more frequent and

persistent. The air was uneasy from the constant fire of cannon. From the height of the factory chimney it was possible to see the lines of Bolsheviks moving forward, stumbling, falling, but irresistibly moving forward. They had already nearly captured the Central Station. The Sichevy Regiment brought up all the available reserves, but could not stop the breach. And so the Bolshevik lines, full of desperate determination, broke into the streets round the station. Then the men of the Third Sichevy Sharpshooters of Petlioura's army, who had been defending the station, were driven from their final positions—the gardens and orchards of that district on the edge of the town—and in scattered little groups fell back in confusion on the town behind them. The Red Army units gave them no time to recover, but thrust steadily forward, took the rearguard defences of the Whites at the point of the bayonet, and poured into the streets of that part of the town.

No power on earth could have kept Sergey Brouzzhak in the cellar where he and his family and their immediate neighbours had gathered. Despite his mother's protests he went up out of the chilly cellar. An armoured car rattled past the house, shooting in all directions, and behind it raced remnants of Petlioura's men in panic. One of them ran into the Brouzzhaks' yard and feverishly tore off and flung away tin hat and rifle and bandolier, and scrambled over the fence and disappeared into the orchards beyond.

Sergey plucked up courage to peep out into the street. The Petlioura men were running down the road towards the South-west Station; their retirement was being covered by an armoured-car. The road leading townwards was deserted. A Red army man came in

sight. He quickly lay flat and fired down the road. Then another appeared, and another. . . . Sergey saw them crouching down and firing as they ran. There was also a sun-tanned Chinese with inflamed eyes, who was making no attempt to conceal himself. He wore a vest, with machine-gun bandoliers criss-crossed over it and held grenades in either hand. At their head raced a Red army man, quite a youth, carrying a hand machine-gun. This was the first unit of the Red army to break into the town. A feeling of joy took possession of Sergey and he ran out into the road and shouted at the top of his voice : " Hurrah ! Comrades, hurrah ! "

His rush was so unexpected that the Chinese nearly knocked him down. The Chinese's first thought was to rush madly at Sergey ; it was Sergey's enthusiastic expression that checked him. The breathless Chinese gasped, " Petlioura man where he go ? " But Sergey did not hear him. He had run swiftly back into the yard and snatched up the bandolier and rifle that the White army man had thrown away and was off to catch the others up. They did not notice his presence till they entered the South-west Station. They cut off a number of White units with munitions and arms and thrust the enemy back into the woods and then paused to rest and get their ranks in order. Then the young machine-gunner went up to Sergey and asked in surprise : " Where are you from, comrade ? "

Sergey said : " I belong here, in this little town, I was only waiting for you to arrive. "

The Reds surrounded him. The Chinese smiled delightedly and clapped Sergey enthusiastically on the shoulder. As for Sergey, his heart was thumping with pride, as they had at once accepted him as one of them-

selves—he had taken part in the bayonet attack on the station.

The town now came to life. The agonised inhabitants reappeared from cellars and basements and poured to the town gates to watch the Red units arrive. Sergey's mother and Valia saw Sergey marching in the ranks : he was bare-headed, with bandolier and rifle. His mother was indignant and waved her hands menacingly. Sergey, her dear little Sergey taking part in that fighting ! Oh, wouldn't he catch it ! Just think, strutting along in front of the whole town with a rifle over his shoulder. What next ! And she could not restrain herself and suddenly shouted : "Sergey, go home at once, this minute ! I'll show you, you bad boy. I'll teach you to go making war." And she made for him, intending to stop him there and then. But Sergey—her little Sergey, whose ears she had so often boxed, merely turned savagely on his mother, flushed with shame and indignation and snapped : "Stop that shouting. I shall do nothing of the sort."

This was too much for Sergey's mother, and she cried "Oh, is that how you talk to your mother. Then don't you dare show your face at home again." Without bothering to turn round Sergey shouted back : "I won't either." And his poor mother just stood transfixed in the street, while the columns of sun-burned, dust-stained warriors marched past. A powerful mocking voice rang out with : "Don't cry, mamma, we'll make your sonny commissar !" A burst of laughter ran down the battalion and hearty voices leading them struck up a song. Sergey's sonorous voice could be heard in the general chorus. He had found a new family, in which one bayonet was his.

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There was a card over the gateway of the Leshchinskis' house—and on it the simple designation, '*Revolutionary Committee.*' Beside it was a placard in flaming colours. The eyes and finger of a Red Army man pointed straight at you and the caption was: *Have you joined the Red Army?* During the previous night workers of the political section had stuck up those dumb agitators. And there, too, was the first appeal of the *Revcom* to all workers of the town of Shepetovka :

“Comrades ! The Proletarian Army has taken Shepetovka. The power of the Soviets has been established. We call on all citizens to maintain calm. The bloodstained organisers of pogroms have been repulsed, but in order to ensure that they do not return, they must be annihilated completely, so join the ranks of the Red Army. Exercise all your energies to maintain the power of the workers. Military authority in Shepetovka is in the hands of the Garrison Commander. Civil authority is in the hands of the Revolutionary Committee.

DOLINNIK,

Chairman of the Revcom.”

The Leshchinskis' house was occupied by a new kind of people. The word “comrade”—for which the day before men had paid with their lives—was to be heard at every turn. That word was extraordinarily moving.

Dolinnik forgot what sleep or repose meant ; that carpenter was busy organising the revolutionary government of the town. On the door of one little room in the house was a scrap of paper, on which was written *Party Committee.* There Comrade Ignatiev, a quiet, dignified woman, was in charge. The political section had entrusted Dolinnik and Ignatiev with organising the

necessary organs of Soviet Government. Only one day had passed, but there were already collaborators seated at tables with typewriters clicking away, and a Commissariat of Supplies was being organised, under mercurial, nervy Comrade Tyzhitzki. Tyzhitzki had been assistant mechanic at the sugar factory. With all the persistence of a Pole his very first work after the establishment of soviet government in Shepetovka was to smash the aristocratic upper levels of the factory management, since they were concealing their hatred for the Bolsheviks and lying low, biding their time. At a general meeting of factory workers he banged the bar of the tribune fiercely and flung a torrent of harsh, unbending words—in Polish—at the workers around him. How many years, he cried, had not Count Potocki's and Prince Sanguszki's ridden on our backs? Were there then few workers among us Poles held under the yoke by Potocki, or among us Ukrainians or Russians? Well, and now there were rumours set going among the workers by the lackeys of those counts to the effect that the Soviets would suffocate them in a grip of iron. Comrades, he said, that is a foul slander, for never did the workers of many nationalities have such freedom as they have now. He quoted that those who have been humble shall have everything. He declared that they, the workers, would have their day of rejoicing, only they were not to give ear to those sly serpents. If there was enough confidence between workers, they would organise a comradeship of all the workers of all the peoples in the world!

Vatslav spoke from the bottom of his heart, a simple working-class heart, and when he came down from the tribune the young folk cheered him approvingly. Only the elder men were timorous of speaking out. Who

could tell—perhaps the Bolsheviks would evacuate the town the next day, and they would then have to pay for every word, and even if they escaped with their lives, they were sure to lose their jobs!

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Comrade Ignatiev was on her way to the *Revcom*, when she noticed a very youthful-looking Red army man and asked him how old he was.

“Rising seventeen.”

“Are you from these parts?”

He smiled and said: “Yes, it was only the day before yesterday, during the fighting, that I joined up.”

She looked hard at him. “What is your father?”

“Assistant engine-driver.”

Dolinnik came in at the gate with a Red Army man, and Ignatiev turned to him and said: “Look here, I had been hard put to it to find a Young Communist for the *Regional Committee*—and here we are—he belongs to the town.”

Dolinnik measured up Sergey with a quick eye. “And who . . .”

“Why, Zakhar’s son. Why, then, off you go, recruit all you can.”

Sergey looked at them in great perplexity. “But my company?” As he ran up the steps to the porch Dolinnik called back: “We’ll settle about that.”

Two days later a committee of Communist Youth of the Ukraine had been created. The new kind of life had burst into the town unexpectedly and swiftly and was embracing every activity, upturning everything by its fierce swirling flow. Sergey forgot all about his family, although it was so near at hand. He was a Bolshevik now

—and for the tenth time he pulled from his pocket the little slip of white paper with the stamp of the *Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of the Ukraine*, on which it was stated that he, Sergey Brouzzhak, was a member of the *Young Communist League* and secretary of its committee. And if anyone doubted it, there over his tunic, on a Sam Browne, in a hand-made canvas holster, hung a reassuring Mannlicher—bequeathed to him by his good friend Paul. That was a most persuasive document. Oh, how sorry he was that Paul was not with him!

The whole day long Sergey would be about carrying out instructions of the *Revcom*. At that very moment Ignatiev was expecting him, as they were to go to the station together to the political section, where they were to receive literature and newspapers for the *Revcom*. He hurried out of the house to the street, where a worker of the political department was waiting for them with a car. It was a long way to the station. The staff and political section of the First Soviet Ukrainian Division was at the station, in a train. Ignatiev made use of this trip to make some enquiries of Sergey. "What have you done in your branch? Have you succeeded in getting an organisation together? You ought to do some agitation among your friends—those who are working-class children. We need a solid group of Communist youth as soon as ever we can get it. We must draw up an appeal for the comsomol to-morrow and have it printed. Then we'll have a large public meeting of youth in the theatre and, anyway, I'll introduce you to Oustinovich in the political section. I think she's doing some work among your folk."

Oustinovich turned out to be a girl of about eighteen with dark bobbed hair, in a new khaki tunic tightly belted at the waist. Sergey learned a lot of new things

from her and she promised him to help him in his work. When they parted she gave him a whole bale of literature and in particular a little booklet containing the constitution and programme of the YCL. They returned to the *Revcom* late in the evening. Valia was waiting for Sergey in the garden. She rushed at him full of reproaches.

“You ought to be ashamed of yourself! What are you thinking of, have you renounced your home altogether? Mother cries about you every day and father is furious. There’ll be trouble.”

He said: “No, Valia, there’ll be nothing of the sort. I simply haven’t time to come home. Upon my word I haven’t. Anyway, I can’t come to-day. But I do want to have a word with you. Come into my room.”

Valia could not recognise her brother, he was completely changed. He seemed just as if he had been charged with electricity. He settled her into a chair and then went straight to the point: “This is what I want you for. Join the YCL. Don’t know what it is? The *Young Communist League*. I’m speaking for the president. You don’t believe me? Well, read for yourself!”

She read his authority and then looked shamefacedly at him. She said: “What use should I be in the YCL?”

He waved his arms excitedly. “Use? Nothing you can do? My dear sister! Why, I haven’t even time at night to sleep. We’ve got to get our propaganda going. Ignatiev says we have to get all the youth to a meeting in the theatre and explain to them exactly what Soviet Government means, and they say I shall have to speak. I think that’s all wrong, because obviously I don’t know how to. I’ll make a fool of myself. Now, come on, what about it?”

“I don’t know what to say. Mother will be absolutely furious if I do.”

“Don’t you think about mother, Valia,” Sergey said, “she doesn’t understand at all. All she wants is to have her children sitting by her side. She hasn’t got anything against the Soviet Government. On the contrary, she’s for it. But she wants others to go to the front and do the fighting, not her sons. Now is that right? Remember what Zhoukhraï used to tell us? Look at Paul, he didn’t wait for what his mother told him. Now its our turn, our right to live and live properly, too. Why, Valia, you aren’t going to say no, are you? Why, I’ve a little book here all about it.” And he took it from his pocket and gave it to her. Without taking her eyes from his face she asked softly: “But if Petlioura’s men come back again?”

For the first time Sergey was at a loss. Then he said: “Of course I should go with the others. But then, what about you? You’re right, mother would be unhappy then.” He stopped and remained silent.

Valia said: “You put my name down, Sergey, but so that mother doesn’t know and nobody knows but you and me. I’ll do all I can to help, that’s the best way out.”

He said: “Right, Valia.”

Ignatiev came in. Sergey said: “Comrade, this is my sister Valia. I have just been talking to her about the movement. She is just the person for it, but, you know, our mother doesn’t take things lightly. Can we enrol her secretly? If we have to retreat, of course, I should take my rifle and go, but she would be sorry for mother.”

Ignatiev sat at the end of the table and listened attentively to Sergey. Then she said: “Ycs, that would be the best thing.”

The theatre was full of chattering youths who had come in response to notices about the forthcoming meeting which were placed all over the town. The brass band of the sugar factory workers was playing. The majority were students—either of the high schools or the senior elementary schools. They had come not so much for the meeting as the show.

At last the curtain rose and Comrade Razin, secretary of the Ukraine committee, who had just arrived in Shepetovka, appeared on the stage. The thin little man with sharp-pointed nose attracted general attention and his speech was heard with great interest. He spoke of the struggle which had seized the whole country, and he called on young people to band together round the Communist Party. When he had finished he was rewarded by warm applause. Sergey was to speak next; Razin had to leave.

Sergey at once tried to speak about practical measures. "Well, comrades," he said, "you've heard it all, now it's up to us to form a cell. Who will support the proposal?"

There was silence throughout the theatre. Oustinovich came to Sergey's aid, and while he stood at one side in great embarrassment, she told the meeting the way in which the younger people were being organised in Moscow. Sergey was annoyed to see their chilly reception of the notion of forming a cell, and he looked down at the meeting with sheer dislike. He could see Zalivanov eyeing Oustinovich with scorn and whispering something to Liza Soukharko. In the front row were senior girls of the high school, with their little noses powdered, and their cunning little eyes looking right and left, and they kept whispering to one another. But in the corner by the

stage door was a group of young Red Army men, and among them Sergey saw the young machine-gunner. He was sitting on the edge of the stage, fidgeting nervously and looking with hatred at Liza Soukharko and Anna Admovski, who were ultra-smartly dressed, and making no attempt to hide the fact that they were busy talking to their beaux. Oustinovich, too, felt that she was not being listened to, so she broke off shortly and made way for Ignatiev. Ignatiev spoke very calmly, and she succeeded in gaining attention.

She said : “ Comrades, youths, each of you can now think over what you have heard here, and I am sure that we shall find comrades from among you who will become active participants in the revolution, not mere lookers-on. The door is open to everybody ; all you have to do is make up your minds. We should like you to express your own attitude towards the matter. Will anybody who has anything to say come forward, please.”

Once again there was a deathly silence. Then, suddenly, a voice rang from the back ranks : “ I should like to speak,” and Mishka Levchoukov, a lad with slightly slanting eyes and otherwise rather like a young bear, pushed his way forward. He said : “ If things are like that, if the Bolsheviks need our support, I’m not going to say no. Sergey knows me. I’m joining the YCL.”

Sergey’s face lit up. In an instant he was in the centre of the stage crying : “ There, you see, comrades. As I said, look at Mishka—he’s one of us because his father’s a pointsman, he was run over by a train, so Mishka never got any schooling. Yet without any of your high-schools he could understand what we need.”

At this there was an uproar in the theatre and a number of cat-calls. Then a high-school boy named

Okoushev, son of a chemist, a lad with hair carefully brushed up to a crest, came forward. He pulled his tunic straight and began: "I am sorry, comrades, but I do not quite see what is wanted of us. Do they want us to take up politics? Then when shall we get our studies done? We need to finish our school studies. It would be different if they were suggesting a sporting society, or a club where we younger folk could gather and read. But politics—and then get hanged for it. No, thank you, comrades. I don't think anybody will agree to that."

There was a wave of laughter. Okoushev jumped down off the stage and resumed his place. The young machine-gunner then came up to speak. He jammed his forage cap down furiously on to his forehead and swept the rows below him with furious eyes and shouted out at the top of his voice: "You laugh, do you, you swine." His eyes were like two blazing coals. He took a very deep breath and then, trembling with rage, he went on: "I'm named Zharki, Ivan Zharki. I never saw my father or my mother, I've been a waif; begging and sleeping up against fences. Starving, without any home to go to. The hell of a life, not the sort of life you mummy's pets have known. Then the Soviet Government was set up and the Red Army took me. The whole platoon adopted me and dressed me and taught me to read and write and, what is most important, gave me an idea of what humanity means. Through that I became a Bolshevik and I shall die one. I know very well what we're fighting for—for us, for the poor, for working-class government. You sit there braying like asses and you don't know we lost two hundred men outside this town, two hundred killed. . . ." His voice

was like an overstrained string on an instrument. "They gave their lives without question for our happiness, for our sakes. . . . And all over Russia it's the same, on all the fronts, and while that was going on you were having beanfeasts here. Comrades, now"—and he turned round and addressed the chair—"you're talking to them and asking them—do you think they are capable of understanding? No. As our proverb says, the full belly's no friend to the empty one. There's only one among them come forward, and why—because he's poor and an orphan." Then furiously he shouted at the meeting: "We'll manage without you, we won't do any begging, I'll be damned if we want the likes of you. What you need is a little peppering with a machine-gun." This was his last shot; he was quite out of breath and without a glance at anyone he ran from the stage and out of the theatre.

Nobody of the presidium stayed on for the concert. On the way to the *Revcom* Sergey said bitterly: "What a mess-up. Zharki's right. There is nothing to be done with those high-school boys. Only harm comes from it." Ignatiev said: "We shall have to start among the working-class lads. Aim at the timber yard and the sugar factory. But this meeting will do some good all the same. There are good comrades among the middle classes, too."

And Oustinovich agreed, and said: "Sergey, our task consists in tirelessly pushing forward our ideas and our slogans into every person's mind. The party will draw the attention of all workers to every new event. We shall organise a whole series of meetings and conferences and councils. The political section at the junction is going to open a summer theatre. In a few days a special

propaganda train will come and then we really will get to work. Don't forget that Lenin says we shall not win unless we succeed in drawing the masses of the workers in their millions into the struggle."

Late the same evening Sergey saw Oustinovich back to the station. When they parted he squeezed her hand hard and held it a second in his own. A slight smile flashed over her lips. On his way back he dropped in to see his people. He listened to all his mother's reproaches without a murmur. But when his father began he passed to the offensive and thrust his father into a tight corner. He said: "Listen here, Dad, when you went on strike when the Germans were here and killed the guard on the engine, did you think of us? Yes; but you did what your working-class conscience told you to do. And I've thought about you just the same and I know that if we have to retreat you will be persecuted on my account. But on the other hand, if we win, our side has the upper hand. And I can't keep out of it any more. Dad, you must see that. Why should we talk a lot of nonsense about it all? I've taken up a good cause, and you should support me in it and help me, and here you are making a row. Dad, let's make peace, and then Mum will be at peace, too." And he looked straight at his father with his clear blue eyes and smiled in a friendly way, because he was sure he was right. And his father fidgeted uneasily on the bench and then smiled so that his yellowed teeth showed through his bristly moustache, and said: "So you're bringing class-consciousness into it, are you, you rascal? You think that because you've strapped a revolver on to yourself you won't get another strap from me?"

But there was no threat in his voice. He hesitated a

moment, rather at a loss what to do, and then said : " Carry on, Sergey boy, as you're on the up-gradient I won't put the brake on, only don't you drop us, let's see plenty of you," and with decision he held his knotted hand out to his son to shake.

It was night-time, and there was a sitting of the Revolutionary Committee—Dolinnik, Ignatiev, Timoshenko, chairman of the local Extraordinary Commission, who wore Cossack clothes and looked like a Kirghizian, and two of the committee—a lanky railwayman named Shoudik and Ostapchouk from the yards, a man with a squat nose.

Dolinnik leant over the table and looked Ignatiev straight in the face, and with a stubborn look and in a hoarse voice hammered out his words : " The front needs supplies. The workers need food. As soon as we arrived these miserable shopkeepers and market stall keepers raised their prices. To-day we must work out some satisfactory prices, to be fixed. We know well enough that none of these dealer type will sell at the fixed price. They'll hide their goods. But then we shall have searches and requisition all the sharks' goods. We cannot let the workers go short any longer. And mark this—it isn't the little traders. For example, I had word to-day that Boris Zon—the innkeeper—has a secret warehouse in his cellars. And all the larger shopkeepers stored huge reserves even before Shepetovka fell into Petlioura's hands." And he glanced at Timoshenko with particular emphasis and a sarcastic grin. Timoshenko shot a random wild question : " How did you find out ? " He was annoyed to find Dolinnik getting

news earlier than he did, since it was his duty to find such things out.

Dolinnik laughed sarcastically and said: "Don't you worry, old fellow, my eyes are everywhere. I don't only know about those cellars—I also know that you and the Commandant's chauffeur yesterday saw the outside of a bottle of vodka."

Timoshenko wriggled in his seat and his sallow cheeks flushed scarlet. "And a lot of harm in that!" he said.

Dolinnik went on: "I learned of the cellar from Sergey Brouzzhak. Apparently he has a friend who worked in the station buffet, and he learned from the cooks that formerly Zon used to supply them with as much as and whatever they wanted. But yesterday Sergey got definite information: this cellar does exist and all we have to do is find it. Now, Timoshenko, you take the boys, and Sergey, and let that store be found to-day as ever is! If we succeed we shall be able to supply both the workers and the Supplies Commissariat of the division."

Half an hour later eight armed men entered the innkeeper's house; two remained outside at the entrance. The innkeeper was a short, fat, squat man like a small barrel, with several days' growth of red hair on his cheeks, and a wooden leg. He fawned in front of the men and in a wheezy guttural voice asked them: "What is this, comrades? Why so late?" At Zon's back stood his daughters, with dressing-gowns hastily drawn on, blinking in the glare of Timoshenko's electric hand-lamp, while in the neighbouring room was his obese wife, groaning while she put on her clothes. Timoshenko explained in one word: "Search."

Every square inch of the floors was examined, but no trace of a secret cellar could be found. In a little room

beside the kitchen the maid-of-all-work slept. She was so soundly asleep that she did not hear anything. Sergey wakened her gently. He asked the drowsy girl: "Who are you? Do you work here?" She pulled the coverlet over her shoulders and shielded her face from the light—she could not make out what was happening and she said: "Yes, I work here. And who are you?" Sergey explained, told her that she had better dress and left her to it.

In the spacious dining-room Timoshenko cross-examined the innkeeper, who spluttered and fumed and became very agitated. "What do you want of me? I haven't got any other cellar. You're wasting your time here. I assure you you're wasting your time. I once had an inn, but I'm a poor man now. Petlioura's men have taken everything I had, nearly lost my life into the bargain. I was very glad when the Soviets came here, but you see all I've got"—and he spread wide his short, podgy little hands, while his bloodshot eyes peered first at Sergey and Timoshenko and then at the corner and the ceiling.

Timoshenko bit his lips nervously. "So you insist on concealing it? For the last time I suggest you show me where it is."

"Oh, what are you talking about, Comrade Officer," the man's wife now broke in, "we ourselves are simply starving. They've taken everything we had." She would have liked to burst into tears, but the tears would not quite come.

Sergey said: "Starving, but you keep a maid."

"Oh, what sort of a maid do you mean? We have a poor girl we give a home to. But let Christina tell her own story."

Then Timoshenko lost patience and cried : “ All right, we’ll start ourselves.”

It was already daylight out of doors before the search of the inn and the innkeeper’s house was over, and Timoshenko, angry at the failure after hours of searching, had just decided to call it off when, in the diminutive room of the maid, Sergey—who was getting ready to leave—heard her soft whisper : “ It must be in the kitchen, inside the stove.” Ten minutes later the large Russian stove had been broken up and revealed an iron trapdoor. Two hours later a two-ton lorry, loaded with barrels and sacks, was on its way from the inn, surrounded by a crowd of spectators.

.

One hot day Maria Korchagin came home from the station, carrying a tiny bundle. When she heard Artem’s story of Paul’s trials she cried bitterly. Dark days had begun for her. She had nothing to live on, but she found work washing linen for the Red Army, in return for which they managed to get her a soldier’s rations. One evening Artem’s footsteps sounded smarter than usual under the window ; he pushed open the door and before he was inside was shouting : “ News from Paul.”

Paul wrote : “ Dear brother Artem, I have to tell you, my dear brother, that I am alive, though not in the best of health. I have stopped a bullet in my hip, but I am getting better. The doctor says the bone is not damaged. So don’t worry about me, it will all pass off. I may get leave and come to see you when I get out of hospital. I did not manage to see mother, and things have turned out so that now I am a soldier in Kotovski’s Cavalry

Brigade ; no doubt you have heard of Kotovski through his heroism. I have never before seen people like him and I have great respect for our Brigade Commander. Has mother come home ? If she has, give her warmest love from her younger son. And ask her forgiveness for being such a worry to her. Your brother, Paul." There was added at the bottom : "Artem, go to the Forester's and tell about this letter."

Maria Korchagin wept copiously ; her scatter-brained son had not even given the address of his hospital.

.

Sergey began making frequent visits to the green passenger coach with the notice over the door, *Pol. section ; agitprop*. In one little compartment of that coach Oustinovich and Medvediev—another woman Party member—had their office. Medvediev was never without a cigarette between her lips and never without a whimsical smile at the corners of her mouth. Without noticing it the secretary of the YCL was becoming very intimate with Oustinovich, and apart from bundles of literature and newspapers, began to carry away with him from the station a cloudy sense of happiness imparted by each brief meeting.

The free theatre of the political section was full of workers and Red Army men every day. The propaganda train of the 12th Army stood on a side-track, plastered all over with brightly coloured placards. The train was a hive of industry at any hour of the day or night. There was a press working, printing newspapers, leaflets, and proclamations. The front was near. One evening Sergey found himself at a loose end and dropped into the theatre, and there, among the soldiers, he found

Oustinovich. Late that night, as he was seeing her back to the station, where the political workers lived, Sergey—to his own astonishment—said: “Comrade Rita, why is it I always enjoy being with you?” And then added: “It’s fine with you. I feel buoyed up and feel I can work without ever stopping.”

Oustinovich stopped short and said: “Now look here, Comrade Brouzzhak, let’s make a bargain for the future, from now on—no more sentiment from you, I don’t like it.”

He blushed like a scolded child. He said: “I spoke to you as one comrade to another, but you treat me . . . What was there counter-revolutionary in what I said? But of course I shall not mention the matter again, comrade.”

He then quickly gave her his hand and turned back towards the town, almost at the double. During the next few days he did not once show himself down at the junction. At last, Ignatiev invited him there, but he found an excuse, spoke of urgent work. After all, he really was very busy.

.

One night somebody shot at Shoudik as he was on his way home down one of the streets where the better paid employees of the sugar factory mainly lived. Following this, searches were made, and weapons and documents of a fascist union going by the name of the “Sharpshooters” were found. There was a conference in the *Revcom*, and Oustinovich was present. She took Sergey aside and calmly asked him: “What’s the matter with you, are you developing petty-bourgeois dignity? Are you interpreting a personal matter to bear on work?”

Comrade, that sort of thing won't do." And once again Sergey began to find occasions to visit the green coach.

Then came a district conference, which he attended. There were two days of fierce discussion. The third day he spent with the rest of the plenum under arms—for twenty-four hours they pursued a guerilla band under Zaroudny, an undefeated Petlioura officer, through the riverside copses. When he got back he found Oustinovich at Ignatiev's. He accompanied her back to the junction. When they parted he shook her hand heartily. She snatched it away. And once again for a long time he kept away from the propaganda train. He took pains to avoid Rita even when duty demanded contact with her. When at last she insisted on an explanation of his conduct he flared up and blurted out: "What's the use of me discussing it with you? You'll immediately label it some sort of bourgeois behaviour, or treachery to the working-class."

.

Detachments of the Caucasian Red Banner Division arrived at the junction. Three swarthy commanders appeared at the *Revcom* offices. One of them, tall and thin and tightly belted with an ornate belt with embossed silver, made for Dolinnik and said: "Not a word. A hundred waggons of hay. The horses are starving."

Sergey was sent with two Red Army men to requisition the hay. In one village they came on a koulak band, who disarmed them and thrashed them nearly to death. Sergey got off more lightly than the others—they took pity on his youthfulness. Men of the Poverty Commission brought them back to the town. A detachment of soldiers were sent to the village and the hay was there

the next day. Sergey did not want to trouble his people, so he convalesced in Ignatiev's room. That evening he arrived was the first time he felt her handshake—it was kind and firm—her hand he had never dared try to shake.

.

One hot midday Sergey ran to the train and read a letter from Paul to Rita and told her about this comrade. As he left he said casually: "I'm going down to the lake in the woods to have a bathe." Rita Oustinovich broke off her work and said: "Wait a moment then. Let's go together."

There was not a ripple on the lake, it was like a mirror; the freshness of that warm transparent water was inviting. She said: "You go to the path out to the road and wait a bit while I have my bathe." He sat down on a stone by the little bridge and turned to face the sun. He heard the water splashing behind him. Through the trees he then saw Tonia Toumanov and the military commander of the train, a fellow named Chouzhanin, coming along the road. Chouzhanin was handsome in his smart British-type officer's tunic, belted with a complicated sort of Sam Browne belt, and with his squeaking chrome-leather high-boots. They were walking arm-in-arm and he was telling Tonia Toumanov something. Sergey recognised her as the girl who had brought the letter from Paul. She for her part looked fixedly at him and evidently recognised him. When she had reached him he pulled the letter from his pocket and stopped her. "Just a moment, comrade. I have a letter here which partly concerns you." He handed her the letter and she read it. The sheet of paper trembled slightly in her

hand. Then she handed it back and said : " You know nothing more of him ? " Sergey said : " No."

Then behind him he heard Oustinovich's foot grind on loose stones. Chouzhanin noticed her and whispered : " Let's be going," to Tonia. Then Oustinovich's voice, taunting and scornful, checked him with : " Comrade Chouzhanin ! They've been looking for you down at the train the whole day."

Chouzhanin looked annoyed and said : " No matter. They'll manage without me."

When the two had gone Oustinovich followed them with her eyes and said : " I wonder how soon that slacker will get turned out."

The woods muttered, the giant oaks nodded their heavy foliage. The little lake was temptingly fresh. Sergey wanted to have his bathe. When he came out of the water he found Oustinovich not far from the clearing, sitting on a fallen oak. They went walking deeper into the woods, talking. They reached a small clearing with long grass and decided to rest a while there. The oaks still whispered about something or other. Rita lay down on the soft grass and rested her head on her crooked arm. Her shapely legs, and her much-repaired shoes, were lost in the long grass. Sergey accidentally looked at them and noticed the careful patching, and he looked at one of his own jack-boots with a remarkably large hole in it at the toe, with his foot peeping through, and he laughed. " Why do you laugh ? " Rita asked. He pointed to the boot. " How are we going to fight in boots like that ? "

She did not answer. She nibbled at blades of grass and her thoughts were elsewhere. At last she said : " Chouzhanin is a bad communist. All the other political workers are in rags, but all he cares about is

how he looks himself. He's an outsider in our Party. . . . And at the front things are really serious. We have got to endure fearful struggles." Then after a while she added : " As I see it, Sergey, we shall have to fight both with words and bayonets. Have you heard of the decision of the Central Committee to mobilise a quarter of the whole YCL for the front ? I don't think we shall be here long, Sergey."

Sergey listened to every word she said. He caught unusual tones in her voice and he was surprised. Her glittering black eyes were fixed on him. He nearly forgot himself and told her that her eyes were like mirrors, that you could see everything in them, but he restrained himself. Rita raised herself on her elbow. " Where's your revolver ? " she said. He felt dismally at his empty belt. " A koulak band in a village took it from me." She thrust her hand into a pocket of her tunic and brought out a glittering Browning. " See that oak, Sergey ? " and she pointed with the barrel to a deeply furrowed trunk about twenty-five paces away. She raised her arm to the level of her eyes and fired almost without taking aim ; the shattered bark flew. " See ? " she said, with great satisfaction and fired again, and again the bark was shattered. She handed him the revolver and tauntingly said : " Now come on, let's see what you can do." Out of three shots he missed one altogether. She smiled. " I thought you wouldn't do as well as I did."

She put the revolver down and lay back. Her firm breasts showed through her tunic. She said softly : " Come here, Sergey." He moved towards her. " See the sky ? It's blue. Now your eyes are just like that sky. That's no good. Your eyes ought to be grey, like steel.

Blue is much too tender. . . .” And suddenly she seized his fair head and kissed his lips possessively.

.

Two months had passed and autumn was at hand. Night had come on suddenly and wrapped the trees in a black veil. The telegraphist of the divisional staff bent over the tape machine which was ticking out its Morse, and gathering up the ribbon of paper as it came out, rapidly translated the string of dots and dashes into written words.

“Commander divisional staff original and copy to chairman revcom Shepetovka. Evacuate all official bodies within ten hours receipt this telegram. Leave town one battalion under command commander N-regiment in command fighting detachment. Staff and political sections of division and all military organs retire to station Baranchev. Report order fulfilled commander division. Signature.”

Ten minutes later a motor-cyclist, acetylene head-lamp glaring, was hurrying through the silent streets of the town. With spluttering engine he pulled up at the entrance to the *Revcom* and handed the telegram to the Chairman—Dolinnik. Others ran up. A special list was then made. An hour later waggons loaded with the archives and other material of the *Revcom* were on their way through the town and were loaded on to a train at the Podolski Station.

When Sergey heard the telegram read out he impulsively followed the dispatch-rider outside. “Comrade,” he said, “can I ride down to the station with you?”

“Get on behind, only hold tight.”

About ten yards from the green coach he threw his

arm round Rita's shoulders and, feeling that he was losing something dear to him, something invaluable, whispered : "Farewell, Rita, my dear comrade ! We shall meet again, only in the meantime don't forget me." He felt horribly like bursting into tears. He had to get away quickly. He could say no more, only squeeze her hands till she cried out from pain.

.

The next morning town and junction were empty, abandoned. The engines of the last train had whistled as they pulled out—whistled as if to say good-bye—while outside the station on either side of the railroad was a column of guards of the battalion left in the town.

Yellowed leaves were already falling, the trees showing bare. The wind was catching at the shrivelled little leaves and gently carrying them along the road. Sergey, in Red Army uniform coat, covered with canvas ammunition bags, took up a position outside the sugar factory with a dozen others, and waited for the Poles to arrive.

.

Avtonom Petrovich tapped on his neighbour Gerasim Leontievich's door. Gerasim Leontievich opened and appeared half-dressed asking : "What is it ?"

Avtonom Petrovitch pointed to the Red Army unit marching by with trailing rifles and gave his friend a nod and a wink and said : "Going."

Gerasim Leontievich looked anxiously at Avtonom Petrovitch and said : "I suppose you don't know what sort of emblem the Poles use ?"

Avtonom Petrovitch said : "To the best of my knowledge it's a one-headed eagle."

“Where can you get them?”

Avtonom Petrovitch scratched his head; that was a question he could not answer. After thinking a while he said: “It’s all very well for these Reds; they can clear off and leave us here to rack our brains and fit ourselves in with a new Government.”

A machine-gun rattled out, breaking the silence. Suddenly a train whistled down by the junction followed by the loud percussion of a cannon. The heavy shell forged high through the air, whining and groaning. It fell beyond the sugar factory, on the high road, and the thickets beside the road were obscured in bluish smoke. Down the street, turning every now and then to look behind them, marched the dour Red columns.

A tiny tear trickled cold down Sergey’s cheek. He quickly wiped it away and then looked round; nobody had noticed it. By his side was marching tall, thin Antek Klopotovski of the timber works. His fingers were on the trigger of his rifle. He was worried, morose. His eyes met Sergey’s, and then he told Sergey his innermost thoughts.

“They will make it hot now for our folk, especially mine. They’ll say: ‘He’s a Pole and he’s gone against his own people.’ They’ll turn my old man out of the timber yard and no doubt flog him, too. I told him to come with us, but he just couldn’t bring himself to leave the family. Oh, curse them, the sooner we get to grips the better!” Antek nervously straightened his Red Army helmet, which had slipped forward on to his forehead.

“Fare thee well, my own little town, so plain and so dirty, with such ugly little houses and rotten streets, my own little town. Farewell, dear ones, farewell,

Galia, farewell, comrades—you will now have to work in secret—underground . . . the foreign, hateful, merciless White Polish legions are marching.”

The workers of the railway yards in their dirty oily tunics followed the Red Army units out with sad eyes. Then Sergey was moved to cry out: “We shall come back, comrades.”

CHAPTER EIGHT

Down by the river five of them had dug themselves in in a narrow trench, and were lying closely pressed round a snub-nosed *maximka*. These were the advance surprise post of the Seventh Sharpshooter Division. At the machine-gun, face towards the river, Sergey Brouzzhak lay on his side. The day before, exhausted completely by endless engagements, and broken by a hurricane of fire from the Polish guns, they had evacuated Kiev and crossed to the left bank of the river, where they had dug themselves in. It was out of the question to allow the Poles further advance over the Dnieper.

The retreat, their huge losses and finally the loss of Kiev, had had a bad effect on the men. The Seventh Division had steadily fought its way through outflanking movements, through forests, and then come out on the railway near Malin Station, and by one furious blow had driven out the Polish unit which had occupied the station, thrust them back into the forest and so freed the road to Kiev. And now that lovely town was relinquished, and the men were morose.

The Poles drove the Reds out of Darnitza and occupied a small vantage point on the left bank near the railway bridge. Despite all their efforts they had not succeeded in advancing any farther, but were met by furious counter-attacks. Sergey gazed on the flow of water and could not keep his thoughts off the previous day. About midday, caught in the general fury, he had met the White Poles with a counter-attack; for the first time yesterday he had met a Polish legionary—with

no more than down on his upper lip—face to face. The lad had been rushing at him with rifle outstretched and on it a long French bayonet like a sword, bounding along like a hare and shouting something which made no sense at all. Another instant and Sergey had struck the other's bayonet with the end of his own bayonet, and the glittering French blade was thrust aside. It was the Pole who fell. . . .

Sergey's hand had not quivered. He knew that he would do more killing yet—he, Sergey, who was able to love so tenderly and to be such a true friend. He was not an ill-natured lad, not cruel by nature, yet he knew that those soldiers were deceived and goaded to hate and were sent by the world parasites in bestial detestation against his own Republic. And so he, Sergey Brouzzhak, killed—in order to bring the day nearer when people would no longer kill each other.

.

For a year now Paul Korchagin had been moving over the face of his mother-country, and on light gun-carriages, riding an old grey hack with one ear cut off. He had grown into a man, grown stronger too ; grown up in suffering and discomfort. His skin, chafed to bleed by heavy munition cases had long healed, and there was now a permanent caloused strip where the strap of his rifle crossed.

In this year he had seen many terrible things. Together with thousands of other warriors like himself, torn and tattered, but consumed with an inextinguishable fire of struggle for the power of their class, he had tramped the country from one side to the other and only twice been out of the storm. The first time had been through his

hip wound, and the second was when in that cold February of 1920 he had tossed in fever, burning with typhus. Typhus—carried by lice—had cut the Twelfth Division down far more than Polish machine-guns. The army had been stretched over a huge area, practically the whole of the north Ukraine, endeavouring to check any further Polish advance. Paul had rejoined his unit before he had fully convalesced.

At the moment the regiment was holding the station of Frontovka on the Kazatin—Ouman branch railway, and once again great events were brewing. During those days, while the Twelfth Army, terribly thinned and partially disorganised, was retreating before the pressure of the Polish armies towards Kiev, the Proletarian Republic was making ready to strike the White Poles a crushing blow in one triumphant march. By a forced march unprecedented in military history, divisions of the First Cavalry Army Corps, men hardened in battle, were being rapidly transferred from the far-off North Caucasus. One after another, the Second, Fourth, Sixth, Eleventh and Fourteenth Cavalry Divisions drew near to Ouman and concentrated behind the front line—and incidentally, on the way to decisive battles, they swept away Makhno's guerilla bands. These were sixteen thousand five hundred sabres, sixteen thousand five hundred warriors tanned in the scorching steppes. The whole attention of the supreme Red Command and the Command of the south-western front was concentrated on ensuring that their decisive blow was not anticipated by Pilsudski's men. The staff of the Republic and the front preserved the grouping of those calvary divisions with enormous care.

Active fighting on the Ouman sector was suspended,

and direct lines from Moscow to the Front Staff at Kharkov buzzed continuously—and further, to the Staffs of the Fourteenth and Twelfth Army Corps. The narrow ribbons of the tape-machines tapped out Morse cypher messages. “Do not allow the attention of the Poles to be drawn to the grouping of the cavalry.” Active fighting was allowed to result only where the movement of Polish forces threatened to draw the divisions of the Boudyonny cavalry into battle.

.

The camp fire flames quivered in the air, and the smoke coiled up in huge dun spirals. Mosquitoes don't like smoke. There were dense swarms of mosquitoes, swift, everywhere. Some distance away the men were grouped fanwise round the fire, and the reflection from it lit their faces with a copper glow. Round the fire, pots were being warmed up in the bluish ashes. The water in them was beginning to bubble. From under a burning log a cunning tongue of flame shot up and touched the tousled head of somebody bending over the fire. The head was quickly drawn back and growled “Damnation!” and there was a wave of laughter.

A middle-aged man in a cloth tunic, with close-clipped moustache, who had just been squinting through his rifle-barrel against the firelight, said in a deep voice: “There's a keen student, when he don't feel the heat of the fire.” Another said: “You might tell us what it's all about, Korchagin.” The young fellow plucked at a wisp of singed hair and smiled. “Ah,” he said, “and it is a fine little book, too, since I began it I can't put it down.”

Paul's neighbour, a snub-nosed lad, very busy with

a strap of his haversack, bit through the coarse thread and asked curiously: "But what's it all about?" He stuck his needle into his helmet and winding the remainder of the thread round the projecting points, added "If it's about love, I should very much like to know what it says."

Everybody roared at this. Matveichouk raised his close-cropped head and, cynically squinting with his one roguish eye, said to the youth: "That's all right, Sereda, my boy, love's not a bad thing at all. You're such a pretty boy, too, a regular oil-painting. Wherever we go, the girls fall over their heels on account of you. Your only little failing, if you'll pardon me, is that button of a nose of yours. But that can be put right. One of those ten-pound Novitzki grenades hung on the tip of it ought to do the trick in one night."

The burst of laughter made the horses tethered to the machine-gun carriages snort with fear. Sereda turned slowly round and said: "It's not beauty that counts, but brains,"—and he tapped his own forehead suggestively. "Take yourself, you've a nettle-tongue all right, but otherwise you're a bit of a booby and slow in the uptake." Then Tatarinov, who kept out of it all, stood between the two comrades ready to fly at each other and said: "Steady, boys, steady, why wrangle like that? Far better let Korchagin tell us what he's been reading, if it's at all worth it."

"Come on, Paul, come on," rang from all sides. And Paul moved the saddle nearer the fire, settled himself comfortably on it, and opened a small, but thick book on his knees. He said: "Comrades, this book is called *The Gad-fly*. I got it from the Military Commissar of our battalion. It's making a great impression on

me, is this little book. If you'll sit quiet, I'll read to you."

"Come on, Paul, get on with it, cut the gab, nobody'll interrupt."

When, a littler later, the Commander of the regiment, Pouzyrevski, rode quietly up with a Commissar, he saw eleven pairs of motionless eyes fixed on the reader. He turned to the Commissar and pointed to the group. "There's half our intelligence service," he said. "There's four of them there, absolutely green YCL-ers, but every one of them's worth a good soldier. Look, that lad who's reading, and that one over there, see?—with eyes like a young wolf's—that's Korchagin, and that one's Zharki. They are fast friends, though a hidden rivalry is always there. Korchagin used to be my best scout. Now he's got a dangerous rival. See, though, they're carrying on political work now, but unnoticeably, and they have a great influence. Somebody's even invented a first-rate name for them—the Young Guard. . . ."

"Is that the political leader of the scouts reading?" the Commissar asked.

"No, Kramer is the political leader."

Pouzyrevski moved his horse forward. "Hallo, lads," he cried loudly. They all turned round. The Commander dismounted lightly and went up to them. "Having a warm, eh, comrades?" a broad friendly smile covered his face, and his slightly Mongolian features and narrow eyes lost their severity for a moment. They met him gladly, as a friend, as a good comrade. The Commissar remained on his horse, for he was anxious to press on.

Pouzyrevski pushed his revolver back and squatted down on the saddle beside Paul and said: "Smoke?"

I've managed to get some fine tobacco." And when he had lit up he called out to the Commissar: "You go on, Doronin, I'll stay here—if I'm wanted at headquarters, you can let me know." When Doronin had left, Pouzyrevski said to Paul: "Read on, I'd like to listen too, for a while."

Paul read the final pages and then put the book on his knees and gazed thoughtfully into the fire. For a few minutes he did not say a word. They were all under the influence of the death of 'the Gadfly.' Pouzyrevski pulled hard at his cigarette and waited for opinions. Sereda broke the silence. "A terrible story," he said "So there are folk like that in this world. Otherwise a man couldn't stand it, but as soon as he had something to stand for it happened like that." He spoke as if he was really moved, the story had made a great impression on him.

Andrew Fomichev, a young shoemaker's assistant from Belaia Tzerkva, cried angrily: "If I got hold of that damned priest who stuck a cross in his mouth I'd soon finish him off."

Androushchouk took a pot from the fire, put it between his knees and began to untie a bag with bread in it before he went on yarning . . . it was late that night when the cavalry scouts fell asleep, and Sereda was snoring heavily. Pouzyrevski too was sleeping there, with his head on a saddle, and the political leader, Kramer, was making some notes in a note-book.

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The following day, after returning from a scouting expedition, Paul tethered his horse to a tree and beckoned Kramer to him. Kramer had just finished drinking tea.

Paul said : " Listen, comrade, what would you say if I switched over to the First Cavalry ? They've hot work ahead. It isn't likely they're massing just for an exercise canter, is it ? Whereas we look like staying here for ever."

Kramer gaped. " What do you mean by ' switch over ' ? What do you think the Red Army is, a movie show ? What on earth are you thinking of ? If we were all to start switching over a fine state of affairs it would be ! "

Paul stopped him and said : " Does it matter so much whether I'm in one spot or the other ? I'm not deserting to a soft job behind the lines."

But Kramer was definitely against it. " What do you think discipline means, eh ? You're all right, Paul, but there's a good dose of anarchy in you too. Just because you want it you think it should be so. But our party and the YCL are based on iron discipline. The party first. And every man's duty is to be, not where he wants to be, but where he is required. Pouzyrevski refused the transfer ? Well, and that's the end of it."

Lanky sallow-faced Kramer was so agitated he had a fit of coughing. The lead dust of a printing-works had eaten deep into his lungs, and there was frequently an unhealthy flush in his cheeks. When the fit of coughing had passed, Paul said quietly, but firmly : " That's all quite correct, but all the same I am transferring to Boudyonny's regiment." And the following evening Paul was missing at the camp fire.

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The cavalry were assembled in a wide curve on a hillock, near the school of a neighbouring hamlet. A lusty fellow was sitting on the back of a light gun-

carriage, with forage cap tipped back on his head, and was pumping at an accordion. The accordion kept croaking and he missed many a beat, while another, in enormous red breeches, was whirling in a circle dancing a crazy *hopak*. Village lasses and lads came and leaned against the gun-carriages or the fences to watch the dashing dances of the cavalry brigade which had just entered their village. There were cries of "Tread it, old Toptalo (*Toptalo* means 'Stepper'), beat it down, and you there, with those bellows, put a bit of fire into it!" But the musician's huge fingers were more capable of bending a horse-shoe than dancing nimbly over the keys. Another sun-tanned cavalryman said: "Ah, Makhno died in Afanasi Mouliabka, he was a first-class player, he was. He rode on the right flank in the squadron. What a pity he's gone. He was a fine fighter, and a better player."

Paul was there, and when he heard the last words he pushed through to the gun-carriage and laid a hand on the bellows. The accordion wheezed and was silent. The lad who was playing looked down at him. "What d'you want?" he cried. Toptalo stopped short, and there were angry cries of "What do you want there? What do you mean by stopping us." Paul reached out for the accordion belt. "Hand over, let me have a go." The player looked at the Red Army man mistrustfully, but slowly took the belt off his shoulder. With practised knack Paul had the instrument balanced on his knee. The bellows waved out fan-shaped till they strained at the stitches and off the tune went with the full force of the bellows. Toptalo caught up the familiar rhythm in the middle; his arms flew out like a bird's wings and away he went, whirling with all manner of fancy tricks,

his hands coming down with ringing slaps on his thighs and knees and the back of his head, on his forehead, and then with a ringing crack on the sole of his jackboot and finally on his open mouth, while the accordion simply whipped him on, spurred him with its turbulent intoxicating rhythm. Toptalo became like a top whirling round, legs flying in all directions, till he was completely out of breath, with cries of "Ikh, akh, akh, akh!"

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On June 5th, 1920, after a series of furious short engagements, Boudyonny's First Cavalry Army broke through the Polish front at the point where the Third and Fourth Polish Armies were linked, and completely smashed the Cavalry Brigade of General Savitzki, which tried to bar the way. It then advanced towards Rouzhin. In order to repair the breach, the Polish command with feverish haste prepared a shock corps, and five tanks, fresh from the railway trucks at Pogrebishche, were rushed to the spot. But Boudyonny's army encircled Zaroudnitza, from where the counter-attack was being prepared, and attacked the Poles from the rear.

The Polish Cavalry Division of General Kornitzki was then despatched against Boudyonny's army with orders to strike it in the rear, as in the opinion of the Polish Command it was bound to attempt to reach Kazatin, a very important strategic point in the Polish rear. This did not improve the Polish position. Although they succeeded in closing the breach the next day and cutting off Boudyonny's army, there was that powerful cavalry group in their territory, smashing up their rear bases and bound to attack the Polish forces round Kiev. As they proceeded the cavalry destroyed

numerous small railway bridges and sections of tracks so as to make it impossible for the Poles to retreat easily. Then, having obtained information from prisoners, to the effect that the staff of the Polish army was quartered at Zhitomir, the situation really being that the staff of the whole front was at Zhitomir, the commanding officer made up his mind to seize the important railway junctions and administrative centres of Zhitomir and Berdichev. On June 7th at dawn the fourth cavalry division was already on the way to Zhitomir. In one of the squadrons, in place of Koulyabko, on the right flank rode Paul Korchagin. He had been accepted in the squadron on the collective demand of the men, who did not want to let such a fine accordion-player go.

Without reining in they spread in a fan-shape round Zhitomir. Their sabres glistened in the sun. The earth groaned, the horses panted, the men rose in their stirrups. The ground flashed by beneath them, and the large town with its gardens and parks rushed towards them. They galloped down the residential streets of the outskirts into the centre of the town, and the cry of "Give in!" as terrible and bloodcurdling as death, rang through the air. The Poles were taken completely by surprise and showed scarcely any resistance. The town garrison was crushed. Paul galloped furiously, head down to his horse's neck; beside him, on a thin-legged black horse, rode Toptalo. In front of Paul's eyes, with a merciless blow, the dashing horseman cut down a Polish legionary who was too slow to put rifle to shoulder. Their horses' iron-shod hooves scraped shrieking on the paving-stones. And then, suddenly, directly in the middle of the road, there was a machine-gun and four figures in blue Polish uniforms and rectangular caps. When one of them, with

coils of gold braid on his collar, saw the men galloping towards him he flung out one arm, levelling his revolver : neither Toptalo nor Paul were able to hold back their horses and they galloped straight into the jaws of death. The officer fired at Paul—and missed ; the bullet whisked past his cheek and the horse rode the lieutenant down, and he fell, his head crashing on the large cobbles of the street. That very second the machine-gun began its wild laughter, feverishly hurried, and Toptalo and his horse were each stung by a dozen hornets.

Paul's horse reared and whinnied in fright. Then it leapt forward and carried Paul clean over Toptalo and his horse, straight at the men with the machine-gun. His sabre glittered through the air and cut deep into a blue square of cap. Again his sabre whirled, ready to come down on another head, but the maddened horse had leapt to one side. Then the squadron came pouring round from the cross-roads like a furious mountain river and dozens of sabres whistled in the air.

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The long narrow corridors of the prison were loud with cries. There was great excitement in the cells, crammed as full as could be with folk with agonised and exhausted faces. Fighting had been going on in the town—was it possible that liberty was at hand, that their own forces had entered the town ? Though from what quarter ? Shots were heard at close range—in the prison courtyard. Then the sound of men running down the passages. And then suddenly a voice that meant so much, saying : “ Come on out, comrade.”

Paul ran up to a locked door ; there were dozens of eyes at the little window in the door. He struck the

door with all his might, with his rifle-butt, again and again. Mironov stopped him and took a grenade out of his pocket and said: "Wait a bit, this will do it." Sergeant Cigarchenko snatched it from him. "Drop that, you damned fool, are you crazy? The keys will be here in a moment. If we can't break in without explosives we'll wait for the keys."

They were already bringing the warders down the passage, urging them on with revolvers. The passage filled with ragged, unwashed people, beside themselves with delight. Paul swung a door wide and rushed into the cell. He cried: "Comrade, you are free. We are Boudyonny's men, our division has taken the town." A woman, her eyes wet with tears, rushed at Paul and embraced him as if he was her own son, and sobbed. Better than any other prize, better even than victory for the men of the Division, was that liberation of five thousand and seventy-one Bolsheviki herded by the White Polish armies into stone cages, there to await a firing-squad or the gallows, and two thousand political workers of the Red Army. For those seven thousand-odd revolutionaries, night with no ray of light suddenly was turned to the brilliant sunshine of a hot June day.

One of the released prisoners, a man with a face as yellow as a lemon, rushed at Paul with great delight. It was Samuel Lecher, a Shepetovka compositor.

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Samuel told Paul his story. His face was covered with a grey deposit. His story was of the sanguinary tragedy of their own town, Shepetovka, and his words fell on Paul's heart like drops of molten metal.

“They rounded us all up one night, in one go, some accursed provocateur gave us away. So there we were in the hands of the military police. Paul, how they beat us up! I suffered less than some of the others, as after the first few blows I fell senseless to the floor—some of the boys were too tough. We had no point in hiding anything. They knew more than we did, every step we’d made.

“We couldn’t even be sure there was not some traitor still among us! I can’t tell you about those days. Paul, you know many of them—Valia Brouzzhak, Roza Gritzman, a mere kid, only seventeen, such a nice girl, such trusting eyes she had, then Sasha Bounshaft, you remember, one of our composers, such a happy lad he was, always drawing caricatures of the boss. Well, him, then two schoolboys from the high school—Novoselski and Touzhitz. You must know them. And all the others from the places round. Altogether there were twenty-nine of us arrested, six of them girls. They tortured us all cruelly. Valia and Roza were raped the very first day. The swine misused them just how they liked. They were half-dead when they were dragged back into the cell. Then Roza began talking to herself and a few days later she was completely out of her mind. They didn’t believe in her madness, they considered she was simulating madness, and at every cross-examination she was knocked about. She was frightful to look at when they shot her. Her face was black all over from blows, her eyes were wild and mad, and she was like an old woman.

“Valia Brouzzhak held herself well to the very last. They died real warriors. I don’t know how they found the strength—but Paul, can I tell you about how they died? I can’t. Their death was more terrible than

words can describe. . . . Valia Brouzzhak was mixed up in most dangerous work—she was maintaining contact with the radio-telegraphists of the Polish staff, and she had been sent into the country round for liaison work, and when they searched they found two grenades and a revolver in her room. The very same provocateur who gave us away had given her the grenades. The whole thing was planted—as if she was plotting to blow up the Polish staff.

“ Oh, Paul, I don't feel I can tell you about their last days, but if you insist I shall. There was a court-martial which condemned Valia and two others to hanging and the rest to shooting. The Polish soldiers among whom we had been working were tried two days earlier. A young corporal, the radio-telegraphist Sniegourko, who had been an electrical fitter before the war in Łódz, was accused of high treason and Communist propaganda among the soldiers and sentenced to death by shooting. He did not appeal against it and was shot twenty-four hours later.

Valia was called as witness at his trial. She told us that Sniegourko had admitted that he had carried on Communist propaganda, but fiercely rejected the accusation of high treason. He said : ‘ My fatherland is the Polish Soviet Republic. Yes, I am a member of the Communist Party of Poland ; I have been made a soldier by force. And I have done my best to open the eyes of other soldiers like myself whom you have sent to fight. You can hang me for it, but I deny that I have been treacherous to my country, nor shall I change my view. Only my fatherland is not the same as yours. Yours is the fatherland of the gentry and bourgeoisie, and mine of the workers and peasants. And in my fatherland—

for it will come, I am profoundly convinced of that, nobody would call me a traitor.'

"After sentence they put us all in together.. And then, just before the execution, they herded us in the town prison. During the night they built the gallows opposite the prison, under the hospital walls, and out by the woods, a little farther away, beside the road, at the place where there's a steep drop, they allotted a site for the shooting, and dug a common grave for us.

The sentence was posted all over the town and everybody knew about it ; they fixed the execution for the afternoon because they wanted everybody to see it and be frightened. From early morning they began to drive people out from the town to the gallows. Some went out of curiosity, and though it was terrible, they went. There was a huge crowd round the gallows. There were heads as far as you could see. You know there is a timber stockade round the prison. That's where they built the gallows, and we could hear the murmur of the crowd. They had a row of machine-guns in the street in the background, and mounted and foot police collected from the whole district. There was a whole battalion encircling the quarter. For those condemned to the gallows a grave was dug just beneath. We waited for our end in silence ; only every now and then somebody would say something. We had talked everything over the day before, and said our good-byes. There was only Roza kept muttering something in one corner of the cell, talking to herself. Valia was completely exhausted by beatings and rapings, and could not walk and just lay still. And two Communist girls from the town, sisters, sat hugging each other and could not keep their tears back. Then Stepanov of the district,

a young fellow as strong as a wrestler, who had laid out two military police when they arrested him, said persistently : ' No tears, comrades ! Get your crying done here, so you don't cry there. There's no reason to give the accursed swine extra enjoyment. Whatever we do we're for it, we have to perish, we must die well. Let not one of us go on his knees. Comrades, don't forget, die well ! '

" Then they came for us. The leader of the guard was Shvarkovski, chief officer of their intelligence service, a sadist, a mad dog. He may not have done the raping himself, but he certainly let his gendarmes do it while he looked on and enjoyed it. They had a gangway of military police from prison to gallows. And there were the canaries, as we called them on account of their yellow shoulder-knots, their sabres bared. With their rifle butts they hurried us out into the prison-yard and then made us form fours, and opened the gates and drove us into the open street and ranged us in front of the gallows so that we should all see how our comrades were killed. The gallows were high, made of thick timbers. There were three nooses of thick twisted cord, and platforms with steps supported on a post which could be knocked over. The sea of people made a scarcely audible murmur and seemed to be all the time astir, and all eyes were on us. We could recognise our families.

" On the steps of the parade entrance to the prison, a little way off, the Polish gentry were gathered, with field-glasses, together with their officers. They had come to see the Bolsheviks hanged.

" The snow was soft, the woods were grey with it, the trees might have had cotton-wool on them, and there were snowflakes slowly turning and falling and melting on

our hot faces and the platforms of the gallows were powdered with snow. We were almost naked, but not one of us felt the cold, and Stepanov did not even notice that he had no boots on.

“The military prosecutor and superior officers took their places by the gallows. At last Valia and the other two comrades who were to be hanged were brought out of the prison. They walked arm in arm, all three, Valia in the centre—she was too weak to walk, so the comrades supported her, but she tried hard to walk herself, remembering Stepanov’s words; ‘We must die well.’ She had no coat on, only a knitted jumper. Clearly Shvarovski did not like to see them arm in arm like that, and he gave them a push. Valia said something—and for that a mounted policeman slashed her with full force across the face with his whip. Then a woman somewhere in the crowd shrieked terribly, went into wild hysterics and tried to force her way through the crowd to the three going to their death, but she was seized and dragged off somewhere. It must have been Valia’s mother.

“When she got near the gallows Valia began to sing. I never heard such a voice before—only somebody going to death could sing like that. She sang the *Warszawianka* and the two other comrades took it up too. The mounted police lashed at them, thrashed them with stupid rage, but they did not seem to feel the blows. The police then knocked them down and dragged them like sacks to the gallows. They then gabbled through the death sentence and put the nooses on them. Then we all struck up the *International*. They rushed at us from all sides, and all I saw was a soldier knocking the post from under a platform with his rifle butt and the three of them dangling on their ropes. . . .

“We ten had the sentence commuting the death sentence to hard labour for life read to us only when we were ranged up against the wall. The other seventeen were all shot.”

Samuel wrenched at the neck of his shirt as if it was choking him. “They left them hanging three days, and there was a guard day and night by the gallows. Later new prisoners were brought in to our cell and they told us that Toboldin’s rope broke on the fourth day—he was the heaviest—and then they took the others down and buried them on the spot. But the gallows were not taken down, and when they brought us here we saw them with the nooses dangling, ready for new victims.”

Samuel’s story ended. He sat staring somewhere far off. Paul did not notice that the story was ended. He could see three human figures silently turning, with ghastly faces, their heads jerked to one side.

Suddenly bugles in the street rang out with the “Assembly” and this brought Paul back to reality. In an almost inaudible voice he said: “Let’s get outside, Samuel!”

Outside the street was bordered by cavalry and the Polish prisoners of war were marching by. The Regimental Commissar was standing by the door of the prison finishing an order in a field note-book. He handed the note to a sturdy squadron-leader. “Take this, Comrade Antipov,” he said, “prepare a cavalry escort and deliver these prisoners to Novograd-Volynski. Have the wounded treated and loaded in ambulances and taken there too. Take them about a dozen miles out of the town and let them go. We’ve no time to bother about them. And see there is no harshness towards a single prisoner.”

As he mounted, Paul turned to Samuel and said:

“Have you ever heard the like. They can hang our folk, but we’re to take them nicely over to their own people, and see there is no harshness! How can we?” The Regimental Commander turned to him and looked him fiercely in the eyes, and Paul heard the hard dry words—as if the Commander was talking to himself: “Any harshness towards unarmed prisoners will be punished by shooting. We are not Whites!”

And, as he rode away from the prison gates, Paul recalled the last order of the Revolutionary Military Council which had been read out to the whole regiment. It ran: “The land of workers and peasants loves its Red Army and is proud of it, and it demands that there shall not be one stain on its banner.” And Paul’s lips whispered: “Not one stain.”

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While the Fourth Cavalry Division was taking Zhitomir, the 20th Brigade of the Seventh Sharpshooter Division, which was part of Comrade Golikov’s Shock Troops, was forcing the passage of the River Dnieper in the neighbourhood of the village of Okouninovo. A group made up of the Twenty-fifth Sharpshooter Division and the Bashkirian Cavalry Brigade was ordered to cross the river and cut the Kiev-Korosten Railway at Irsha Station. This manœuvre cut the sole route of retirement of the Poles from Kiev. In this engagement Mishka Levchoukov, one of the Shepetovka YCL Organisation, lost his life, unnoticed in the general struggle.

They were hurrying over the rickety pontoon bridge when from behind the hills with a menacing whine came a sharpnel shell and tore the water to pieces, and in the same instant Mishka fell under one of the boats of the

pontoon. The water swallowed him up, did not give him back, and only flaxen-haired Yakimenko, wearing a peakless cap, cried out in alarm : " Take pity, look, there's Mishka fallen into the water, he's gone, he's lost ! " Yakimenko stopped short and gaped at the dark mass of water, but others came up behind, pushing him on and shouting : " What are you gaping there for, you fool. Get on with you ! " There was no time to waste thinking about a comrade. The brigade was behind the rest anyway ; they had already taken the other shore.

Sergey did not learn of the death of Mishka till four days later, when the brigade took Bouch Station after a sharp engagement and then took up a position facing towards Kiev and fought off the fierce attacks of the Poles trying to get through to Korosten.

Yakimenko was lying by Sergey's side. He paused in the furious fire he was keeping up and with some difficulty threw open the action of his rifle, and then, keeping his head low on the ground, said to Sergey : " The rifle wants a rest, it's red-hot."

Sergey could scarcely catch what he said, the noise of firing was so great. Then, when there was a slight lull, Yakimenko managed to get out : " By the way, that mate of yours got drowned in the Dnieper, though I didn't exactly see him fall in." Then he worked the action of his rifle a moment, took out a clip from his case and concentrated on re-loading his rifle for more work.

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The Eleventh Division, which was aiming at taking Berdichev, met with a fierce resistance from the Poles. There was a sanguinary battle in the streets of the town. Barricades had been erected against the cavalry and

machine-guns rattled away. Yet they took the town, and the remainder of the defeated Polish forces took to flight. But the greatest blow to the Poles was the exploding of a million shells—the munition dump of the Polish armies. Finely powdered glass fell like rain over the town and the houses shook like cardboard houses from the explosions.

The fall of Zhitomir and then of Berdichev were blows in the Polish rear, and in two great streams they began a hasty retirement from Kiev, making desperate efforts to forge a road out of the iron ring which encircled them. Paul had now lost all sensation of his own individuality. Every day was marked by the intoxication of fierce fighting, and Paul Korchagin was lost in the mass of men and, like every other of them, the "I" disappeared and "we" took its place—it was *our* regiment, *our* squadron, *our* brigade. Meanwhile events developed at a tempestuous speed, and every day brought something new. The regiments of Boudyonny's Horse struck blow after blow and shattered and disorganised the whole of the Polish rear. And, intoxicated with their victories, the cavalry divisions made passionately fierce attacks on Novograd-Volynski, the very heart of the Polish rear. They would fall back like waves from steep cliffs, and retire a little and then once again fling themselves forward with their terrible cry of "Give in!"

Nothing could help the Poles, neither barbed-wire entanglements nor the desperate resistance of the town garrison, and on the morning of July 27th a cavalry detachment in parade order crossed the River Slouch and entered Novograd-Volynski, and further pursued the Poles in the direction of Koretz. At the same time the Forty-fifth Division, under Yakir, crossed the Slouch

by Novoić Miropolić, while Kotovski's cavalry brigade attacked Liubar. Then the radio-station of the First Cavalry Division received orders from the general command to direct all cavalry to the capture of Rovno. The advance of the Red Divisions was invincible; the Poles were broken up and demoralised and driven to seek safety in scattered flight.

One day, when sent by the Brigade Commander to the station, where an armoured train was waiting, Paul had a most unexpected meeting. His horse cantered up the steep embankment without stopping, and Paul only reined in at the first of the grey coaches. There was something menacing about the inaccessible train with the black muzzles of guns concealed in turrets. A number of men covered with grease and black were busy by the train lifting a heavy steel shield off the track. There was a Red Army man carrying a bucket of water and Paul asked him where he could find the train Commander. The man pointed to the engine and said: "There he is."

Paul went up to the engine and asked: "Which of you is the Commander?" A pock-marked man dressed in leather from head to foot turned to him and said: "I am." Paul pulled out the packet and said: "Orders from the Brigade Commander. Please sign on the envelope." The Commander rested the envelope on his knee and signed. At the second bogie of the engine was a man oiling. All Paul saw was a pair of broad shoulders; he noticed a revolver sticking out of one pocket of the man's leather trousers. "Here's your receipt," the Commander said and handed Paul the envelope. Paul was just drawing in the bridle preparing to go back when the man with the oiler suddenly straightened up

and turned round. The next instant Paul had leapt to the ground—as if something had knocked him off his horse—and was crying: “Artem, brother!” The grease-covered mechanic quickly dropped the oiler and seized the young Red Army man in his bear’s embrace. “Paul, boy! You scoundrel! Why, it really is you!” Artem cried—he could hardly believe his eyes.

The Commander of the armoured train viewed the scene with some surprise. The gunners of the train laughed heartily. “Just think, brothers, and meeting like that.”

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On August 19th, near Lvov, Paul lost his cap during an engagement. He reined in his horse, but his comrades were already in desperate hand-to-hand fighting with the Poles. Demidov came charging through a willow copse down towards the river, yelling: “The commander of the division’s killed!” Paul started. So Letounov, his heroic commander, a comrade of irreproachable bravery, had gone. A wild fury took possession of Paul, and he slashed his horse, Gnedok—the horse’s bridle was spattered with blood and the horse was exhausted—with the flat of his sabre and galloped into the thick of the fray. “Cut the swine down!” he yelled, “cut them down; cut down these Polish nobles, they’ve killed Letounov!” And blindly, not even seeing his victim, he slashed at a body in a green uniform. The men were seized with savage hate because of the death of their Commander, and cut down the troop of Polish legionaries to a man.

They had galloped out into the open in pursuit of fugitives, but the Polish batteries had them sighted and

the shrapnel was rending the air and scattering death all round. A green magnesium flame flared in front of Paul's eyes and thunder smote his ears and burning iron seared into his skull. Then the earth span round in a frightful and incomprehensible way and began to lose its balance, stood on one side. Paul was swept from his saddle like a straw, and he flew over Gniedok's head and struck the earth heavily. There was immediate night.

CHAPTER NINE

THE octopus had a bulging eye, a head like a cat's, it was dull-red with a green centre and was all aglow, luminous. It had dozens of suckers and they were constantly writhing like a tangle of reptiles and there was a revolting rustle from the rub of their scales. The octopus, too, had the faculty of locomotion. He saw it come nearly touching his own eyes, and then the suckers crept over his flesh and they were at one and the same time both clammy and burning, like stinging nettles. The octopus reached out its sting and it sank into his head like a leech and then spasmodically contracted and sucked at his blood. He felt his blood pouring from his body into the swollen body of the octopus. How that sting sucked, and the pain where it had pierced his head was unbearable.

Somewhere far away he could hear human voices. Somebody said: "How is his pulse to-day?" And another voice, a softer voice, a woman's voice, answered: "Pulse, 138. Temperature, 103.1. Constant delirium."

Then the octopus disappeared, though the pain from its sting remained. And Paul felt somebody's fingers at his arm above the wrist. He tried to open his eyes, but they were so heavy that he could not part the lids. And why was it so hot? His mother must have lit the stove. Then there were people talking again: "His pulse now is only 122." He tried hard to open his eyes. Inside him there was fire. He was suffocating. Drink—how

thirsty he was. He would get up at once and have a good drink. But why didn't he get up? As soon as he tried to stir he found it was not his body, but a strange body which he was not able to control. So his mother would bring him water at once. He would say to her: "I am thirsty." There was something stirring beside him. Was it not perhaps that octopus creeping up again? There it was, with its reddish eyes. . . . And from a distance he heard the soft voice saying: "Frossia, bring some water, will you?"

And Paul then endeavoured to recall who Frossia was. But the effort only thrust him back into darkness. He came back out of the darkness and again he remembered "I am thirsty." He could hear voices, and somebody said: "I think he is coming to." And then, more clear, nearer, was that gentle voice: "Are you thirsty?" And the voice called him "the patient." Was he then ill or wounded, or were they talking to someone else? He said to himself: "It must be typhus." And for the third time he made a great effort to open his eyes, and at last he succeeded in opening them, and then through the narrow slit of the opened eye the first thing he was aware of was a red globe over his head, and then he was again wrapped in something dark, and the darkness bent down over him and his lips felt the hard edge of a glass and moisture, life-giving moisture, and the fire inside him was somewhat quenched.

He was very satisfied and whispered: "That's fine."

The voice asked: "Can you see me?"

This voice came from the something dark which was over him, and then he began to fall asleep again, though he did find time to answer: "I can't see you, I can hear you. . . ."

The voice said : “ Who would have thought he would recover. Yet, see, he’s struggling back to life. An extraordinarily powerful constitution. Nina Vladimirovna, you have every right to be proud. It’s certainly your handiwork.”

Then the woman’s voice—very moved—“ Oh, how glad I am ! ”

Paul had returned to consciousness after thirteen days. His young body had refused to die, and strength had slowly returned to it. It was a rebirth, and everything seemed new and strange. Only his head was held down by an invincible weight in a plaster of Paris casing, and he could not move it. But the sensation of body returned, and he even began to contract and relax his fingers.

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Nina Vladimirovna, younger physician of the Military Clinical Hospital, was seated at the tiny table in her cubicle, turning over the pages of a thick lilac-coloured note-book. The following entries stood in it, written in fine sloping hand :

“ 20 August, 1920. A batch of badly wounded brought in to-day by Red Cross train. The corner cot allotted to a Red Army man with head wound. Only seventeen. . . . The wounded man has been unconscious ever since he was hit—19 August, shrapnel fragment. . . . ”

“ 27 August. Korchagin’s wound examined to-day. Very profound, skull fractured, hemiplegia, right cranium. Effusion of blood in right eye, which is swollen. The surgeon wanted to extirpate the eye, to avoid inflammatory process, but I persuaded him not to so long as there is any hope of the swelling subsiding. He agreed. I did this purely on æsthetic grounds, as if the lad is to

get over it, why disfigure him? He is in constant delirium, and very restless, and has to be watched. . . . The surgeon says he will recover. . . .”

“30 August. Korchagin still unconscious. Now moved to hopeless case ward. One of the nurses, Frossia, spends almost all her time beside him. It appears she knew him. Outlook hopeless.”

“2 September. 11 p.m. What a red-letter day! My patient, Korchagin, has come to, come back to life. The crisis is passed. I have not been home once these last two days. . . .”

“10 September. To-day I wrote a letter home for Korchagin. He has told his people that he is only slightly wounded, will soon be well and come to see them. He has lost a great deal of blood and is as white as a sheet, and still very feeble.”

“14 September. To-day Korchagin smiled for the first time. He has a wonderful smile. He is generally morose, like an old man. He is making great strides now. . . . Yesterday he asked me what the black marks on my arms were. I didn't tell him that they were the marks made by his hands when he gripped me in delirium.”

“17 September. The wound in Korchagin's forehead very healthy. All the staff are amazed by his enormous patience, really remarkable, when being dressed. He often loses consciousness, but never a groan passes his lips. We all know now that if we hear a gasp he has fainted. Where does he find such resistance? I cannot tell.”

“21 September. Korchagin was wheeled out on to the balcony for the first time to-day. How he looked at the garden and drank in the outdoor air! There is only one eye free under the bandages, but it shines, it's

alive, it looks on the world as if this was the first time he had seen such things.”

“26 September. I was called to the reception room to-day, and found two girls waiting there. One of them is a beauty. They wanted to see Korchagin. Tonia Toumanov and Tatiana Bouranovski. The name Tonia was familiar to me—Korchagin often mentioned her in his delirium. I gave permission.”

“8 October. To-day Korchagin for the first time walked alone in the garden. He has been asking me persistently when he will be able to go. I have told him soon. The two girls come to see him every visitors' day. I know now why he never once groaned. I asked him and he said : ‘Read *The Gadfly*, and you'll see.’”

“14 October. Korchagin discharged to-day. Our parting was difficult. The bandage is off his other eye, only his forehead is bandaged now. The eye is blind, but it looks normal. I was very sorry to lose such a fine comrade. Life is like that. As soon as they are mended they leave us hoping never to see us again.

“When we said good-bye he said : ‘If only it had been the left eye—how am I going to shoot now?’ He's still thinking of getting back to the fighting line.”

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Paul spent the first weeks after hospital at the Bouranovskis', where Tonia Toumanov was living. He immediately made attempts to draw Tonia into general party work. He invited her to a general meeting of the town YCL and she consented to go. But when she came out of her room, ready to go, Paul bit his lips. She was dressed very smartly, with particular taste, and he could hardly bring himself to take her to the meeting. That

was the cause of their first quarrel. When he asked why she had dressed like that she was piqued and said : " I never believe in doing what everybody does ; if you don't want to take me with you I'll stay at home. "

In the club of the YCL he found it difficult to speak to her decked out like that among faded tunics and poor little blouses, and the comrades looked on her as an outsider. She felt that and replied by treating them in a provocative scornful way. The secretary of the goods-quay, a broad-shouldered dock-worker named Pankratov, in a coarse tarpaulin tunic, called Paul aside. He scowled at him and squinted over at Tonia, saying : " Was it you brought that tart here ? "

Paul answered harshly : " Yes, it was. "

Pankratov said : " Hmmm ! She doesn't look quite our sort ; she looks too much of a swell. How did she come to be let in ? "

Paul felt a drumming in his temples. He said : " She is my comrade, and I brought her here. Understand ? She is not hostile to us, only on the clothes question there is something to be said, I know, only you must not always judge by people's clothes. Don't forget that I know whom to bring here, so you needn't become so critical, comrade. "

He felt like saying something a great deal stronger, but he refrained, as he guessed that Pankratov was expressing the general opinion. So he transferred all his anger to Tonia. He said to himself : " And I told her about it, too. Why on earth does she have to go to such extremes ? "

That evening was the beginning of the end of their friendship. Paul saw the friendship which had seemed so secure slowly break up—and he watched the process with both astonishment and bitterness. Days passed, and every meeting, every conversation brought greater

estrangement and a mute discomfort into their relationship, till Tonia's cheap individualism became hateful to Paul. Then the inevitability of a break was evident to them both.

The day came when they both went to the Merchants' Park, littered with brown autumn leaves, to say a last word to each other. They leant over the railings over the cliff; the Dnieper gleamed below them, a grey mass of water. The setting sun painted Troukhanov Island with gold and flooded the windows of houses opposite with fire. Tonia gazed at those golden rays and with great sadness said: "Is our friendship really dying like those rays of the sun?"

He could not take his eyes from her. He frowned decisively and answered in a low voice: "Tonia, we've already talked it all over. Of course you know how I have loved you, and even now my love might return, but before that could happen you would have to be with us. I am no longer the same Paul you knew before. I should be a bad husband, too, if you believe that I should first be yours and only then belong to the Party. Because for me the Party comes first, and you and other folk second."

Tonia stared miserably at the shimmering blue of the river, and her eyes filled with tears. Paul looked steadily at the familiar outline of her face and her thick chestnut hair, and a wave of pity for that girl who had once been so dear and near entered his heart. He put his hand cautiously on her shoulder and said: "Give up all those things that tie you. Join us. Let you and me together go on with the work of destroying the boss-class. On our side there are so many splendid women who bear the whole burden of the terrible struggle together with

us and bear all our deprivations, too. They may not be so finely educated as you are, but why, oh why don't you join us? You've told me that Chouzhanin tried to take you by force, but Chouzhanin is a degenerate, not a real Communist fighter. You say my friends were hostile towards you; but then, why did you dress up just as if you were going to a society dance? Your pride, eh? You weren't going to be the same as folk in grubby tunics. You've had the courage to fall in love with a worker, and yet you can't fall in love with the working-class idea. I don't want us to part, and I should like to have a fine memory of you." He said no more.

The following day in the street Paul saw a public notice signed by the Chairman of the Provincial Extraordinary Commission, and the signature was that of Fiodor Zhoukhraï. His heart leapt. He simply forced his way in to see Zhoukhraï—the sentries did not want to let him in. He made such a scene that they nearly put him under arrest—but he got his way. The meeting was wonderful. Zhoukhraï had lost an arm—shrapnel. The two had a great talk about work. Zhoukhraï said: "While you're still not fit to go back to the front, you can help me in work against counter-revolution. You come round and see me to-morrow."

The Polish war was over and the exhausted country could take breath. But Paul was unable to see his folk because Shepetovka had been again taken by the Poles and had become a temporary military frontier outpost. Peace negotiations were begun and Paul was at work on the Extraordinary Commission day and night. Zhoukhraï's room served him as living quarters. When

news that the Poles had occupied Shepetovka reached him, he fell into depression. He said: "Fiodor, what, does this mean my mother will have to be a Pole, if peace is concluded as things are?" But Fiodor reassured him, and said: "The frontier is almost sure to follow the river and pass through Goryn, so that Shepetovka will be ours. Anyway we shall soon know."

New divisions were being transferred rapidly from the Polish front to the south. Wrangel was trying to take advantage of the lull, and moving up from the Crimea—while the Republic had been straining its forces on the Polish front, the Wrangel armies had been moving up the Dnieper towards the Province of Ekaterinoslav. Now that the Polish war was ended the country moved its armies down to the Crimea to put an end to that new nest of counter-revolution.

The trains poured through Kiev southwards—loaded with men, waggons, field-kitchens, guns. In the Transport Extraordinary Commission in which Paul worked there was now frenzied activity. The tremendous flow of armies created endless congestion, and the stations were overcrowded and all movement would break down in the absence of any single free track; while the tape-machines threw out endless ribbons of ultimatums to clear the road for this or that particular division. There was no end to those telegrams, and each of them contained some such phrase as "precedence above all others" . . . "consider as operational orders" . . . "immediately free a track. . . ." And nearly every one of them contained a warning that those guilty of failure to execute the order would be handed over to court martial by the Military Tribunal. The department responsible for clearing

the congestion was always the local Transport Extraordinary Commission. Thither it was that officers commanding various units would hasten and brandish revolvers and insist on their particular trains having precedence, as ordered by Telegram No. So-and-so from such and such a commander. But Zhoukhraï's massive iron body and his icy calm and his unbending voice which prohibited argument always drove the revolvers back into their holsters. Paul used to go out on to the platform with stabbing pains in his head. That work was destroying his nerves.

One day he suddenly saw Sergey on one of the open trucks surrounded by munition cases. Sergey leapt down on to him and nearly rolled him over and crushed him in his embrace. "Paul, old fellow! Damn it, but you haven't changed a bit." The two friends hardly knew what to talk about, there was so much they had gone through since they had met. They asked questions and answered themselves without either waiting for the other, and did not even notice the engine whistle. It was only when the train began slowly to move out that they separated. What else could they do? Their meeting was cut short, the train was steadily gathering speed. So as not to be left behind Sergey shouted a final word to his friend and raced along the platform and grabbed the open door of a horse-box. He was snatched up by a number of hands and drawn inside, while Paul stood watching him go. He only then recalled that Sergey knew nothing about Valia's end. He had not been to Shepetovka at all, and Paul had been so overcome by the unexpected meeting that he had forgotten to tell him. But he said to himself: "Let him be at peace, it's better for him not to know." He did not

know himself that this was the last time he would see Sergey. He did not know that Sergey, planted there on the roof of that horse-box, bearing the force of the autumn wind on his chest, was moving towards his death.

Doroshenko, a soldier with his overcoat burned through on the back, said : " Sit down, Sergey." But Sergey laughed and said : " It's all right, the wind and I are old friends. Let it blow a few cobwebs away."

A week later Sergey fell during an engagement in the autumnal steppes—hit by a chance bullet fired from a great distance. The blow staggered him. He made one step forwards, the burning pain rending at his chest ; then he rocked from side to side without a cry, flung out his arms and embraced the air, hugged it to him and then crouched as if preparing to spring. His body turned to cast-iron and crashed on the ground and his expressionless blue eyes stared out over the grand expanse of the steppe.

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The nerve-wracking nature of the Extraordinary Commission work began to tell on Paul's shattered constitution. Head-pains grew more and more frequent, and at last, after two nights without a wink of sleep, he lost consciousness. Then he had to talk it over with Zhoukhraï. He said : " Fiodor, tell me what you would have to say about my transferring to some other kind of work ? I should very much like to work in the head-shops in my trade, and anyway I feel there's something not quite in order here. The medical commission told me I was not fit for military service. But it's worse than the front here. These two days' work rounding up Soutyr's band have completely done me in. I must have

a rest from this constant skirmishing. Fiodor, you must see I'm not much good in the Extraordinary if I can hardly walk."

Zhoukhraï looked hard at him, with concern, and said : "You certainly don't look up to much. You ought to have been released before, but it's my fault, I've been slack." And as a result of this conversation Paul found himself at the Provincial YCL headquarters with a certificate to the effect that he was placed at the disposal of the committee. A mercurial young lad with his cap rakishly down over his forehead glanced at the document and then gave Paul a lively wink and said : "Out of the Extraordinary, eh? And a pleasant sort of job, that ! Well, of course we'll fix you something up in two shakes. We're damnably short of people. Now what would you like to do, eh? Provincial Supplies Commissariat, eh? No? Then what about the propaganda centre at the docks? No? Now you're making a mistake there. It's a real, nice job, rations first-rate."

Paul interrupted the lad and said : "I want to get into the principal railway shops."

The other gaped at him : "The railway shops? Hm. . . . Now that's just where we don't want people. But, anyway, you go along and see Comrade Oustinovich, she'll fix you up somehow."

And after a short talk with that swarthy girl the matter was settled, and Paul was off as secretary of the YCL group in the workshops with the provision that he should be able to work there at his trade.

Meanwhile, at the gates of the Crimea, in the narrow bottle-neck of land joining the peninsula to the mainland,

at the old frontier which had once separated the Crimean Tartars from the Zaporozhian Cossack settlements, Perekop had been restored and heavily fortified by the White Guards. Behind Perekop, in the Crimea itself, feeling themselves secure and able to carouse endlessly, were the remnants of the old world, driven thither from all parts of the country, and doomed to destruction. And one frosty autumn night tens of thousands of sons of the working-class waded into the cold waters of the bay to cross the Sivash Sea during the night and strike the fortified enemy in the rear. Among those thousands was Ivan Zharki, carefully carrying his machine-gun over his head. When, at daybreak, Perekop came to feverish life, and thousands made a frontal attack on the fortifications, in the rear of the Whites, on the Litovski Peninsula, the first columns of those Reds who had crossed the gulf were going ashore. And one of the first to clamber up the rocky shore was Zharki.

A battle unprecedented in severity then began. The cavalry of the Whites flung itself in wild, bestial attack on the men scrambling out of the water. Zharki's machine-gun spat death around it and never once was silent, and under the rain of bullets men and horses fell in piles. Zharki clipped in fresh discs of bullets with frenzied speed. The hundreds of guns of the Perekop forts roared out, and it seemed as if the very earth was collapsing into a bottomless gulf as thousands of shells were hurled dealing death, rending the sky with wild shrieks and bursting into tiny fragments. And the rent and wounded earth was thrown into the air and darkened the light of the sun with masses of whirling soil. But the head of the reptile was crushed and the Red stream flooded turbulently into the **Crimea**—the divisions of the

First Cavalry Corps, terrible in their final blow. And then the White Guards were seized with instinctive fear and crowded on to the steamers leaving the harbour.

On tattered tunics, where the heart beats, the Republic pinned the little gold discs of the Red Banner, and among the tunics was that of machine-gunner Ivan Zharki.

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Peace was at last concluded with Poland, and, as Zhoukhraï had hoped, Shepetovka remained in the Soviet Ukraine. The frontier was drawn along the river thirty-five kilometres, or about twenty-two miles, from the town. In December, 1920, one memorable morning, a train bore Paul to the familiar scene. He came out on to a platform dusted with snow, glanced in passing at a sign *Shepetovka Main Station*, and then turned sharp to the left to the railway yards. He asked for Artem, but his brother was not there. So he buttoned his overcoat close and strode off rapidly through the woods towards the town.

At the knock on the door Maria Korchagin turned her head and called "Come in!" Then, when in the doorway appeared somebody powdered with snow, and in that somebody she recognised her dear son's face, both hands clutched at her heart and she was so overjoyed that she could not speak at all. She pressed her thin little body against her son's chest and smothered his face with endless kisses and wept happy tears, while Paul embraced his mother and examined her face, worn by sorrow and expectation, and wrinkled all over. He, too, was speechless, and waited for her to grow calmer.

Happiness again showed bright in the eyes of that

woman who had suffered so much. During Paul's whole stay she never tired of talking to him or watching him ; she had never expected to see him again. Her delight was endless, too, when, three days later, late in the evening, Artem burst into the little room with travelling bundle on his back. The little Korchagin home was once again complete, and the two brothers, after frightful trials and tribulations, had come together again.

Their mother asked them : " And what will you both do now ? "

Artem said : " Back to my old bearings, Mamma ! " As for Paul, he spent a fortnight at home, and then went back to Kiev, where his work was awaiting him.

CHAPTER TEN

THE earth was wilting under the scorching heat, and the iron railing on the footbridge over the station was hot enough to burn any hand that touched it. Quite a crowd had gathered on the far side, and they were limp and exhausted by the heat. They were not travellers ; the bridge was principally used to get from the railwaymen's settlement to the town proper. Paul noticed Rita when he was on the first step ; she had come to the station before him and while waiting for him was watching the workers come off the bridge.

Paul stopped three paces away from her. She had not noticed him draw near. Paul examined her with a curiosity which was strange to him. She was wearing a striped blouse, a short blue skirt of simple material, and had drawn a soft chrome leather tunic round her shoulders. Her sun-burned face was framed in a mass of disobedient locks. She was standing with her head a little thrown back, and she was half-frowning because of the dazzling light. This was the first time Paul had looked at this comrade and teacher with that sort of look, and for the first time he had realised that Rita Oustovich was not only a member of the Bureau of the Provincial Committee. As soon as he grasped where his thoughts were leading he was furious with himself and he said to her : " Here, I've been here a whole hour watching you and you won't even see me. It's time we were off, the train's already in." And they

made their way through a service passage to the platform.

The train moved slowly. The coaches were badly in need of repair and they were over-full ; they groaned and creaked and shook as they crossed the points. The evening sky, dense and mauve, poured into the coach, and then night covered the open windows and the compartments were in darkness. Rita was tired and dozed off with her head resting on her rucksack. Paul sat on the edge of the seat with legs dangling and smoked. He too was tired, but there was no room for him to lie down. The night freshness blew in at the window. A jolt wakened Rita, and she noticed the glow of Paul's cigarette. She said to herself : " He's capable of sitting like that all night ; evidently he doesn't want to embarrass me by being too close." Then she said out loud, jokingly : " Now then, Comrade Korchagin, just you drop those bourgeois tendencies and lie down too and have some rest."

So Paul lay down beside her, thankful for the relief of stretching out his legs and swollen feet. She said : " We've enough work and to spare to-morrow. Go to sleep, you unsociable creature." And her arm embraced him confidently, and he felt the touch of her hair on his cheek.

To Paul, Rita was something sacred. She was his life friend, his life comrade—his political guide. But she was also a woman. This he had first realised at the bridge, and that was the reason for her arm being so disturbing to him. He felt her steady breathing, her lips were quite near his. The nearness produced a terrible desire to find those lips. Yet he conquered that desire.

Rita seemed to guess his feeling, and she smiled in the darkness. She had already gone through the delight of passion and the horror of loss. She had given her love to two different Bolsheviks, and both had been taken from her by White Guard bullets. One had been a fine giant of a man, a Brigade Commander; the other had been a lad with wonderful blue eyes.

Soon the regular beat of the wheels had put Paul to sleep, and he did not wake till the engine whistled shrilly the next morning.

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One afternoon Paul was called to the workshop telephone. It was Rita, to tell him she would be free in the evening, and to say something about the uneven writing in an essay of his she was examining on *Causes of the Defeat of the Paris Commune*. And that evening, as he drew near the entrance to the house in Krouglo-Universitetskaia Street, he glanced up. Rita's window had a light in it. He ran up the stairs as usual and knocked on the door and without waiting for an answer, went in. And on the bed, on which not one of the young comrades had a right to sit even for a moment, lay a man in army uniform. His revolver and his cap with five-pointed star lay on the table. Beside him, with her arms tightly round him, sat Rita, deep in a lively conversation. . . . Rita turned a radiant face to Paul. The officer freed himself from her embrace and got to his feet. Rita shook hands with Paul and said: "This is . . ." But the man in uniform without any ceremony butted in and seized Paul's hand and shook it heartily and said: "David Oustinovich." Rita laughed and said: "Just turned up, out of the blue."

Paul's handshake was chilly. He was hurt and the hurt flashed fiercely in his eyes. He observed four stars on David Oustonovich's cuff. Rita was going to say something, but Paul interrupted her and said: "I only ran in to tell you that I am busy to-night unloading timber down at the quay. So don't expect me. For that matter, you have a visitor. Well, I'll be off, the boys are waiting for me down below." And he vanished as suddenly as he had appeared. His rapid steps rang down the stairs, and then a door banged dully down below. There was silence.

Rita answered David's astonished look. She said: "Something's the matter with him."

Down below him, under the bridge, an engine breathed deeply and its powerful lungs threw out a swarm of golden sparks; their fantastic dance swirled into the air and then was extinguished in the smoke. Paul leant on the railings and gazed away at the twinkling of the various coloured lamps at the points. He squinted his one eye. He said to himself: "All the same, Comrade Korchagin, I don't quite understand why you should be so hurt to find that Rita has a husband. After all, has she ever told you she hadn't? And even if she had said so, what has that got to do with it? Why should it cut so deep? And yet, my dear comrade, you have been kidding yourself that it was only a platonic friendship . . . how can you have been so blind? But supposing it isn't her husband. Say, a brother or an uncle. . . . That being so, you've made an ass of yourself, being so boorish to a stranger. In other words, you're a regular lout, no decency in you at all. Of course, you could find out if it is a brother. But then, supposing it does turn out to be a brother or an uncle, what are you

going to say to her about it? No, better break off altogether."

The whistle of a train interrupted his thoughts. It was late, time to be home, that was reflection enough.

Five men formed a little commune in Solomenka—that was what the railway workers' settlement was called. They were Zharki, Klaviček, a jolly fair-haired Czech, Nikolaï Okounev, secretary of the Railway Yards YCL, Stepa Artioukhin, a man of the Railway Extraordinary Commission, till recently boilermaker in the central repair shop, and Paul. They found a suitable room, and for three days after work they lime-washed and painted and scrubbed. There was so much water fetched that some of the neighbours thought they had had a fire. Then they made bunks; sacks stuffed with maple leaves from the station park served as mattresses; on the fourth day the room was ready, dazzling white, with a portrait of Petrovski and a huge map on the walls.

From one of the two windows to the other they had a bookshelf. Two packing-cases covered with cardboard served as benches, and a larger packing-case made a cupboard. In the centre of the room they had a massive billiard-table—minus its baize—which they had lugged home from the Public Services Offices. This was a table by day and by night Klaviček's bed. They then brought all the possessions they each had in the world, and finally Klaviček, who had a genius for household management, made an inventory of the commune's property. He would have pinned it on the wall had not the consensus of opinion been actively against it. Everything in the room was to be common property—earnings and rations

and any occasional parcels received were to be divided equally among all five. Only their weapons were to be considered private property. The members of the commune then decided unanimously that any member of the commune who broke the rule of communal ownership, or in any way deceived his fellows, should be expelled from the commune. Okounev and Klaviček insisted on an addition to that clause—namely, that the offender should also be evicted.

The whole of the district YCL attended the house-warming of the commune. A huge samovar was borrowed from neighbours and the whole stock of saccharine was used on tea. When the tea-drinking was over, choral singing began, with Talia from the tobacco factory as conductor, her red kerchief cocked a bit to one side and her eyes like those of an impudent boy. Nobody yet had managed to look into those eyes at close quarters. Talia Lagoutin's laughter was infectious; that young packer looked on life from the bright-coloured angle of eighteen years. Up would go her arms and the chant would ring out like a fanfare of trumpets. The company did not disperse till the small hours, when it filled the silent streets with hearty young voices.

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Zharki reached out his hand to the telephone. "Shh, lads, I can't hear a word!" he cried to the noisy crowd of YCL-ers gathered in the secretary's room, and the voices immediately dropped two tones.

"I am listening. Oh, it's you. Yes, yes, just a moment. Work? Oh, same old job—transporting the timber from the quay. What? No, he hasn't been sent anywhere. Shall I call him? Right."

Zharki beckoned to Paul. "Comrade Oustinovich wants to speak to you"—and handed him the receiver.

She said: "I thought you must have gone away. I happen to be free this evening. My brother only dropped in on the way through. We hadn't seen each other for two years."

So it was a brother!

He could not hear anything she said. At the same time he thought of that evening and of the decision he made afterwards standing on the bridge. Yes. He would have to go to see her, and burn his boats. Love means so much unrest and pain. Was it a time to speak of love? The voice over the receiver was saying: "What, can't you hear me?" He said: "Yes, yes, I can hear you. Very well, after the meeting of the Bureau." And he hung up the receiver.

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He looked her straight in the eyes and gripped the edge of the oak table hard. "Most likely I shall not be able to go on coming to see you." He spoke, and then saw her thick lashes agitated; her pencil stopped moving over the paper and lay motionless on the opened exercise book.

"Why?"

"I find it more and more difficult to find the time. You yourself know what difficult days we are living in. I am sorry, but I shall have to put my lessons off to a future date. . . ."

He listened to his own voice and he felt that he had not ended with quite the same assurance. He said to himself: "Why beat about the bush like that? So you haven't the courage to deal straight with your heart?"

And he went on insistently: "Apart from that there is

something I have long wanted to tell you—I don't understand you very well. Now when I worked with Comrade Segal things really stuck in my head, but since I've worked with you I remember nothing. After every lesson I've been to see Tokarev to try to straighten things out in my mind. My brain doesn't digest it. You'd better find a pupil with a bit more brains."

He flinched from her intense stare. Then he cut off any possibility of return to her by saying crudely: "So you see, I've come to the conclusion that there's no point in our wasting any more of each other's time."

He got to his feet and carefully slid his chair to one side with his foot and then looked down on her bent head and her face; it looked pale in the lamplight. He put on his cap and said: "Well, Comrade Rita, good-bye. I am sorry I've been such a bother to you. I ought to have told you at once. It's all my fault."

Rita mechanically gave him her hand, and then, astounded by this chilliness towards her, managed to say: "Paul, I don't blame you. If I have been unable to make myself understood by you I deserve what I am getting to-day."

His feet were leaden. He pulled the door to softly. As he left the building he paused. There was still time to go back and tell her everything. But what for? To get a scornful reply from her, like a smack in the face, and again find himself leaving the building? No.

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The sidings gradually turned into cemeteries for worn-out rolling-stock and old engines, and the wind played with the shavings in the emptied timber-yards. At the same time round about the town, in the dense woods,

through the deep ravines, Orlik's guerilla band circled with the swiftness of wild animals. By day they hid in the farms around or on the rich bee-farms in the woods, and came out by night and destroyed the railway track and again retired into their retreats. Time and again trains went shattering down embankments : trucks were turned to matchwood, sleepy men were crushed out of all human semblance, and precious grain was mingled with earth and blood.

Orlik's band galloped down on quiet country places, riding swift horses. The fowls would run squawking from the streets. There would be wild shots. The skirmish would be short, the crackle of rifles outside the white house of the local Soviet would be brief and dry, like brushwood trodden underfoot. Then the bandits would canter about the streets on their well-fed horses and cut down all prisoners. They would hack away whistling like men splitting logs. They rarely shot, in order to spare their ammunition.

Then they would disappear as quickly as they had appeared. They had their eyes and ears everywhere. The parsonage or some better-off peasant's house in each place would contrive to have eyes inside the Soviet ; and from parsonage and farm invisible threads lead to the heart of the woods. By the same road went munitions and fresh pork and bottles of bluish " prime spirit " and also news, which went quietly to the under-atamans and further, through a complex network, to Orlik himself. The band consisted of two to three hundred cut-throats, and numerous attempts to capture them failed. They would break up into numerous small units and they always worked in two or three districts simultaneously. By day the bandits appeared to be peaceful peasant farmers

poking about in their farm-yards, feeding the horses and smugly sucking at their pipes as they stood by their gates and watched the Red cavalry patrols go past.

Alexander Pouzyrevski lost all rest and sleep as he hurried his regiment about through the three counties. He was tirelessly persistent in his pursuit, and he did occasionally succeed in treading on their tails. A month later Orlik withdrew his men from the two counties ; things were getting too hot for him.

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The remnants of the Petlioura armies, driven over the Polish frontier by the Red Army, now began to make ready to play a part in a rising which was to take place ; in this they had the close support of certain foreign representatives in Warsaw. An insurgent army was secretly formed among them. The uprising committee in Shepetovka had its own separate organisation, which consisted of forty-seven persons, of which the majority were active former counter-revolutionaries who had been too trustingly left at liberty by the local Extraordinary Commission. Father Basil was one of the leaders of that organisation, and others were Vinnik and a Petlioura officer named Kouzmenko. The priest's two daughters, and Vinnik's brother and father, also a certain Samotyia, who had found concealment in the offices of the Executive Committee, carried on the rebels' intelligence work.

The proposal was to bomb the Special Department of the Frontier Guards with hand grenades one night, and then release the prisoners and if possible seize the railway station. Meanwhile in the main town, the centre of the proposed uprising, a concentration of officers went on in the greatest secrecy, while guerilla bands were drawn

into the woods round the town, and trustworthy men kept up communications with Petlioura in Rumania.

There were only five men—Bolsheviks—in the town who knew of all those preparations.

The sailor in the Special Commission of the district had not had a minute's sleep for five nights, and this was the sixth. He was one of those Bolsheviks who knew everything. Fiodor Zhoukhraï was going through all the sensations of a man who has tracked down a wild beast and is only waiting for its spring. It was out of the question to give the alarm. The bloodthirsty pest had to be destroyed. That alone would make steady building up of the country possible without everybody being constantly on tenterhooks. It was out of the question to scare the animal away. The only thing which could win that mortal combat was steady nerves on the part of the huntsman and a steady hand. The hour drew near. Somewhere there, in the very town, in a labyrinth of masks and conspiracy, they had decided it should be won—to-morrow night. But those five Bolsheviks who knew it all forestalled them ; their decision was "No, this very night."

That evening an armoured train left the railway yards quietly, without a whistle, and the huge doors were closed behind it silently. The trunk telegraph lines hastened to transmit cypher telegrams, and whenever those telegrams arrived, the guardians of the Republic forgot their sleep and took pains to make the wasps' nests harmless. Akim called Zharki to the telephone. "Group meetings all in order? Yes? Good. You and the secretary of the district committee come here at once for consultation. The timber question is more serious than we expected. Come and we'll have a chat about it"—Zharki heard Akim's quick, firm voice, and growled back into the

receiver : " This damned wood problem's going to drive us all mad soon."

Both secretaries got out of the car in which Litke had brought them and when they had gone up to the second floor they saw that they had not been summoned just to talk about timber. There was a maxim-gun on the secretary's table and machine-gunners from the special mission division were busy with it. The corridors were full of silent guards of town party members and the YCL. In Roussoulbass's room, behind closed doors, an extraordinary sitting of the bureau of the provincial party committee was just ending. Through a fanlight giving on to the street led the wires of two field telephones.

They were talking in hushed voices. In the room Zharki found Akim, Rita and Mikhailo. At first sight he did not recognise Shoumski in his long uniform coat and Sam Browne with revolver in holster. Rita was dressed as she had once been when she was Company Political Instructor—in Red Army soldier's cap, khaki skirt, and leather tunic with heavy Mauser strapped over it. Zharki asked her in astonishment : " Whatever does all this mean ? " She said : " Practice alarm. We're just off to your district. There is an alarm rally at the Fifth Infantry schools. All the lads are going there straight from cell meetings. The chief thing is to endeavour to get there unnoticed."

It was deadly silent in the thick wood. The massive oaks were hundred-year-old giants. The sleeping lake was hidden by burdocks and water-nettles ; the paths were deserted. In the heart of the wood, surrounded by a high white wall, was the building of the former cadet school—now the officers' school of the Fifth Red Infantry Corps. It was late. The upper floor was not lit at all.

From the outside everything was quiet, and anyone who passed by the building would have thought they were all fast asleep. But then why were the huge double doors into the courtyard open, and what were those two things squatting there like huge frogs? But the people collecting at the school from all parts of the railway settlement knew that once a night alarm was on, nobody inside was asleep. They came in straight from cell meetings, after a brief explanation, and they walked in silence, never more than three in a group, and in the pockets of them all were little folding cards headed either *The Communist Party (Bolsheviks)* or *The Ukraine YCL*. Nobody was allowed through the gates who could not show one of those cards.

The assembly hall was already quite full. The hall was lit—the windows were hung with tenting. The Bolsheviks gathered there were quietly rolling cigarettes and smoking and exchanging jokes about the precautions of such mock night alarms—as not one of them suspected any real alarm. They thought it was just a gathering to keep in training and test the discipline of the special groups. But those who had real fighting experience felt something in the air not quite like a mock alarm. It was all being carried out a little too quietly. The platoons of army men of the school were being paraded with whispered commands, and machine-guns were being brought out, and there was not a light to be seen in the whole building from the outside.

Paul went up to Doubava and said: "Something serious afoot, eh, Mityaï?" Mityaï Doubava was sitting on a window-sill with a girl Paul did not know, though he had noticed her two or three days before at Zharki's. He slapped Paul on the shoulder and said jokingly: "What, you don't say you've got cold feet? All right,

boy, we'll teach you a little fighting now. What, you two don't know each other?" He nodded at the girl. "Anna, that's what she goes by, I don't know her surname; she's in charge of the propaganda centre."

The girl examined Paul while Mityaï had his little joke introducing them. She pushed back a lock of hair which had escaped from under her lilac kerchief. Her eyes met Paul's, and there was a struggle which lasted some seconds. Her eyes were bluish-black and sparkled challengingly. Her dense eyelashes were like the wings of a black moth. Paul turned his eyes away and looked at Mityaï. He felt he was blushing, and he frowned—he was annoyed with himself.

There was a commotion in the hall. Mihailo Shoumski got on to a chair and shouted: "Members of the first platoon are to parade in this hall. Look alive, comrades, look alive!"

Zhoukhraï, Roussoulbass and Akim came into the hall. They had just arrived. The hall was packed with ranked men. Roussoulbass—a ponderous figure—stood on the platform of an instructional machine-gun, raised his arm and said: "Comrades, we have gathered here to-day for a serious and responsible piece of work. To-day I am able to say what could not be said even yesterday, as it was a profound military secret. To-morrow night in this town and throughout the Ukraine a counter-revolutionary rising is timed to take place. This town is full of ex-officers, and bandit bands have collected all round us. Some of the conspirators have managed to get into our armoured car division as chauffeurs. But the conspiracy has been discovered by the Extraordinary Commission, and we are putting the whole party organisation and the YCL

under arms. The first and second Communist battalions will work together with the tried units of the Red cadets and the detachments of the Extraordinary Commission. The cadets have already left. Now, comrades, it is your turn. You have fifteen minutes to get your arms and parade. Operations will be under the command of Comrade Zhoukhraï, from whom commanders will obtain their detailed instructions. I hardly need point out to the Communist battalions what a serious moment this is. We must forestall to-morrow's storm to-day."

A quarter of an hour later the battalions were already lined up and armed in the courtyard of the school. Zhoukhraï's eye ran over the motionless ranks. Three paces in front of the ranks stood two wearing cross belts—Battalion Commander Menyaïlo, a heroic figure, a caster from the Urals, and next to him, Commissar Akim. To their left were the leaders of No. 1 company—Company Commander Shoumski and Political Instructor Oustinovich. Behind them stood the silent rows of the Communist battalion—three hundred bayonets. Fiodor gave the signal—"Time to set out."

The three hundred made their way through the empty streets. The town was asleep. When they reached the junction of Dikaia and Lvovskaia streets they broke step. That was where operations were to begin. They surrounded the whole block without a sound. The staff took up a position in the entrance of a shop. A car came up Lvovskaia Street with glaring headlamps. It stopped opposite the staff.

This time Litke had brought his father, and his father—the Commandant of the town—jumped out and uttered a few short phrases to his son in Lettish. The car shot off,

and in a moment was gone round the corner into Dmitrevskaia Street. Litke—a ponderous figure—became nothing but eyes—his hands were part of the dance of the wheel of his car—to right and left. Oh, at last, there he was *obliged* to drive madly—and nobody would put him under arrest for two days for taking corners like a lunatic, so he flew through the streets like a meteor.

Zhoukhraï—he it was whom Litke was driving in a few short moments from one end of the town to another—could not but express his approval. He said: “Hugo, if you don’t do anybody in on this trip you’ll get a gold watch to-morrow.” Hugo was in the seventh heaven. He said: “I was reckoning on ten days for that corner. . . .”

The first blows were directed against the house which served as staff headquarters to the conspiracy. The first prisoners and documents seized arrived at the Special Department.

In Dikaia Street, in a side alley with the same name, No. 11, lived a certain gentleman who went by the name of Zürbert. According to the information in the hands of the Extraordinary Commission, that person had played no small part in the White conspiracy. He had lists of the bands of ex-officers who were to operate in the Podolié district. Litke himself had come to Dikaia Street to arrest Zürbert. The house had windows which gave on to a garden separated from a nunnery by a high wall. They did not find Zürbert at home. According to the neighbours he had not come home all day. The house was searched, and they found a case of hand grenades and some addresses. Litke gave orders for an ambush to be set and remained for a while at the desk examining some of the material he had found.

The sentry in the garden was a young soldier training

at the school. He could see the lighted window from where he stood. It was not pleasant standing like that in a corner. A bit creepy. His orders were to watch the wall. But he was a long way from the reassuring light of the window. And then the moon, damn it, was showing such poor light. In the darkness the bushes seemed alive. He poked all about him—but there was nobody there. He said to himself: "Why was I posted here? There's no possibility, anyway, of anyone coming over that wall—it's too high. Should I go up to the window and have a peep in?" He examined the ridge of the wall again and then left his corner which smelt of fungi. He stopped a moment in front of the window. Litke was hastily gathering papers together and preparing to leave the room. At that very moment a shadow appeared on the ridge of wall. The man on the wall could see the sentry outside the window and also the man in the room. With feline agility the shadow climbed off the wall on to a tree and thence slipped to the ground. With feline quiet it crept up to its victim and then, one sweeping blow, and the young soldier fell headlong. A naval dirk had been driven up to the hilt into his back.

A shot from the garden was like an electric shock to the men surrounding the block. Six of them raced with heavy steps to the house. Litke was dead. He was sitting in the chair at the desk, and his blood-streaming head was lying on the desk. The glass of the window was broken. The enemy had not succeeded in saving the documents.

There was a cascade of shots by the nunnery wall. The murderer had leapt into the street and was running hard for Loukianov Heath, shooting back as he

ran. He did not get away ; a bullet was swifter than he was.

All through the night household searches were made, and hundreds of persons who were not registered, or whose papers were out of order, and who had arms, were despatched to the Extraordinary Commission. A selecting committee was hard at work there sorting them out.

In some parts of the town the conspirators offered armed resistance. In Zhikinskaia Street Antosha Lebediev was shot dead during a household search. The Solomenka battalion that night lost altogether five. Jan Litke, an old Bolshevik, a true and faithful guardian of the Republic, was seen no more at the Extraordinary Commission. But the White rising was nipped in the bud.

That night, among others, Father Basil and his two daughters and other leaders of the gang were arrested. After that there was again calm in the town.

Later, a new enemy appeared and menaced the town—a paralysis on the railways, which threatened starvation and cold in the coming winter. Everything began to depend on supplies of wood and grain.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

ZHOUKHRAÏ absent-mindedly took his stumpy pipe from his mouth and cautiously poked at the ash in the bowl with his finger ; the pipe was out. The grey smoke of a dozen cigarettes hung in coils under the dulled ceiling and enveloped Roussoulbass's chair ; the faces round the table seemed lost in mist. Next to Roussoulbass was Tokarev, leaning heavily on the table. The old man was plucking nervously at his short-cut beard and casting brief sidelong glances at a short-statured, bald-headed man who, in a reedy little tenor voice, was producing an incessant flow of wordy phrases as empty as a blown egg. Akim noticed Tokarev's glances, and they took him back to his childhood—they had had a fighting cock they called *The Bruiser*, and when he was preparing to spring he used to squint at his victim just as Tokarev was now doing.

This meeting of the Provincial Party Committee had been going on nearly two hours. The bald-headed man was head of the Railway Forestry Committee. His nimble fingers sorted over his pile of papers and he piped : “ So you see, the objective clauses I have just placed before you make it impossible to carry out the instructions of the Provincial Party Committee or the Railway Management. I must repeat that even in a month's time we shall still be unable to supply more than four hundred metres of wood. As for this demand for 180,000 metres

... it's ...” (he spent some time choosing his epithet) “... Utopianism!” And having made this pronouncement he closed his thin little lips and squeezed them indignantly together.

There was a long silence. Zhoukhraï tapped on his pipe and cleaned it out. It was Tokarev who broke the silence in his throaty, resounding bass. “Well, there’s no need for a lot of palaver. The Railway Forestry Committee has not had any wood, has not got any wood, and is not going to have any in future either . . . is that the case?”

The little bald-headed man shrugged his shoulders. He said: “Pardon me, comrades, the wood is ready, but having no overland transport . . .” Then he swallowed the wrong way and wiped his bald skull with a check handkerchief, after which he tried in vain to find his pocket. He ended by tucking the handkerchief away under his document case.

Then Denecko spoke up from the corner. He said “But what steps have you taken to get the wood transported? After all, it is some days since the engineers and others in charge—those who were mixed up in the plot—were arrested.”

Baldhead turned to him and said: “Three times I reported to the Railway Management that it was out of the question without transport . . .”

Tokarev cut him short and snapped bitingly: “You’ve already told us that. Look here, do you think we are fools?”

At this question shivers passed down the bald-headed man’s spine, and he answered in a subdued voice: “I cannot be responsible for the actions of counter-revolutionaries.”

Akim said : " But you did know that they were felling trees a long way from the railroad ? "

" I did hear of it. But I could not bring peculiarities of work in somebody else's sector to the notice of the authorities."

The chairman of the Railwaymen's Union Soviet put in the question : " How many men have you working ? "

" About two hundred."

Tokarev spat and said : " The wasters cut a metre a year." He was furious.

The chairman of the Railwaymen's Union Soviet went on : " The whole of the Railway Forestry Committee is issued special shockworker rations, while we cut the men short, and what do you do for it? What has happened to the two trucks of flour we sent down for the workers ? "

The bald-headed little man was now the target for pointed questions from all sides, but he fenced them off as if they were all merely tiresome creditors demanding an instalment on promissory notes. He wriggled away from direct answers like an eel ; his eyes, though, could not look straight at anybody. He instinctively felt danger drawing near. In his nervous cowardice he had only one desire—to get away from them as soon as possible—to where his wife—still quite young—had a lavish supper waiting for him while she whiled away the time reading Paul de Kock.

Meanwhile Zhoukhraï attended carefully to all his answers, and while he listened wrote in his note-book : " I consider that this fellow must be very thoroughly examined, this is more than simple incompetence. I already have one or two clues about him. . . . We had better end this meeting and let him go and get some work done." Roussoulbass read the note and nodded to

Zhoukhraï. Zhoukhraï went out of the room to the telephone. When he came back Roussoulbass was already reading the end of a resolution : “ . . . dismiss the administration of the Railway Forestry Committee for obvious sabotage, the matter to be handed over to the appropriate authorities for further investigation.”

Baldhead had been prepared to hear worse. It was true that dismissal for sabotage threw a doubt on his *bona fides*, but that was a trifle—as for the Boyarka job, well, that needn't worry him—that was not his section. “ Phew ! ” he said to himself, “ I thought they had got hold of something.” He gathered his papers into his document case and, relieved, said : “ Well, of course, I'm a non-party ‘ specialist,’ and you have every right to suspect me, but my conscience is clear. If I have failed to accomplish something it has only been because it was quite impossible to do it.”

Nobody answered him. Then he left them and hurried down the stairs, heaving a sigh of relief as he opened the door leading into the street. But there was a man in uniform who said to him : “ What is your name, citizen ? ” His heart sank and he gasped : “ Cher—vinski. . . . ”

And now that this outsider had left them, thirteen heads were bent together over the large table in Roussoulbass's room. Zhoukhraï's finger lay on the map. “ There you are,” he said, “ that's Boyarka station, and the timber felling is going on four miles away. There are two hundred and ten thousand cubic metres of wood piled there. An army of workers has put in eight months' work, and tremendous labour forces have been exhausted, and the result is that the railway and the town are without fuel. The timber has to be transported four miles to the

station at Boyarka. That requires no less than five thousand waggons for a whole month, reckoning two journeys a day, too. The nearest village is ten miles away. And in addition there is Orlika prowling about the neighbourhood with his band. . . . Do you get the position? . . . See, the plan was for the work to be done here, so as to go straight down the line to the yards, and these scoundrels have had it done right away in the forest without any roads. That's their way of striking at us. . . ." And each of those round the table had a clear picture in his mind of the horror moving down on them—the horror of which Zhoukhraï had said not a word. Winter was upon them. Hospitals and schools and public buildings and hundreds of thousands of people would be at the mercy of terrible cold, and the stations would see one train out a week.

Zhoukhraï said: "Comrades, there is one way out. That is within three months to build a narrow-gauge railway from Boyarka to the timber; and on condition it reaches the edge of the clearing in six weeks. I've been working on this a week now. To accomplish it"—Zhoukhraï's throat was dry and his voice grated—"we must have three hundred and fifty workers and two engineers. We have the rails and seven light engines at Pouschaia Voditza. The YCL has discovered them in the store sheds there. Before the war there was a proposal to continue the narrow gauge railway to the town. But there are no living quarters at Boyarka for the men, only a forestry school which is half in ruins. The men will have to be sent up in groups, fortnight at a time, they won't be able to stand more. How about sending the YCL-ers, Akim?"

He did not wait for an answer, but went on: "The

YCL will put all its possible forces into it. In the first place the Solomenka organisation, and some from the town itself, too. The task is not an easy one, but if we explain to the lads that it will be the salvation of the town and the railway, they will accomplish it."

The commander of the railway shook his head dubiously. "I have my doubts whether anything will come of it. Lay five miles of track under present conditions—autumn rains, then frosts. . . ." He spoke as if tired. Zhoukhraï answered without even looking at him, and said sharply: "As for that, you should have kept a closer eye on what was being done with the timber. We will build the track to the timber now. We're not going to sit and do nothing but wait till we freeze."

The last of the cases of tools had been put on the train and the brigade had taken their places. There was a sticky drizzle. Rita's tunic was glittering with rain; large drops formed on it and trickled down. When she came to say goodbye to Tokarev she shook the old man's hand firmly and said: "Our thoughts will be with you." He looked lovingly at her from under his grey eyebrows and growled: "We'll need it, a nice teaser they've set us. And you keep an eye on the job at this end. If we get stuck for anything you put a little pressure on at the right point. You know these blasted old women can't do anything without a lot of red tape. Well, lass, it's time I was getting aboard."

He buttoned his jacket to the neck. He was just going to board the train when Rita asked him—apparently quite by the way—"What, isn't Paul Korchagin going with you? I don't see him." Tokarev said: "He went

out yesterday with the engineering chief on the trolley to make a few preparations for our arrival."

Then Zharki and Doubava came hurrying towards Rita and Tokarev along the platform, and with them, her jacket thrown carelessly over her shoulders and a dead cigarette in her thin fingers, Anna Borchardt. Rita looked fixedly at these three and put her next question to Tokarev—"How are his lessons with you going?" Tokarev looked at her in bewilderment. "Lessons? What do you mean? I thought you were looking after the boy. He's spoken to me about you many a time. Never stops singing your praises."

Rita heard him unbelievably. She said: "Are you sure, Comrade Tokarev? I must tell you he left me to have it all over again with you." The old man laughed. "Me? Teach him? I've never seen him once come for a lesson."

The engine whistled wildly. From one of the coaches Klaviček shouted: "Now then, Comrade Oustinovich, just you let our daddy go; that won't do; what are we going to do without him?" He would have said more had he not noticed the three newcomers—his eyes caught the uneasy gleam in Anna's for a second, and then his heart sank as he saw the farewell smile she gave Doubava, and he disappeared quickly from the window.

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The rain beat in their faces. It was late autumn, and the endless trees of the forest were stripped bare; the ancient hornbeams, with moss-covered bark, were gloomy. The little station was lost in the forest. There was a goods loading platform of stone; from it a strip of upturned soil reached into the forest; the upturned soil was

covered with men like busy ants. The sticky mud was disgusting ; it squelched underfoot. The men were digging furiously at the embankment ; there was a dull scrape of crowbars, or of shovels on stone. And all the time the rain drizzled down ; cold drops soaked through to the men's bodies. The rain washed away their work. Clay slithered from the embankment like thick porridge. Their clothes were sodden—heavy and cold ; but they never stopped work till late evening, and with every day the ribbon of ploughed and heaped-up soil reached farther into the forest.

Not far from the station was a solid stone building. Everything in it that could be removed whole or broken had long ago been pillaged by marauders, and in place of doors there were gaping holes and in place of the iron doors to the built-in stoves there were black holes ; the roof had been robbed, and through the holes one could see the skeleton of rafters. The only thing left whole was the concrete floor in the four rooms, and on this concrete floor every night, in four rooms, four hundred men lay down to sleep in clothes soaked through and plastered with mud. They endeavoured to dry one another by body-heat ; their clothes steamed ; but that was all, they did not dry. And all the time the rain beat on the fragments of corrugated iron left on the roof and the wind blew in at the gaping doorway.

In the morning they drank tea in a rickety shed which served as kitchen, and went out to work. For their main meal they ate plain boiled lentils, day in, day out, hellish monotonous, and there was a daily allowance of a pound and a half of rye bread, black as anthracite. That was all the town could provide.

Their engineer was a tall wiry elderly man with a deep

furrow down either cheek, by name Valerian Patoshkin, and their under-engineer was a squat-built fellow with a fleshy nose and rough features, named Vakoulenko. These two were quartered on the station-master. Tokarev put up in the room of the station Extraordinary Commissioner, by name Kholyava, a short-legged fellow as lively as mercury in his movements.

The men bore their privations with savage stubbornness, and the embankment made strides daily, though there were already nine deserters, and a few days later five more decamped. But the first real blow came in the second week : the evening train from Shepetovka failed to bring their bread supplies. Doubava wakened Tokarev and told him the news. The secretary of the Party lowered his hairy legs to the floor and sat scratching himself under the arm for a while. Then he growled to himself : " So the fun begins," and dressed hastily. Meanwhile mercurial Kholyava bounced in. Tokarev said to him : " Run like the wind and get on the phone to the special department, and you "—he turned to Doubava—" don't let on to anyone about the bread."

After a struggle of half an hour with the telephonists down the line, persistent Kholyava got through to Zhoukhraï, who was taking the place of the chief of the Special Department. While he listened to the argument Tokarev stood and fidgeted impatiently. Then Zhoukhraï's voice rumbled in the receiver and said : " What ? Bread not come through ? I'll find out at once who's responsible. You shall have supplies by morning."

It was hardly light when a mud-spattered car loaded with sacks of bread arrived at the station, and young Litke got down from the driver's seat, pale after his all-night drive.

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The struggle to get the line built grew fiercer. News came through from the railway management that there were no sleepers available. Nor had the town the means to transport either rails or narrow-gauge locomotives to the site, and anyway, the narrow-gauge locomotives were in need of considerable overhaul. The first shift of workers, too, was getting near the end of its time and there was no sign of relief; yet it was out of the question to keep those fellows, absolutely worn out, on the work. The party members carried on a council deep into the night in the old hut in the light of a flare, and when morning came Tokarev, Doubava and Klaviček, together with six others, left for the town to repair locomotives and to see to the transport of the rails. Klaviček, being a baker by trade, was detailed to the forage department, the others to Poushchaia Voditza.

And all this time the rain poured down.

With some difficulty Paul wrenched his foot out of the sticky mud and then by the cold he suddenly knew that the rotting sole of his boot had at last come right off. Ever since he had come out he had been suffering from his worn-out boots, permanently wet through and permanently squelching with mud, but now his naked foot was treading the ice-cold mud porridge. He could not work like that—and all on account of a boot. He rescued the sole from the mud and gazed sadly at it and broke the oath he had taken not to swear any more. He went down to the barracks and sat down beside the field kitchen, turned back his mud-soaked drawers and held his cold-cramped foot to the warmth.

Odarka, wife of the track watchman, was busy cutting up beetroot at the table—the cook had taken her on as

assistant. Nature had endowed the watchman's wife—a youngish woman, too—with everything in plenty. Her shoulders were as broad as a man's, her bosom enormous, her thighs massive and powerful. She was a good hand with a knife, too, and the pile of cut-up beetroot on the table grew rapidly. Suddenly she shot a scornful glance at Paul and very sourly asked: "What do you think you're doing, getting yourself snug, ready for dinner? A bit on the early side, isn't it? My lad, anyone can see you're a slacker. Where d'you think you're putting your feet? This is a kitchen, not a bathroom."

At that point in came the cook. Paul explained. He said: "One of my boots has completely come to bits." The cook examined the ruined boot and nodded to Odarka, saying: "Her good man's bit of a cobbler, he'll fix you up, because you'll ruin yourself without proper boots." When she heard this Odarka took a better look at Paul and was rather ashamed of herself. She said: "And I thought you were just a slacker." Paul smiled and forgave her. She examined the boot with quite a professional air. She said: "My old man won't mend this, there's no use mending it, but so you don't hurt your foot I'll bring you an old golosh; there is one lying out on the rubbish heap. Did ever people go through such misery! Any day now the frosts will begin, and then you're done." She was now full of sympathy, and put down the boot and went off. She was soon back with a deep-cut golosh and a piece of canvas. When his well-warmed foot was wrapped in the canvas and packed in the warm golosh Paul rewarded the watchman's wife with a look of silent gratitude.

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Tokarev and some others went to Shepetovka to hurry things up there. He came back in a furious temper and gathered the party faction in Kholyava's room and told them the ominous news. "Things are held up all along the line. Wherever you go they're marking time. Boys, I'll tell you straight, things don't look any too good. They haven't got a second shift together yet, and they don't even know yet how many they will send us. And the frosts are just beginning. Whatever it costs we must get through the marsh before the frosts begin, or we'll never get our teeth into the stuff. The situation is that they're going to stir up all the fools in the town who're muddling things, but we've got to put on double speed here. If it costs us our lives we've got to get that track laid. Otherwise should we be Bolsheviks? No, mere dribblers. . . ." Tokarev could not even speak in his usual rather gruff deep tones, but in a voice like tightly sprung steel. His eyes, blazing under frowning brows, spoke of decision and persistence. He handed Pankratov a sheet of paper folded in four and said: "To-day we'll have a closed meeting of all Party and YCL members and explain the situation fully, and all to work to-morrow; and to-morrow morning we'll release the non-party fellows and stay on ourselves. That's the decision of the Provincial Party Committee."

Paul read over the dockers' shoulder: "Consider necessary keep all YCL members on the work and refuse leave till first batch of wood got through. For the Secretary of the Provincial YCL, R. Oustinovich."

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The barrack was crammed full; one hundred and twenty in it. They lined the walls, they were standing

on the table, they even stood on the field-kitchen itself. Pankratov opened the meeting. Then Tokarev said a few words—the conclusion of his speech staggered them all. “To-morrow all party and YCL members are to stay on here.”

The old man’s arm made a gesture which showed the decision was irrevocable. That gesture wiped away all hopes of getting back to the town, to home, out of that mud. For the first minute nothing could be made out of the general outcry. The dim glimmer of a light flickered in the draught made by the general commotion. The din rose. Some were beginning to sentimentalise about the domestic hearth and others were waxing indignant and talking about fatigue. A large number were silent. But only one announced his intention of deserting. His enraged voice could be heard from a corner, swearing and calling out: “I won’t stay here another day. Men get sent to hard labour, but at least they’ve done something to deserve it. What have we done? You’ve kept us here a fortnight and that’s enough. We aren’t going to be fooled any longer. Let the one who thought of this come and do the building. Let those who want to, go on wallowing in this filthy mud, but I’ve only got one life to live. I’m going back to-morrow.”

The voice came from behind Okounev, and Okounev lit a match to see who it was who proposed deserting. For a second the match lit up in the darkness an open mouth in a face distorted by ill-temper, and Okounev recognised the son of the accountant to the Provincial Commissariat of Supplies. The fellow shouted out: “What are you spying for? I’ve nothing to hide, I’m not a thief.” The match went out. Pankratov stood up to his full height.

“Who’s that there who’s got so much to say for himself?” he said. “Who is it finds a Party task is like hard labour?” His voice was low and his eyes swept grimly over all standing near him. “Comrades, it’s out of the question for us to go back to Shepetovka. Our place is here. If we run away from this job the folk at home will freeze to death. Comrades, the sooner we finish the sooner we’ll be back, but run away from this job, like that whimperer over there, we daren’t, our Communist ideals and our discipline don’t allow it.”

The docker did not like long speeches, but even this short one was interrupted by the same voice crying: “And are the non-party people going?” Pankratov barked out “Yes.” Then a youth wearing a short town coat pushed his way through to the table and a little piece of card fluttered through the air, struck Pankratov’s chest, fell on the table and lay on its edge. “There’s my card, take it, if you please. I’m not going to ruin my health for the sake of that bit of card.”

The last words were drowned by a sudden volley of voices from all over the hall—“You dirty cad!” “He only joined the YCL because he thought that’d get him a soft job.” “Outside with him!” “We’ll show you, you louse, you!” And the youth lowered his head and made his way towards the door. They let him pass, drawing back from him as if he were infected. The door closed on him with a creak. Pankratov crumpled up the card and held it in the flame of the lamp. The card caught fire and turned into a twisted black tube.

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A rifle shot rang through the woods. A horse and rider leapt away from the ricketty barracks and were lost in the

darkness of the forest. Men ran out of school and barracks. One of them stumbled over a small piece of three-ply wood stuck in the crack of the door. They lit a match. They shielded the little flame from the wind with the skirts of their coats and on the board they read: "All of you clear away from this station back where you came from. Anybody who stays will get a bullet in his head. We shall kill you all without mercy. We give you till to-morrow night." It was signed "Ataman Chesnok." That had been one of Orlik's men.

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The horses trod warily in the soft, yielding snow. Every now and then a hoof would snap a branch hidden under the snow, the horse would snort and shy, but a sharp cut over its laid-back ears would send it galloping after the others. About a dozen horsemen surmounted the ridge, on the other side of which was a belt of black earth still free of snow. There they reigned in and their stirrups rattled together. The leader's two-year-old, sweating from the long, hard ride, trembled visibly. "There's the hell of a lot of them come," the leader said, "but I reckon we'll scare them. The old man's orders are to see that they're all gone to-morrow, or the working-class swine will get to that timber. . . ."

They rode up to the station in single file, riding beside the single track. At a walking pace they made for the clearing by the old school; they did not go out into the open, but kept behind the cover of the trees. A sudden volley stripped the silence from the dark night, and the snow fell in squirrel-like clusters from a birch showing silver in the moonlight. The sharp shots flashed among the trees and the bullets bored into the crumbling

plaster, and the panes of the windows that Pankratov had had brought were shattered and tinkled to the ground. The volley roused the men from the concrete flooring and they leapt to their feet, but immediately the ominous insects whizzing through the rooms sent them in fear back to the floors again. They fell one on another.

Doubava seized Paul by the overcoat. "Where are you going?"

"Out there."

"Lie down, you idiot. They'll pick you off the moment you show yourself," Doubava whispered swiftly.

They were lying in the room against the outside door. Doubava lay as flat as he could and reached out one arm towards the door—a revolver in his hand. Paul squatted and anxious fingers felt fiercely for the chambers of his service revolver. He got five in. He felt a blank space and spun the drum. Then the shooting broke off short and the silence was crushing. In a whisper Doubava commanded those lying there: "Lads, those who've guns, this way!" Paul opened the door cautiously. There was nobody to be seen in the clearing, only the snowflakes, slowly turning as they fell, while the horsemen lashed their horses as they galloped away.

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Three miles from Boyarka station the shovellers attacked the earth furiously; they were trying to cut through a rise of ground which stood in their way. On either side were seven of them on guard, armed with Kholyava's carbine and Paul's, Pankratov's, Doubava's and Khomoutov's revolvers—all the weapons they had. Patoshkin was sitting on the steep slope jotting down figures in his note-book. He was alone now, as Vakoulenko

had preferred trial for desertion to a bandit's bullet, and so made off one morning back to Shepetovka.

Then to Khomoutov, who was standing near him, Patoshkin said : " Making this cutting will take us a fortnight at least, the ground is frozen hard." Khomoutov was always almost loutishly morose and taciturn. Now he chewed angrily at the end of his moustache and said : " We've only twenty-five days left for the whole track—and you want fifteen for this cutting alone." Patoshkin said : " Of course it's only a paper estimate, never in my life have I laid a track under such conditions as these—or with people like these. I may be wrong ; I've been wrong twice already."

At this moment Zhoukhraï, Akim and Pankratov came up to the cutting. When they reached the slope they were noticed. Paul was working side by side with Peter Trophimov, a slant-eyed lad in an out-at-the-elbows sweater ; Trophimov was a bolt-turner in the railway shops. Paul jogged him hard, pointed down the slope and cried : " Look, see who's coming ? " And then he dropped his shovel and raced down the hill. Under the peak of his cap his eyes were smiling warmly, and Zhoukhraï shook his hand longer than the others. " How are you, Paul, my boy. Why, I wouldn't recognise you in that rig, you tramp," Pankratov smiled ironically. He said : " It's not a bad set of five toes, all get-at-able, too. What's more, one of the deserters has gone off with his overcoat. Okounev is in his commune ; gave Paul his jacket. . . . No matter, Paul's a warm-blooded lad. All he needs to get warm is a weck on a concrete floor and then he'll play coffins if you like "—thus Pankratov to Akim, bitterly.

Okounev, navying, broke in and said : " We won't

let Paul down. If we say the word he'll be made cook and handed over to Odarka as one of her reserves. If he has any sense he'll not only fill his belly, but he'll have a good warm too, either on the stove—or Odarka.”

And snub-nosed Okounev half-closed his roguish eyes, while they all laughed heartily—the first laugh that day.

With all due respect, but also with solid argument, Patoshkin succeeded in proving to Zhoukhraï that they could not possibly manage the cutting in less than a fortnight. Zhoukhraï listened and then thought things out for himself. He said : “ Take the lads off the cutting and go on with the track on the other side of the hill—we'll find another way of managing this hill.” When he got down to the station he spent a long time at the telephone, while Kholyava stood guard at the door. Behind him he could hear Zhoukhraï's deep voice : “ Ring up the Chief of Staff of the district at once and in my name ask him to have Pouzyrevski's regiment transferred immediately to this district. We *must* have the district cleared of bandits. Also send us an armoured train with some sappers. The rest I'll arrange here myself. I shall be coming back to-night. Let Litke be at the station with the car at midnight.”

In the barracks, after a short speech from Akim, Zhoukhraï rose, and an hour passed in comradely discussion. Zhoukhraï told them there could be no question of being later than the date fixed, which was January 1st. He said : “ We are putting the work on a military basis from now on. The party members will constitute a special mission unit company, with Comrade Doubava as Commander. Each of the six constructional groups

will have a definite task. The remaining work will be divided into six equal sectors. Each group will have its own sector. All work is to be completed by January 1st. Any group which finishes its sector earlier will have the right to go back to Shepetovka and rest. In addition the Presidium of the Provincial Executive Committee will send a recommendation to the Ukraine Central Executive Committee to decorate the best worker in any such section with the order of the Red Banner."

As leaders of the various sectors were appointed: No. 1, Pankratov; No. 2, Doubava; No. 3, Khomoutov; No. 4, Lagoutin; No. 5, Korchagin; and No. 6, Okounev.

Zhoukhraï ended his speech with these words: "And chief of the construction generally—organiser and inspirer, unquestionably remains Anton Nikiforovich Tokarev."

The clapping of hands was like the sudden flight of a dense flock of birds, and harsh faces broke into smiles. This whimsical comradely conclusion to the speech of a very serious man enabled their strained attention to be discharged in a burst of laughter.

About twenty of them saw Akim and Zhoukhraï off to the motor-trolley on which they had come.

As he bid Paul farewell Zhoukhraï looked at his snow-covered boot and said quietly: "I'll send you a pair of boots. I hope you haven't had any frost-bite yet?"

Paul said: "Something very much like it. My feet have been swollen a little," and then he remembered a thing he had been meaning to ask a long time, and said: "Can you give me a few rounds for my revolver? I've only got three reliable ones left."

Zhoukhraï was sorry to have to shake his head, but when he saw the disappointment in Paul's eye he unstrapped

his own Mauser without a second's hesitation. "Here's a present for you," he said. Paul could not believe at first that he was being given a thing he had dreamed about so much, but Zhoukhraï just slipped the belt over his shoulder. "Take it, take it," he said, "I know you've had your eye on it a long time. Only do be careful with it, and don't shoot your own folk. Here are three full clips for it."

Openly envious eyes were fastened on Paul. Someone said: "Come on, Paul, let's swap it for a pair of boots—I'll throw in a short fur coat." And Pankratov joined in the rag, nudged Paul's back and said: "Don't be a fool, boy, change it for those boots. You can be sure you won't live till Christmas in those goloshes." Meanwhile Zhoukhraï placed one foot on the step of the trolley to support the paper while he wrote out a permit for the revolver he had just given Paul.

Early in the morning an armoured train clanked over the points and drew up in the station. The escaping steam, white as swan's down, rose in luxurious plumes to melt in the frosty air. Out of the armoured carriages came leather-dressed men. A few hours later three sappers from the train had buried two huge pumpkins of polished metal in the hill-side and led long strings from them. They then fired a warning signal, and the fellows ran for shelter in all directions from the now menacing hill. A match lit the end of the string, and it spluttered with a tiny phosphorescent flame.

For a while everybody's heart was strained. There were some seconds of exhausting expectation; then the earth shuddered and a terrible force scattered the

upper part of the hill on all sides, sending huge masses of earth flying skywards. The second explosion was more powerful than the first. A frightful crash echoed in the forest clearing and filled it with a chaos of noise from the shattered hill. And then, in place of the hill, there was only a deep pit, and for dozens of yards in every direction the sugary-white snow was spattered with the friable earth.

Into the hollow formed by the explosion the men rushed with picks and shovels.

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After Zhoukhraï's departure a stubborn struggle for first place began. Long before daybreak Paul got up quietly without waking anyone else and, scarcely able to move his stiffened limbs, went over to the kitchen, where he boiled water and made tea—and then went back and wakened his group. When the remainder of them got up it was already broad daylight, and while they were breakfasting in the barracks Pankratov pushed his way through to the table where Doubava and his arsenal lads were and said: "Just think, Mityaï, that lad Paul had his gang up almost before it was light, and, would you believe it, they've already laid about twenty yards. The boys are saying that he's got his gang to such a pitch that they're talking of finishing their sector by the twenty-fifth. He's out to make a fool of us all. But I reckon we know a trick worth two of that."

Pankratov was quite indignant; Mityaï smiled dourly. He knew very well why the action of the railway yards gang touched the river-port party-group secretary on the raw like that. For that matter Doubava felt it too; Paul had silyly thrown out a challenge to them all.

Pankratov said : " Friends or no friends, but this is a fighting matter, you know."

About midday the energetic work of Paul's gang was unexpectedly interrupted. The sentry standing by the piled rifles sighted a group of horsemen through the trees and gave the alarm. Paul cried : " To arms, lads ! We're attacked ! " and flung down his shovel and rushed to the tree on which he had hung his Mauser. The others seized what arms they had and lay down straight in the snow beside the track. Then the leading horsemen waved their fur caps and shouted : " Steady, hold hard, friends. . . ." About fifty Boudyonny horse, with the red stars on their caps, rode up to the track. It was a detachment of Pouzyrevski's regiment come to see the work through. Paul noticed that the Commander's horse had only one ear. The lovely grey mare with the white patch on her nose would not stand still, but pranced about with her rider, and when Paul rushed at her and seized her bridle she stepped sharply back in fear. Paul cried : " Gniedok, old horse, what a place to meet you. So you've come through it all, my one-eared beauty." And he threw his arm tenderly round the horse's slender neck and stroked her quivering nostrils. The Commander stared at him and then recognising him, cried in amazement : " Why, it's Paul Korchagin ! . . . He can recognise the old mare, but he hasn't got eyes for poor old Sereda. How are you, lad ? "

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Back in the town the comrades did everything possible ; and the effect on the job was immediate. Zharki sent the rest of the District Committee to Boyarka and Solomenka was left with only the girls ; Zharki also

managed to get a party sent out from the new batch of students at the Railway Technical Schools. When he reported this to Akim he said : " I left myself all alone with the female proletariat. I'm going to appoint that lass Lagoutin in my place. I'll put up a notice over the door, ' Women's Department,' and I'll be off to Boyarka myself. It's a bit awkward for me to be the only man among all those girls ; I'm sure the hussies talk about it and say : ' Look at him, sent all the others away, the flat-footed gawk,' or something to that effect. I must ask you to give me permission to go." But Akim merely laughed and refused permission.

Meanwhile the new-comers arrived at Boyarka, among them sixty railway students, and Zhoukhraï contrived to get the railway management to send four passenger coaches down for them to live in. Doubava's group was sent away to Poushchaia Voditza with orders to bring the narrow-gauge engines and sixty-five narrow-gauge open trucks, the work to be classed as part of their sector work.

Before he left, Doubava advised Tokarev to send for Klaviček and give him a group of the new-comers to work with. This Tokarev did, not suspecting the real cause which had prompted Doubava to think of the Czech. The cause was a note from Anna Borchardt which the new-comers from the Solomenka settlement had brought. Anna wrote : " Dmitri, Klaviček and I have taken a whole pile of your literature. We send you and all our heroic storm workers hearty greetings. You really are splendid, all of you ! We wish you all strength and energy. Yesterday the last supplies of wood were issued at the stores. Klaviček sends you his greetings. He's a first-rate comrade. It's he does the baking for

you ; he won't trust anyone in the bakery. He does all the flour sifting with his own hands and works the dough-mixer himself. He found some good flour and it's wonderful bread, not a bit like the stuff I get. In the evenings our crowd come round to see me—Lagoutin, Artioukhin, Klaviček and sometimes Zharki too, and we're getting on slowly with our studies, though we spend most of the time talking about everything under the sun, particularly about you all out there. The girls are furious because Tokarev won't let them go out, too. They are convinced they could stand the privations as well as the others. Talia says she's going to dress in her father's clothes and just turn up and report to old man Tokarev and see then if he'll get rid of her. She's quite capable of doing it, too. My best wishes to black-eyes. Anna."

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The blizzard came on them all of a sudden. The sky was covered with low grey clouds and the snow began falling heavily. That evening the wind howled in the chimneys and whined through the trees in its chase after the slippery whirlwind of snow, and the trees were restless and threatening. The blizzard raged the whole night, and though they kept the stoves going all night the men were frozen through to the bone. The half-ruined building did not keep in any heat. The next morning as they went to work they trod in deep snow. The sun was blazing over the trees and there was not a single cloud in the sky.

Paul's gang cleared their section of snow drifts. Only now did Paul realise how agonising suffering from cold and hunger can be. Okounev's old jacket did not keep him warm, and his golosh filled with snow. Time and

again he lost it in a deep drift, and now the other boot was threatening to fall to pieces. Also, through sleeping on the floor, he had two huge carbuncles on his neck. Tokarev had given him his towel to serve as scarf.

He was thin, his eyes were inflamed. He worked feverishly with a wide wooden shovel clearing away snow. Meanwhile a passenger train came to a stop in the station, the engine had only just managed to draw it so far. There was not a single log left in the tender and the fire was burning low. The engine-driver shouted to the station-master: "Give us some wood and we'll go on, if you haven't any, shunt us to a siding while we've got enough steam up to move." The train was shunted and the dejected travellers were told the situation.

There was a chorus of groans and oaths in the crowded coaches. The station-master told the conductors to "go and have a word with that old man coming along the platform there. That's the boss of the work here. If he cares to, he might have some wood brought down on a sledge. They're using it for sleepers."

The conductors went towards Tokarev. He said: "I can let you have some wood if you pay for it. Don't forget, it's our building material. We're held up by drifted snow. There are six or seven hundred in your train. The women and children can stay where they are, the men can take shovels and clear the snow away by evening. If they do this they'll get wood. If not, they can stay where they are till the New Year."

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Paul heard one of the lads behind him say: "Look what a crowd have come. Look, women, too!" Paul turned round. Tokarev came up. "Here are a hundred

pairs of hands," he said, "give them something to do and see they don't slack."

Paul allotted the new-comers work. A tall man in a railway uniform overcoat with fur collar and a warm astrakhan cap turned the shovel over and over indignantly. Then he turned to a young woman standing beside him, wearing a seal-skin cap with the rich fur outside, and said: "I'm not going to shovel snow, and nobody has the right to make me either. If they like to ask me, as a railroad engineer I am prepared to take over the direction of the work, but neither you nor I are obliged to shovel snow, that is not in the contract. This fellow is acting quite illegally, and I shall see that proceedings are taken against him for it. Who is foreman here?" he asked the worker nearest him.

Paul went up to him. He said: "Citizen, why are you not working?" The man countered with: "And who do you think you are?" Paul said: "I am a worker." The man said: "Then I have nothing to discuss with you. Send the foreman here. . . ."

Paul scowled at the man and said: "If you don't want to work you needn't. Only without our check on your railway ticket you won't go in that train. Those are the orders of the works chief." Paul then turned to the woman and said: "And you also refuse to work?" Then he stood dumbfounded, for it was Tonia Toumanov!

With difficulty she recognised the tattered man as Paul. It was Paul—in a torn and threadbare suit, and fantastic footgear, with a dirty towel round his neck and a face which had not been washed for days. Only the eyes were the same as before, as bright as ever, Paul's eyes. And that tatterdemalion who looked like a beggar—she had so recently loved! How things change! She had

just married and was on her way with her husband to the great city where he held a responsible position in the railway administration ; and it was just her luck to meet her young flame in these circumstances. She was too confused to shake hands—whatever would Basil think ? How unfortunate it was that Paul had sunk so low. Clearly the young stoker would never get farther than navy's work.

Yet she was full of indecision, and her cheeks burned. Meanwhile what seemed to the railroad engineer insolence on the part of the ragged rascal, who was still staring at his wife, enraged that gentleman, and he flung the shovel down and went nearer to Tonia and said : “ Let us go, Tonia. I shall not be able to control myself if I see any more of this Lazzaroni.”

Paul knew from that novel about *Giuseppe Garibaldi* who Lazzaroni was, and he said : “ I may be Lazzaroni, but you're no more than a bourgeois who has escaped without having his throat slit for him.” He had said this in a flat sort of voice and then looked at Tonia and said in a dry, metallic voice : “ Comrade Toumanov, you take the shovel and do your bit. Don't take this fat bullock as an example. I apologise for my language ; of course I don't know what he is to you,” and he smiled savagely. Then he looked down at Tonia's fur-lined snow-boots and added : “ But I don't advise you to stay here. We've had bandits here recently.” He turned and rejoined his comrades, his golosh flip-flapping at every step. His last words had had an effect on the engineer, and Tonia succeeded in persuading him to stay and work.

That evening, when the task was finished, they made their way back to the station. Tonia's husband hurried

on ahead to make sure of good seats in the train. Tonia stopped beside the track and let the workers go by. The last was Paul, tired out, using his shovel as support. Tonia said : " Paul—how are you ? I must say I never expected to see you looking so poor. Haven't you really deserved more of the present Government than navvying ? I thought you must long have been a commissar or something like that. How badly your life has turned out. . . ."

She had fallen in step beside him. When she had said this he stopped short and looked at her in amazement and said : " Nor did I ever expect to see you so . . . so pickled"—after a moment's thought he had found a gentle way of saying it.

Tonia flushed to the tips of her ears. " As rough and rude as ever," she said.

He answered by shouldering his shovel and striding on again. It was only when he had gone a little way that he answered : " No, Comrade Toumanov, my ' roughness and rudeness,' if I may say so, is gentler than your politeness. You needn't worry about my life, it's quite all right. Only your life certainly is turning out worse than I expected. A year or two ago you were better ; you weren't ashamed to shake hands with a worker then. Now you stink of moth-balls. And I must tell you I find there's nothing more in common between us."

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There was a letter from Artem ; he wrote to tell Paul he was about to get married and to ask Paul to be at the wedding at all costs. Then the wind tore the scrap of paper out of Paul's fingers and it went flying away. It was not going to be his luck to be at the wedding—

united

was it thinkable to leave the job? Only yesterday that rogue Pankratov had caught his gang up and leapt ahead at a pace at which everyone was marvelling. The docker was well away for first place, and his usual calm had completely vanished: he was inspiring his dockers to work at an absolutely mad pace.

Patoshkin watched it all with a silent sort of fury. He scratched his head time after time and said to himself: "What on earth is it in these people? Where does this extraordinary strength come from? Why, if this weather holds only a week longer we shall reach the timber cutting! Really the proverb is right, 'Live an age and learn all the time and find you're only a fool at the end.' These folk are breaking all standards and reckonings in their work."

Klaviček came out from Shepetovka with his last batch of loaves. He had an interview with Tokarev and then looked up Paul. They greeted each other heartily. Klaviček smiled and pulled a lovely yellow Swedish fur-lined tunic from his bag and, slapping the elastic chrome leather, said: "This is for you. You'll never guess from whom? Oh, what a stupid lout you are, man. This is from Comrade Oustinovitch, you old ass, to keep you from freezing to death. It was a present to her from Comrade Olshinski—she handed it straight over to me and said—take it to Korchagin. Akim had told her that you were working in this cold without a coat. That put Olshinski's nose a bit out of joint. He said: 'Oh, if you wish I can have a full-size coat sent to this comrade.' But Rita laughed at him and said: 'Oh, don't you bother, I guess he'll be able to work better in this.' Here you are, boy!"

Paul held the precious thing and stared at it in amaze-

ment, then hesitatingly put it on his chilled body. The soft fur soon warmed his back and his chest.

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The precious timber was very near at hand now, only the work became slower and slower, for typhoid snatched away dozens of hands every day. Then one day Paul made his way down to the station on failing legs, swaying as if he were drunk. He had had a temperature for days, but this day the temperature was making itself more felt.

The disease which had already bled his gang was now attacking Paul himself. His stout constitution struggled against it, and for five days he found the strength to get up from the straw-strewn concrete floor and go to work with the rest. But neither the warm tunic nor the felt boots which Zhoukhraï had sent, and which he was already wearing on his frosted feet, saved him. At every step something stabbed painfully in his chest and his teeth chattered with fever and his eyes swam, and the trees seemed to be whirling in a strange drunken dance.

He only just managed to get to the station. The unusual bustle astonished him. He forced his eyes to see and then he saw a long train reaching through the whole station—open trucks with small engines and rails and sleepers, being unloaded by men who had come with the train. He took a few more steps and then lost his balance. He only felt his head strike the ground faintly. Then the snow cooled his burning cheek most pleasantly.

They only found him a few hours later and took him to the barracks. His breathing was hard and he recognised no one. The doctor summoned from the armoured train diagnosed pneumonia, with complications, and

typhoid. His temperature was 106·7°. There was no point in talking of the inflammation of his joints or the carbuncles on his neck—those were mere trifles. The first two troubles were enough to finish him, as the doctor said.

Pankratov and Doubava, who had come with the train, did all they could to save him. Alexey Kokhanski—from the same town—was entrusted with taking him to Shepetovka. But it was only with the assistance of the whole Korchagin gang and, principally, the pressure of Kholyava, that Pankratov and Doubava managed to get Kokhanski and Paul, unconscious as he was, on to the full train. Those in the train were against letting them in—they were afraid of typhus—and they threatened to throw him out as soon as the train started. But Kholyava waved his service revolver in the faces of those who said this and shouted: “This patient is not infectious. He’s going to travel even if we have to clear you all out of the train. And don’t you forget, you scoundrels, that if anyone of you lays a hand on him I’ll get on the ’phone and as soon as you arrive you’ll find yourselves behind iron bars. Look here, Kokhanski, here’s Paul’s revolver, now use it point-blank on anyone who tries to put Paul off the train”—this Kholyava added to scare them.

The train drew out. Pankratov went up to Doubava, on the deserted platform, and said: “What’s your opinion, will he pull through?” There was no answer. Then he said: “Well, it’s out of our hands, come on, Mityai. Now we’re responsible for everything. We must get those engines off by this evening and try to get steam up in them to-morrow.”

But Kholyava first rang through to every Extra-

ordinary Commission man down the line—all pals of his—and asked them to prevent the passengers on the train from putting the sick man down, and it was only when he had a definite promise from each that they would not allow it, that he went to rest.

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When the train reached the junction station, the corpse of an unknown fair-haired youth was carried out on to the platform. Nobody knew who he was or what he had died of. The station Extraordinary Commission guards remembered Kholyava's request and rushed to the coach to prevent what was being done, but when they had seen that the youth really was dead they arranged for the corpse to be removed to the station mortuary, and telephoned immediately to Kholyava at Boyarka, to inform him of the death of the comrade he had been so perturbed about. A brief telegram from Boyarka to the Provincial Party Committee then informed them of Paul's death.

Meanwhile Kokhanski delivered Paul—alive, though ill—to his family, and then went down himself with the disease.

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Rita Oustinovich kept a diary. This is part of her entry for January 8th: "Why am I so desperately miserable? I have just been crying; who could have persuaded me that Rita Oustinovich would shed tears—and such painful tears! The cause of them is a grief which burns. Why had it to be to-day. To-day is a day of victory. The horror of cold has been defeated, and the railway is well supplied with precious fuel, and I have just come from the celebration of the victory, an enlarged

meeting of the whole town soviet with the heroes who have built that railway present. Victory, yes, but two have given their lives : Klaviček and Paul Korchagin. Paul's death has revealed the truth to me ; he was dearer to me than I ever thought.

“ To-morrow I shall write to Kharkov for permission to transfer to the Central Committee of the Ukraine YCL.”

CHAPTER TWELVE

BUT youth conquered. Paul did not succumb to typhoid. For the fourth time he passed the barrier of death and came back to the living. A whole month later, pale and thin, he stood on shaky legs and, supporting himself by clinging to the walls, endeavoured to move about the room. His mother helped him to get to the window and he leant a long time looking out into the street. It was the beginning of the spring thaw, and immediately opposite the window, on a cherry branch, a grey-chested sparrow was preening himself, and pecking at Paul from time to time with crafty little beads of eyes.

“ Well, so you and I have got through the winter, eh ? ” Paul said softly and tapped on the window-pane. His mother looked at him in alarm. “ Who’s that you’re speaking to out there ? ” “ Ah,” he said, “ I was talking to that sparrow. . . . Now he’s gone, the little rogue,” and he smiled weakly.

By the time spring was in full swing, Paul began to think of going back to the town. He was now strong enough to walk, but there was something quite out of order inside him. One day when strolling in the garden he was suddenly brought to the ground by a fierce pain in his spine. He only got back to his room with great difficulty. The next day the doctor came and made a thorough examination. He found a deep hollow in Paul’s backbone. In amazement he cried : “ How did you get this ? ”

Paul said : " That, doctor, is the trace of a piece of paving-stone. In the outskirts of Rovno a three-incher churned some of them up just behind my back. . . ."

" But how have you managed to walk up to the present? Hasn't it troubled you? "

" No. I was laid out for about a couple of hours and then mounted my horse again. This is the very first time I've felt anything of it."

The doctor frowned and examined the hollow again. He said : " No, no, my boy, I don't like the look of this at all. The backbone doesn't like disturbances of this sort. Let's hope it doesn't give you any trouble in future. You may dress, Comrade Korchagin."

And with sympathy and badly concealed concern he watched his patient dress.

Artem lived with his wife's family. She was an ugly young woman named Stiosha. It was a poor-peasant family. One day Paul paid Artem a visit. A squint-eyed grubby little brat was running about in a tiny untidy courtyard. When he saw Paul the child gaped at him without any shyness and went on picking his nose with great concentration and asked : " What do you want? Perhaps you've come here to steal? You'd better go away, our mummy's bad-tempered."

Then a tiny window in a miserable low hovel of a hut opened and Artem called out : " Come in, Paul boy."

An old woman with a face yellow as parchment was busy at the oven. She gave Paul a sour glance and let him pass, and went on with her pots.

Two little girls with stumpy pigtails clambered up

over the oven and peeped out from that place of vantage with the curiosity of savages.

Artem was sitting at the table. He was rather ashamed. Neither his mother nor Paul himself had approved of his marriage. Although he was a proletarian by long descent, for no clear reason he broke off with pretty Galia, daughter of a stone-worker—Galia herself was a sempstress—succumbed to the wiles of dismal-looking Stiosha, and entered a family of five in which there was not a single worker. When his work in the railway yards was over he wore himself out at the plough endeavouring to restore the wretched little farm.

Artem knew that Paul did not approve of what he considered his defection into a "petty-bourgeois" world, and now he was anxious to observe how Paul took his surroundings. They sat a while exchanging the usual empty phrases one does exchange on meeting, and then Paul got up to go. Artem said: "Wait a bit, boy and have a bite with us, Stiosha 'll be in with the milk any minute. So you're off to-morrow? You're not strong enough yet, Paul my boy."

Stiosha came in and shook hands with Paul and called Artem out to the stackyard to help carry something in, and Paul was left alone with the old woman, who was not very talkative. She muttered sourly: "Oh, Lord Jesus, so much work there's never time to pray." Then she took the kerchief from her neck, glanced again at the visitor and went to the corner which was full of dreary time-blackened pictures of saints. She put two bony fingers and thumb together and crossed herself. "Our Father, which art in Heaven, Hallowed be thy Name," she muttered with her dried-up lips. Out in the yard the brat took a

flying leap on to a black pig with hanging ears and spurred it hard with his bare feet and dug his hands into its bristles, yelling at the squealing and twisting animal : "Off we go !" Then he spat and cried : "Steady there !" The pig raced about the yard with the child on its back, trying to throw him off, but the squint-eyed little ragamuffin held on tightly. The old woman broke off her prayer in the middle and stuck her head out of the window. "Get off that pig at once, or you'll be falling off. You naughty little boy."

At last the pig succeeded in throwing its rider and the old woman was satisfied and returned to her cikons. She put on a pious expression again and went on : "Thy Kingdom come. . . ." Then the little boy appeared in the doorway, in tears. He wiped his grazed nose with his sleeve, whimpered from pain and howled : "M-a-amma-a-a, give me a cheesecake." The old woman turned round furiously. "You squint-eyed little devil," she yelled, "you just won't let me pray, I'll give you cheesecakes in a minute. . . ." And she snatched a whip from the bench. The boy vanished and the little girls up on the stove sniggered softly while the old woman went back for a third try.

Paul got up and went out. He was not going to wait for his brother. As he shut the gate he noticed the old woman's head sticking out of the tiny window at the end of the hut, watching him go. He wondered what on earth could have attracted Artem in that household. He would never get out of it now. Stiosha would have a child every year, and Artem would be as deeply buried as a beetle in a dung-heap. He would even come to throwing up his work in the railway shops.

"And here was I thinking of drawing him into political

life," Paul said to himself as he strode through the deserted streets of Shepetovka. He was glad that he was going to-morrow to the town where his friends and all those dear to his heart still were. That larger town attracted him by its power and its pulsating life, by the uninterrupted busy streams of humanity, the thunder of trams and the hooting of cars. But the chief thing which drew him was the complex of huge stone buildings and smoke-blackened furnaces, the machinery and the soft rustle of the driving-belts. He was drawn to where huge fly-wheels whirled at a furious pace and there was a scent of engine-oil in the air; he had grown up in that life, had been part of it, and he was drawn back to it. Here in this quiet little provincial town he felt a depression as he went through the streets. He had long ago taken root elsewhere.

Meanwhile, without noticing it, he had reached the pinewoods, and paused a moment where the road forked. On his right, separated from the woods by a high stockade, was the gloomy old prison, and beyond it the white hospital buildings. It was there, on that wide open space that Valia and her comrades had had the life choked out of them in the rope nooses. He stood for a while, lost deep in thought, on the very spot where the gallows had stood, then he went over to the cliff. He went down the steep slope and came out on the patch of level ground where the common grave of the comrades was. Somebody's careful hands had decorated the row of graves with fir branches and thus made a green wall round the little cemetery. Sturdy lofty pines rose high over the cliff, and grass covered the slopes with green silk. Here it was that his own kind had courageously given their lives so that life might be better for those who

were born in poverty and those whose very birth was the beginning of slavery. Paul's hand slowly drew the cap from his head and his heart was full, full to overflowing, full of pain.

The thing one prizes most is life. Life comes to us but once and it should be possible to live one's life in such a way that looking back one would feel no regret for years lived pointlessly, no shame for a petty worthless past—so that as one died one could say: "All my life and all my strength has been given to the most beautiful thing in the world—the struggle for the freedom of mankind." And Paul felt a momentary need to hasten, so as to live his life fully. He felt that an illness or some tragically stupid accident might suddenly put an end to it. And caught up in thoughts of this kind Paul left the graves of his comrades.

At home his sorrowful mother made preparations for her son's departure. As Paul watched her he saw she was hiding her tears from him. And she said: "Won't you perhaps stay, Paul darling? Leaving me alone miserable—I'm old. However many children you have they all grow up and leave you. Why does the town attract you so? There's life to be lived here too. Or is there some bob-haired little partridge you've set eyes on? You see you neither of you tell an old woman like me anything. Artem married without saying a word to me; as for you . . . I only see you when you're hurt." She could only speak in a whisper. She was packing her son's miserable collection of belongings into a bag for him.

Paul took her by the shoulders and drew her to him.

He said : " There's no partridge, mamma dear. Didn't you know, my dear, that all birds look for mates of their own kind ? What do you take me for, a cock-partridge ? "

She could not but smile.

He said : " Mother dear, I swore an oath not to go looking for girls until we've finished with bourgeoisie in this world of ours. What do you say, a bit long to wait for that ? No, mother, they won't hold out so much longer. . . . "

He began to romance about an ideal world of Communism. His mother said : " No, Paul, I shall never live to see your fairy tales come true. . . . Your grand-dad was just as impulsive as you are ; the sailor one. A real brigand, God forgive me ! " And she was beginning to tell the story of Paul's grandfather when he broke in and said : " Oh, mother, come, are we going to make ourselves miserable like that saying good-bye ? Come on, hand over that accordion, I haven't had it in my hands often enough. " And he cocked his head sideways over the rows of mother-of-pearl keys and his mother marvelled at the fresh sort of music he squeezed out of it. He played differently now. There was none of that harum-scarum swirling stuff, none of those furious scale passages, none of that tipsy catchiness which had once made him famous throughout the little town. His music now sounded melodious, and kept up a steady flow. It had somehow become more profound.

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He went alone to the station. He persuaded his mother not to see him off. He did not want to see her tears when he left. The train was going to be very full. Paul got an upper bench and thence was able to watch

the squabbling noisy crowd in the corridor below him. Sack after sack was dragged in and stuffed under the bottom seats. The train drew out, and then they all quieted down, and, as usual, started eating. Paul was soon asleep.

The first house he was going to call at was in the centre of the town. He climbed the steps of the bridge slowly. It was all so familiar, nothing had changed. He went over the bridge, his hand glided along the smooth railing. He reached the steps down. He stopped a moment. There was not a soul on the bridge. In the limitless spaces of the sky night was laying bare its magnificent spectacle to his enchanted gaze. Darkness was spreading a dark velvet covering over the horizon and the multitude of stars were lighting up, forming into patterns and twinkling with their phosphorescent glow. And lower, where the earth merged invisibly into the heavens, the town had spattered the darkness with thousands of lights.

A small group of men came up the steps towards him, discussing something. Their sharp excited voices broke the silence of the night, and Paul turned away from the lights of the town and went down the stairway. When he enquired in the permit office of the Special Department of that district, the officer on duty told him that Zhoukhraï had long ago left the town. The man in the office probed into Paul's identity with a long string of questions, and only when he was quite sure that the young fellow really did know Zhoukhraï, did he tell him that Fiodor had two months previously been sent to Tashkent, to work on the Turkestan front. Paul's disappointment was so great that he did not even

ask for any details, but without a word turned and went out again. He suddenly felt very tired and had to sit down a while on the steps of the building.

A tram rattled by and filled the street with its noise. There was an incessant stream of people along the pavements. The town was really alive with the happy laughter of women and snatches of voices talking, deep bass, youthful tenor, and the hoarse croak of old men. The stream of people was endless and they were all in a hurry. There were brilliantly lit trams and the headlights of passing cars and the electric lamps round the advertisements of the cinema opposite. And people everywhere, filling the street with never-ending talk. Evening in a large town. All this bustle and noise somewhat blunted the sharpness of the disappointment Paul had experienced by the news that Zhoukhraï had gone. But where was he to go? It was a long way to go back to Solomenka, where his friends were. Automatically his mind came to a house in a street—the Krouglo-Universitetskaia—which was not far away. Of course he would go there. After all, was not Rita the comrade he most wanted to see after Zhoukhraï? There too—in Akim's room or Mikhailo's—he could spend the night.

Quite a distance away he saw there was a light in the corner room. He tried to be calm and opened the oak door. He stood still a few moments on the landing. He could hear voices in Rita's room. Somebody was playing the guitar. "Oho!" he said to himself, "so she allows the guitar now, does she, the rules have slackened a bit." He knocked lightly on the door. He felt very excited, and so he bit his lip hard. A strange woman opened the door—she was young and the hair over her temples was curled. She looked enquiringly at Paul.

“Whom do you want?” She did not shut the door behind her, and a swift glance, revealing unfamiliar fittings and furniture, gave him the answer in advance. But he said: “Can I see Comrade Oustinovich?” The stranger answered: “She’s no longer here. She went to Kharkov in January and I’ve heard she has since gone to Moscow.”

“Does Comrade Akim still live here, or has he gone too?”

“He has gone too. He’s now secretary of the Odessa Province YCL.”

There was nothing else for Paul to do but turn back. The pleasure of coming back to this town had somewhat paled. And now he had to think seriously about his night’s lodging. He mastered his disappointment and growled to himself: “If you go on looking for old friends like that you’ll wear your legs off and still see nobody.” But nevertheless he made up his mind to have one more try—he would look up Pankratov. The docker had lived near the river harbour, and he was nearer than Solomenka. And at last, tired out, he reached Pankratov’s lodgings and tapped on the once ochre-painted door and said to himself definitely: “If he isn’t here, I’ll give it up and lie down under a boat and sleep.”

The door was opened by an old woman with a simple kerchief tied under the chin, peasant fashion—Pankratov’s mother.

“Is Ignat at home?”

“He’s only just come in. Do you want to see him?”

She did not recognise Paul. She turned round and called out: “Genka, somebody to see you!” Paul followed her into the room and put his bundle down on the

floor. Pankratov turned his head from the table. His mouth was full—he was busy with his supper. He said : “ If you want to see me, sit down and tell me what it’s about while I put a bowl of borshch inside me, I’ve had nought but water all day.” And Pankratov picked up a large wooden bowl.

Paul sat down beside him on a chair with the seat out. He took off his cap and by old habit wiped his forehead with it. “ Have I really changed so much,” he said to himself, “ for him not to recognise me ? ” Pankratov despatched two spoonfuls of borshch and then, hearing no sound from his visitor, turned his head towards him and said : “ Come on, man, speak up, what is it you want ? ” His hand with a piece of bread stopped short half-way to his mouth and he blinked in bewilderment. “ What ? . . . half a moment. Damnation ! you old humbug ! ”

Seeing Pankratov’s face grow purple from the strain, Paul could not keep from bursting into laughter.

“ Paul ! Why, we’ve thought all the time you were dead ! Half a minute. What is your name ? ”

Hearing his cry, his elder sister and his mother ran in from the other room, and then all three satisfied themselves that it really was Paul Korchagin in the flesh. The whole house was long asleep when Pankratov was still telling Paul of all that had happened in the past four months. “ During the winter Zharki, Doubava and Mikhailo went to Kharkov. And, the scoundrels, of all places, where to but the Communist University ! Zharki and Doubava to the preparatory courses and Mikhailo to start first year work. There were about fifteen of us went in for it. In the heat of the moment even I sent in application forms. I thought I’d better thicken the

mixture in my brain a bit, it's on the watery side. But would you believe it, the selection board just dropped me like a hot coal."

Pankratov wheezed a bit, almost angrily, then went on :

"I got to cross purposes with one of the comrades on the selection board. He put me a nice innocent little question. 'Tell me, Comrade Pankratov,' says he, 'what you know about philosophy.' You'll understand me if I say I didn't know anything at all. No, but I thought of a docker we once had, a college boy he was, a rolling stone ; became a docker out of sheer bravado. One day he told us there used to be men in Greece who were very learned and knew so much they were called philosophers. And one of those fellows, I've forgotten his name, spent his whole life in a barrel and all that sort of rot. . . . The one who could find forty ways of proving white is black and black is white was reckoned their prize scholar. In other words, they were a lot of gas-bags. Well, I remembered all that college boy had told us and I said to myself : 'This fellow on the board is trying to get round my right flank.' And there he was peeking at me with a look in his eyes. So I went straight for it. I said : 'Philosophy is sheer bunk, it's an attempt to throw dust in your eyes. I've not got the least wish to waste time on that rot, comrades. Now the history of the Party would be a different matter, I'd put my whole heart into that.' And then they began plaguing me to find out where I got such novel ideas about philosophy from. Then I added a bit more of what that college boy had said and they all roared. And my college career was finished. I said : 'What do you take me for, eh ? A fool ?' And took my cap and made off. Later I met that very comrade of the board in the Provincial

Party Committee offices and we had two or three hours' chat. I found out that college boy had got a bit mixed up. It seems philosophy is a great thing, a very important thing.

"But Doubava and Zharki both got through. Now Doubava had done a fair bit of schooling before, but Zharki was not much better than I was. The plain fact is that his decoration helped him out. However, it happened I was left high and dry. They've begun making me do all sorts of management work in the docks. I used formerly always to be at loggerheads with the bosses, and busy with various youth matters, and now here I am doing the bossing myself. This sort of thing happens—you get a real slacker or a born fool, and then you can put the screw on, both as secretary and as docks chief. They aren't going to diddle me. But there's time to talk about myself. What other news have I got to tell you? You know about Akim, the only one of us in the Provincial Committee who's still where he was is Toufta. Tokarev is working as secretary of the district party committee in Solomenka. Okounev, your commune-mate, is in the district YCL. Talia's on political educational work. And in the shop your place has been taken by Tzvetaiev, I don't know a lot about him, we see each other in the Provincial Committee; he seems to have his head screwed on straight, but he's a bit cocksure. Then, perhaps you remember Anna Borchardt. She's in Solomenka too, in charge of the women's section of the District Party Committee. I've already told you about the others. Yes, Paul, my boy, there's a crowd of party folk turned to studies now. The whole of the old gang is studying now in the Provincial Soviet Party school. They've promised to send me next year."

They did not go to bed till long after midnight. The next morning, when Paul awakened, Ignat had already left for the docks. Dousia, his sister, a tall girl, very like her brother in features, gave him breakfast and chattered merrily away about all manner of trifles. Pankratov's father was a ship's engineer, and was on a voyage. When Paul was leaving Dousia insisted that he was "not to forget we are expecting you back to dinner."

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There was the usual stir and bustle in the Provincial Committee offices. Paul hung about in the passage a while to see if he could find a familiar face, but failing to do so, he went to the secretary's room. The secretary of the committee, in a blue Russian tunic, was seated at a huge desk. He gave Paul a quick look and without raising his head went on writing. Paul sat down in front of the desk and carefully examined this successor to Akim. The secretary in the civilian tunic put a full stop to what he was writing and said: "And what can I do for you?"

Paul told him his story. He said: "Comrade, I must be put back on the list of members and sent back to the shops. Please issue the necessary instructions." The secretary leant back in his chair and answered indecisively: "Of course we'll put you back, there can be no question about that, but it'll be rather awkward to get you into the shops, as Tzvetaiev is already working there; he's just been made a member of the Provincial Committee. We'll make use of you somewhere else."

Paul's eyes narrowed. "I'm not going to the shops to hinder Tzvetaiev in his work. I'm going there to work at my trade, and not as secretary of the collective,

and in view of the fact that I am still very weak I must ask you not to send me anywhere else."

The secretary agreed. He scribbled a few words on a scrap of paper. "Give this to Comrade Toufta, he'll fix it all up."

In the personnel department Toufta was busy dressing down his assistant-filer. Paul listened to their wrangle for a while, but then, seeing that it would go on for a long time, he cut short the chief at the height of his eloquence and said: "You can finish telling him off afterwards, Toufta. Here's a word for you, let's get my papers through."

Toufta examined the note a long time, and then Paul too. At last he grasped what had happened. "Oh! So that's what it is, you aren't dead! Ah, but what are we going to do now? You've been removed from the list of members, I myself sent your card back to the Central Committee. And there's another thing—you've missed the all-Russian census. According to circular instructions from the Central Committee of the YCL, all persons who have not filled in census forms are disqualified and excluded from membership. So there's only one course open to you—to join the YCL anew on the same footing as any other person." His tone was final.

Paul frowned. "So you still work in the old way? A young man and worse than any of the old rats in the provincial archives. Volodka, my boy, when will you grow up?"

Toufta leapt to his feet, as if something had bitten him. "What do you mean by lecturing me on what I am to do. I am responsible for my work. Circular instructions are written to be kept, not broken. As for your insult about 'rats,' you shall answer for that officially."

Toufta spoke in a threatening manner and demonstratively pulled a bundle of unopened letters forward, and generally showed by his manner that the matter was ended. Paul went leisurely to the door, but on second thoughts he went back and took the secretary's note, lying in front of Toufta on his desk, while Toufta watched him. That ill-humoured youthful "old man," with his large spreading ears, was unpleasant, but at the same time comical. "All right," said Paul in a challengingly calm tone, "I am ready to plead guilty to 'disorganising statistical work,' but will you please tell me on what grounds you intend to lay charges against people who have died without previously declaring their intention? Why, you know, there'll be no end to the people taking it into their heads to get ill and die, and I'm sure you haven't got circular instructions on that matter."

When he heard this Toufta's assistant was unable to maintain his neutrality, and he burst into laughter. The point of Toufta's pencil broke. He flung the pencil on the floor, but could find no answer for Paul. At that instant a whole crowd came noisily into the room, talking and laughing, and among them was Okounev. There was no end to the delighted astonishment and questions. A few minutes later another group of YCL-ers came in, among them Olga Youreniev. She was a great friend of Rita Oustinovich. She shook Paul's hand a long time, and with great enthusiasm, but there was a distressed look in her eyes all the same.

Paul had to tell the story all over again from the beginning. The sincere delight of his comrades and their genuine friendship and sympathy and their firm handshakes and slaps on the shoulders, really heart-felt, made him forget about Toufta for the moment. But at

last he told them about his conversation with Toufta. There were then indignant cries all round and Olga Youreniev devoured Toufta with one glance and went in to the secretary. Okounev threw his arm round Paul's shoulders and said: "Let's go and see Nezhdanov, he'll let some daylight into him," and they all followed Olga. Olga was saying furiously: "He ought to be dismissed and sent for a year to work in the harbour as docker under Pankratov."

The secretary of the Provincial Committee smiled gently and listened to the demand for Toufta's removal put forward by Okounev, Olga and the others. Then he said soothingly: "There's no need to discuss Korchagin's restoration, he'll have a card this instant. And I do agree with you that Toufta is a pedantic fellow. That is his underlying weakness. But after all we must admit that he has put the index in wonderful order. Wherever I have worked hitherto, YCL archives and figures have been completely unusable and it has been impossible to believe a single figure. But the statistics in this office are magnificently done. You yourselves know that Toufta sometimes works on till late at night. And so my view is that though it's always easy to remove him from the post we should only be sure to get a first-rate jolly fellow in his place, but a rotten office organiser; we should lose our red tape, but we should also lose our records. Let Toufta go on. I'll give him a good talking to. It will have effect for a time, and then we'll see how we stand."

Okounev agreed. "Come on, Paul, old fellow, let's go over to Solomenka. We've a general meeting of active YCL members in the club, to-day as ever is, and none of them know about you and we'll be able to startle them

by announcing 'Comrade Korchagin will now speak.' Damn good work, Paul, not dying. What use would you have been to the proletariat if you had died?' And thus babbling, Okounev flung his arms round Paul and trundled him out into the passage.

"You coming, Olga?"

"What do you think?"

Though the Pankratovs expected him, Paul did not turn up for dinner; night fell and still no Paul. Okounev had taken his friend home. He had his own room in the House of the Soviet. He fed Paul as well as he could and then put bundles of newspapers and two thick books of meeting reports of the Bureau of the District YCL Committee in front of him, and said: "You'd better glance through all this. While you were wasting time on typhoid a lot of water flowed under the bridges here. Look up what we've done and what the present position is. I shall be back in the early evening and we'll go round to the club—and if you feel tired, lie down and have a nap."

Okounev then stuffed a heap of documents and notes and letters into his pockets—he scorned a portfolio on principle; it lay on the floor under the bed—and made a farewell tour of the room before going. When he came home that evening the floor was covered with opened newspapers and a pile of books had been pulled out from under the bed—some of them were heaped on the table—while Paul was sitting on the bed reading the latest letters from the Central Committee. These he had found under his friend's pillow.

"You brigand, what have you done to my room!"

Okounev cried, with pretended indignation. "Hi, there, steady, comrade, steady, why you're reading secret documents. A fine fellow to give the run of one's house to."

Paul smiled and put down the letter he was reading. He said: "As it happens this is not a secret, but you really had got a paper pinned on the lamp as a lampshade which should not have been made public. It was even scorched at the edges. Look!"

Okounev took the scorched sheet, glanced at the heading and then smote himself on the forehead. "Why," he cried, "I've been looking for this the last three days, damn it! It absolutely vanished. I remember now. Why, it was Volyntzev the other day who made a lamp-shade of it—he himself looked for the paper afterwards till he was in despair." Okounev took the paper and folded it most carefully and stuffed it under his mattress. "We'll put all this stuff in order later," he said reassuringly. "Let's have a snack now and then go round to the club. Sit up to the table here, Paul, my lad!"

From one pocket Okounev unloaded a long dried Caspian fish wrapped in a newspaper and from another two chunks of bread. He moved the paper to the end of the table, spread the newspaper over the blank patch, took the dried fish by the head and whacked the table with it. Okounev sat down on the table and his jaws began working energetically, and, mingling jokes with business, he told Paul all the latest news.

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Okounev took Paul in through the officers' door and behind the stage. In the corner of the spacious hall, to the right of the stage, near the piano, in a close circle of railway YCL-ers, sat Talia Lagoutin and Anna

Borchardt. Opposite Anna, rocking on his chair, was Volyntzev—the secretary of the railway yards YCL—rosy-cheeked as an apple, and wearing a once black leather tunic which was on the point of decomposition. He had straw-coloured hair and eyebrows. Near him, leaning in negligent pose on the piano, was Tzvetaiev—a handsome youth with auburn hair and very clean-cut lips. His shirt was unfastened at the neck.

As he approached them Okounev heard Anna saying: “There are folk try to do everything they can to make it difficult for new comrades to get in. Tzvetaiev’s one of them.”

Tzvetaiev answered bluntly and with rude scorn of Anna: “The YCL is not a passage-way.”

Then Talia cried: “Just look, just look! Nick’s as bright to-day as a new-cleaned samovar!” She had caught sight of Okounev. They drew him into the circle and showered questions on him: “Where’ve you been all this time?” “Let’s get started.” Okounev held out a calming hand and said: “Keep calm, my pets. Tokarev’ll be here in a moment and then we’ll start.” Anna said: “And there he is.” It was the secretary of the District Party Committee coming towards them. Okounev ran to meet him. “Daddy,” he cried, “come with me to the back here a moment, I want to show you somebody you know,” and he dragged Tokarev off.

In Okounev’s hands the bell jangled so fiercely that the most hardened chatterboxes quickly stopped talking. Behind Tokarev, in a rich frame of green fir branches, was the leonine head of the author of the *Communist Manifesto*. While Okounev opened the meeting, Tokarev’s eyes were on Paul, who was standing out of sight behind the wings.

Okounev said : “ Comrades, before we come to discussion of the tasks of the organisation which are on the agenda, a comrade has asked to be allowed to say a few words and Tokarev and I have agreed that he should speak.” Numerous voices shouted agreement, and Okounev then barked out : “ I call upon Paul Korchagin to make a speech of greeting to you.”

Of the hundred in the hall not less than eighty knew Paul, and when the familiar figure of the tall, pale youth appeared in front of the stage and began to speak, he was met by cries of delight and enthusiastic applause. “ Dear comrades ! ” His voice was even, but he could not hide his emotion. “ Friends. Things have so turned out that here I am back again with you to take my place in the ranks. I am happy to be back. I see before me numerous old friends. Okounev has shown me the minutes, from which I see that the Solomenka YCL is thirty per cent bigger, and that in the yards there’s an end to railway workers spending their time making cigarette-lighters and that the rolling-stock cemetery is being passed through general overhaul and restored to life. All this means that our country is being reborn and is growing stronger. There’s reason to be alive ! Now, could a fellow die in times like these ? ” And his face lit up with a happy smile. Shouts greeted him as Paul climbed down from the stage to the floor of the hall and made for the corner where Anna and Talia were sitting. He quickly shook hands with a number of people. The friends moved up and made room for Paul. Talia’s hand lay on his and squeezed it very hard. Anna’s eyes were wide open and her lashes were quivering, and there was both astonishment and welcome in her glance.

The days slipped by. It was impossible to call them ordinary working days. Every day brought something new, and in the morning when Paul mapped out his day he had often to admit with disappointment that it was too short and something he had thought of doing had had to be left out. He took up lodgings with Okounev, and began work in the shops as assistant electrical fitter. He had a long quarrel with Okounev before he could persuade him to agree to his temporarily resting from leadership work. Okounev said: "We're short of people and you talk of cooling your heels in the shop. Don't you produce health as a reason to me, I myself after typhoid couldn't do without a stick for a month while I was doing District Committee work. Paul, look here, I know you, and I know it isn't health. Now out with it, what's the real reason?" Okounev insisted, and Paul said: "The real reason is that I want to do some serious reading."

Okounev shouted in triumph. "Oh, that's your game, is it? You're going to study, and you think I don't need to do anything of the sort? Now, brother, that's blank egoism on your part. We're to keep the wheels turning while you do the bookworm stunt. No, young fellow, to-morrow you start work as organising instructor."

Yet, after a long discussion, Okounev gave in. He said: "I'll leave you alone two months. And don't forget to thank me. Only you won't fit in with Tzvetaiev, he's a very high opinion of himself."

Certainly Tzvetaiev did meet Paul's return to the shop very cautiously. He was convinced that Paul's return meant the beginning of a struggle for the leadership, and as he was morbidly ambitious, he prepared to resist. But only a few days had passed when he became convinced of the error of his supposition. When Paul heard

of the determination of the bureau of the collective to put him up, he went to Tzvetaiev and, making his preoccupation with Okounev the excuse, persuaded Tzvetaiev to remove his name from the agenda. In the shop cell of the YCL Paul took on a political grammar circle, but made no effort to get on to the bureau. But nevertheless, in spite of his official relinquishment of leadership, Paul's influence was to be felt throughout the work of the group. In comradely fashion, without being noticed, he more than once helped Tzvetaiev out of difficult positions.

Then one day, when he entered the shop Tzvetaiev was astounded to see the whole of the YCL cell and some three dozen non-party lads washing the windows and cleaning the machinery, scraping the accumulation of years of grease and dirt and removing all manner of scrap and other rubbish. Paul himself was scrubbing furiously at the cement floor with a swab soaked in oil and grease.

Tzvetaiev was quite at a loss and said to Paul : " What on earth is all this prettifying for ? "

Paul said : " We're tired of working in dirt. This place hasn't been cleaned out these twenty years ; we'll make a new shop of it in a week."

Tzvetaiev shrugged his shoulders and went out again. But the electro-technicians were not satisfied with this and set to work on the yard. The large yard in which their shop stood had since time immemorial been a dumping ground. There was all manner of rubbish there. Hundreds of truck-loads had been shot there—whole mountains of rusty iron, rails, buffers, axle-boxes—thousands of tons of metal rusting under the open sky. But the attack on the dumping-ground was put a stop to

by the management—"There are more important tasks than that, the yard doesn't leak on our heads."

Then the electricians paved a little square in front of their shop with bricks and rigged up a boot-scraper with some stout wire, and were satisfied with that. But inside the cleaning-up went on in the evenings after work. When Strizh, the chief engineer, came in about a week later, the shop was brilliantly lit. The huge windows in their iron grille frames, once cleaned of their mixture of the dust and grease of years, made way for the rays of the sun, and the sunlight penetrated into the machine-room and was brightly reflected from the polished copper surfaces. The heavy cast parts of the machine-tools were freshly painted green, and somebody's hand had even picked out the spokes of the wheels with yellow stripes. And Strizh stood nodding. "Hm . . . ye-e-es," he said.

In the far corner of the shop a number of workers were putting an end to the work. Strizh went down towards them, and he met Paul with a can of ready mixed paint. The engineer stopped him and said: "Half a minute, old fellow. I thoroughly approve of what you're doing. But where did you get that paint from? You know, I've definitely forbidden use of paint without my special permission—we're short of paint. The painting of locomotive parts is more important than what you're doing."

Paul said: "We've collected this paint from scrapped empty paint cans. We spent two whole days going over the rubbish dump and we managed to scrape out twenty-five pounds of paint. All's in order, Comrade Engineer."

Once again Strizh said: "Hm!"—this time rather abashed. He said: "Then go ahead. Hm . . . ye-e-s. . . . All the same I find it very interesting. . . . How do you explain such a, well—I suppose I should say

spontaneous desire for cleanliness in the shop? I gather you have done it all out of working hours?"

Paul caught a strain of real indignation in the engineer's voice. He said: "Certainly; what did you think?"

"Oh, of course, of course, but . . ."

"Now, Comrade Strizh, I'll supply your 'but' . . . where have you been told that the Bolsheviki intend to leave dirt undisturbed? Just you wait a bit till we get properly going. You'll have something more to look at and to admire then." And he stepped cautiously round the engineer—so as not to touch him with paint—and went on his way to the door.

But in the evenings Paul stayed on late in the Public Library. He had struck up a firm friendship with the three girls who were librarians, and by dint of using all the means of propaganda, he at last obtained the permission he wanted, to examine all the books he wished. He would put some steps up against the huge sets of shelving and spend hours on them turning over the pages of one book after another in search of something interesting and useful. Most of the books were old. Modern literature occupied one humble little set of shelves. On them were assembled a number of pamphlets and books of the civil war period—Marx's *Capital*, *The Iron Heel*, and others. Among the old books Paul found a novel called *Spartacus*. He read it in two nights and then brought it back and put it together with the row of Gorki's works. He was steadily putting all the more interesting books, nearer his way of thinking, in one place. The librarian girls did nothing to hinder the process—they didn't care either way.

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The monotonous calm in the YCL of the shops was suddenly broken by an event which at first seemed insignificant : Konstantin Fidin, a member of the Bureau of the cell of the intermediate repair shop, a sluggish youth with a squat nose and a pock-marked face, was drilling holes in an iron plate when he broke an expensive American bit. The cause of the break was simply his disgraceful carelessness. No, it was worse, it was done almost on purpose.

It happened one morning. Khodorov, the senior master workman in the shop, asked Fidin to drill a number of holes in the plate. Fidin at first said he would not do the job, but when Khodorov insisted he took the plate and began the work. But Khodorov noticed a minute later that Fidin was drilling with the metal dry, that is to say, without oiling the bit working in the metal. He rushed to the drill and stopped it.

“What, are you blind, or did you come here yesterday?” he shouted at Fidin, knowing that the bit would soon give out if used like that. But Fidin only swore back at him and set the drill working again. Khodorov went off to lay a complaint with the shop-chief, while Fidin left the drill working and ran for an oiler so as to have everything in proper order by the time anybody came along to inspect. While he was finding the oiler and getting back, the bit overheated and snapped. The shop-chief reported the incident and demanded Fidin’s dismissal, but the bureau of the YCL group took Fidin’s part. Their standpoint was that Khodorov constantly did all he could to oppress the Young Communists. The management insisted, and the matter came before the Bureau of the collective. And that was the beginning of it all. Of the five members of the Bureau three were for reproof

of Fidin and his transference to other work—among those was Tzvetaiev. Two held the opinion that Fidin had done nothing at all blameworthy.

Tzvetaiev was an “emancipated worker.” By trade he was a blacksmith, but thanks to his capabilities in the past four months he had become prominent in leadership work among the young folk, and so became a member of the Bureau of the District YCL and the Provincial Committee. He had done smith’s work in the engine shop—he was new to the other shop. From the very outset he gathered the reins firmly into his own hands. He was self-confident and decisive in action, and immediately stifled any initiative on the part of the other lads ; he laid his hand on everything and even before he had quite mastered the work himself he had begun downing his assistants for their inactivity. Even the room was done out under his personal supervision.

He was conducting the meeting lolling luxuriously in the one padded arm-chair, brought there from the YCL club-room. It was a sitting *in camera*. Party Organiser Khomoutov was about to speak when there was a knock on the door, which was bolted. Tzvetaiev was annoyed and frowned. There was a second knock. Kate Zelyonov got up and slid the bolt back. It was Paul. Kate let him in.

Paul was on his way to the one free bench when Tzvetaiev called out : “Korchagin ! This is a private meeting of the Bureau.” Paul’s cheeks flushed, and he turned slowly towards the desk. He said : “I know that. I am interested in the opinion of you all on the Fidin business. I wish to raise a new matter in direct connection with it. Why, have you anything against my presence ? ”

Tzvetaiev said : " I am not exactly against it, but you should know that only members of the Bureau are present at closed meetings. It is difficult to discuss matters when there is a great crowd. But as you are here you may stay."

Paul had never received such a slight before, and a deep furrow divided his forehead, between his eyebrows. Khomoutov was annoyed and said : " What is the point of such formality ? " But Paul stopped him with a gesture and sat down on a stool.

Khomoutov said : " This is what I wanted to say. About Khodorov, it is true an individualist like him is not our sort, but at the same time our discipline is pretty rotten. If YCL-ers are going to start breaking steel twist drills, we shall soon be without tools. As for the non-party lads, it's an absolutely rotten example that's set. I think the lad ought to be seriously warned."

But Tzvetaiev did not let him finish, and began raising objections. After listening to about ten minutes of the discussion, Paul grasped the attitude the Bureau was taking. When they were going to vote on it, he asked to be allowed to speak. Tzvetaiev mastered his annoyance and allowed it. He said : " Comrades, I want to give you my opinion about Fidin's affair." His voice was harsher than he wished it to be.

He said : " Fidin's affair is a symptom ; it goes far deeper than Kostia Fidin. I got a few figures together yesterday." He took a note-book from his pocket. " I got them from the time-keeper. Listen carefully : twenty-two per cent of the YCL members come from five to fifteen minutes late every day. It's become a rule. Seventeen per cent of the YCL-ers don't turn up to work at all, and this regularly, one or two days in every month,

whereas the non-party youth show only fourteen per cent of such slacking. Figures are worse than a scourge. I jotted down some others by the way: of the adult Party slackers four per cent who shirk work one day a month are regularly four per cent late. As for the non-party adult workers, eleven per cent miss a day a month and thirteen per cent come late. And as for breaking of tools—ninety per cent falls on the youth, among whom seven per cent are new hands. From which one must draw the conclusion that we YCL-ers work much worse than regular Party members and also worse than the adult non-party workers.

“Yet this state of affairs does not hold everywhere. We can feel nothing but envy for the smithy, and the position in the electrical shop is good, and it is more or less normal in the other shops. In my opinion Comrade Khomoutov has only said a quarter of what needs to be said about discipline. Our task must now be to straighten out the ups and downs in our figures. I don't want to harangue you or make an agitational meeting of it, but I must say we have got to attack this slacking and shabby working with all possible severity. The older workers say quite openly that when there was a boss the work was better, when they had to work for a capitalist there was more accuracy generally; but now that we ourselves are the bosses, there is no excuse. And primarily Fidin is not so much to blame or any other particular worker, but all of us, because not only have we not struggled with this evil as we should have struggled, but on the contrary, we have found this or that excuse to defend our Fidins.

“Samokhin and Boutylnik here have just said that Fidin's 'one of the best.' You might say he was a standard production: an active YCL-er, he takes on all kinds of

additional social duties. As for that drill-bit—well, he's broken it, what of that, who doesn't break drill-bits, a lot of fuss about nothing. He's one of the best, that is he's one of ourselves—and this fellow Khodorov is an outsider. . . . Though let me observe that nobody seems to have made much effort to bring Khodorov into the party. He's always finding fault—don't forget he has thirty years on this job behind him! His political standpoint is neither here nor there at the moment. He's in the right; he may be an outsider from our point of view, but he is taking care of State property, and we're the ones ruining costly machine tools.

“How are we to qualify such a topsy-turvy state of affairs? I believe we should immediately strike the first blow towards an attack in our own sector, and I propose that we expel Fidin from the YCL as a slacker, a disorganiser of production. I propose we should write it all up in the wall newspaper and quite openly, without fear of any talk it may cause, put these figures in a leading article. We are strong enough and we have support behind us, because the basic majority of the YCL-ers are good workers. Sixty of them were at Boyarka, and that was a reliable school. With their help and with their collaboration we can straighten out this tangle. Only once and for all we must give up the approach to the matter we have at present.”

Though generally calm and taciturn, Paul here spoke hotly and sharply; this was the first time Tzvetaiev had seen him in natural form. Tzvetaiev, too, was aware how right Paul was, but the constant feeling of being on his guard was in his way. He took Paul's intervention as a sharp criticism of the general state of the organisation—and as an undermining of his own authority, and he

decided to smash Paul. He prefaced his attack with a direct accusation that Paul was shielding Khodorov's menshevism.

There was a passionate discussion which lasted three hours. It was late when agreement was reached—and then Tzvetaiev, crushed by the invincible logic of facts and losing his majority, which had passed to Paul's side, took a false step—he attacked democratic methods, and insisted on Paul leaving the room before the final vote. Paul said: "Very well, I will go, although it does not show you in very good light, Comrade Tzvetaiev. Only I must warn you that if in spite of everything you insist on having your own way, I shall bring the matter to-morrow before a general meeting, and I am sure you will not have a majority then. Tzvetaiev, you simply are wrong. In my opinion, Comrade Khomoutov, you should bring this matter up at a general party meeting, even before the next regular general meeting." Tzvetaiev shouted challengingly: "What, are you trying to frighten me? I know the way to a general meeting without you, and we shall have a word or two to say about you too. If you aren't going to work yourself don't stand in the way of other people."

Paul shut the door and wiped his burning forehead with his hand and went through the empty office to the entrance. Once outside he took a deep breath. Then he lit a cigarette and made for a little house on Batyiev Hill, where Tokarev lived. He found Tokarev at supper. He was made to sit down to supper. Tokarev cried: "Daria, bring the boy a bowl of kasha. Now tell us all the news. We're listening."

Tokarev's wife Daria was the opposite of her husband—tall and plump. She placed a plate of millet kasha

before Paul and then, wiping her moist lips on her white apron, said in a kind voice: "Now make yourself at home, dear."

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In the old days, when Tokarev worked in the shops, Paul had sat till late in this house many a time, but this was his first visit since he had come back to the town. The turner listened to his story attentively. He said nothing himself, just plodded away very earnestly with his spoon and grunted now and then to himself. Then he wiped his moustache dry and clearing his throat, said: "Of course you are right. It's high time we got these things straight. The shops are the basic collectives in this district, and they should be the starting-point. So you've come to grips with Tzvetaiev, eh? That's bad. He's a conceited young fellow. But have you done any better with the lads? But now, what exactly do you do in the shops?"

"I'm in the union. What do I do—well, I stir things up a bit everywhere. In the cell I have a political grammar circle."

"And in the bureau?"

Paul could not give a simple answer. He said: "For the present while I've been getting my strength back—and needed to read things up a bit—I take no official part in the leadership."

"Ah, and that's just what's been wrong, my friend!" Tokarev cried. "The only thing that saves you from a good row is the fact you're not as fit yet as you might be. But how are you really, are you better?"

Paul said: "Yes."

"Well, then, you set to work in proper fashion. There's

no use playing at things. Who ever saw anything properly done that way! Anybody else would say the same as I do—you're wriggling out of responsibility, and you can't hide it, either. Now you put it all right to-morrow, and as for Okounev, I'll tell him a thing or two." Tokarev was really annoyed.

But Paul said: "Don't say anything to Okounev. I myself asked him not to put me in the Bureau."

Tokarev gave a scornful whistle.

"You asked him. And he approved, eh? Well, all right, I don't know what's to be done with you young YCL-ers. . . . Come, lad, let's have a bit of old times . . . read me a bit from the paper; my eyes aren't what they used to be."

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The Bureau of the party group approved the opinion of the majority of the YCL Bureau. Both the party and the YCL now had an important and difficult task—to give an example of labour discipline by their own work. Tzvetaiev got a good dressing-down from the Bureau. At first he ruffled up his feathers, but the secretary, Lopakhin, got him in a corner, and Tzvetaiev gave in and half-admitted his mistake. The following day the wall-newspapers in the shops carried articles which attracted the attention of the workers. They were read out loud and hotly discussed. That evening, at an unusually full meeting of the YCL, the talk was solely of those articles.

Fidin was expelled, and a new comrade was appointed to the Bureau, as political instructor—Paul Korchagin.

The assembly listened to Nezhdanov in silence and with unusual patience while he spoke of the new

tasks and the new stage on which they were entering in the railway shops. After the meeting Paul waited for Tzvetaiev outside. He said to him: "Let's walk along together, there are one or two things we ought to have a word about." "And what may they be?" Tzvetaiev asked, in a cold voice.

Paul thrust his arm through Tzvetaiev's and they went a few paces till they came to a bench. He sat down and said: "Let's sit here a minute." Tzvetaiev's cigarette glowed bright and died down in quick pulsation. Paul said: "Look here, Tzvetaiev, what is it you've got against me?" There was several minutes' silence. Then, in an uncertain voice, feigning surprise, Tzvetaiev said: "Oh, so that's what you want to speak about. I thought it was work." Paul laid a heavy hand on the other's knee. He said: "I say, comrade, look here, stop being on your dignity. It's only diplomats strut like that. Now give me a straight answer—what have I done to upset you?"

Tzvetaiev fidgeted impatiently. "What's all this persistence? What do you mean I have against you? You yourself refused to be on the Bureau, and now you want to make out I've been keeping you off it."

Paul missed any sign of sincerity in his voice, and without removing his hand from Tzvetaiev's knee he said, with great emotion: "Well, if you won't say, I will. You think I'm crossing your tracks, you think I'm after the secretaryship, eh? Now if that hadn't been in your mind there wouldn't have been this disagreement about Fidin—am I not right? Now relations of this sort ruin our work completely. If it only crippled you and me, it wouldn't matter so much, I wouldn't care a jot what you think. But to-morrow we'll be working in

harness together. And what will be the result? Well, listen. We've nothing to split between us. We're both working-class lads. If you really care for our cause, give me your hand, and we'll start off to-morrow good friends. Otherwise, if you aren't ready to forget all this nonsense you've been thinking and insist on going the squabblers's way, well, I can assure you that there will be a stand-up fight about every single breakdown in our work that results from it. Now there's my hand—take it while it's the hand of a friend."

And with great satisfaction Paul felt Tzvetaiev's knotted fingers in his grasp.

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A week went by. They were finishing off work in the District Party Committee offices, and it was growing quiet; but Tokarev was still at work. He was sitting in an arm-chair intent on new papers. There was a knock at the door. "M'm!" he called. Paul came in and placed before him two filled-in forms. "What's this?" Tokarev asked. "That, dad, is the end of irresponsibility. Time, too, I think. And if you agree, I want your support."

Tokarev took a look at the heading, then a few seconds at the young man before him, and then without a word picked up his pen. And in the column headed '*Party status of referees recommending Comrade Korchagin Paul Andreievitch as candidate for the Russian Communist Party (Botsheviks)*' he wrote in firm strokes '903' and his simple signature.

"There you are, lad. And I'll say so much as that I know you'll never disgrace my grey head."

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It was stuffy in the room, and he had only one thought—to get there as soon as possible, to the chestnut-alleys of Solomenka. The sweat streamed from Tzvetaiev's face. He said: "Have mercy, Paul, wind up, I'm done." Kate and the others joined in, and so Paul closed the book and the reading circle finished for that day. And then, just as they all got up, the old Ericsson telephone began its fussy rattle and Tzvetaiev answered, trying to make himself heard above them all. He replaced the receiver and turned to Paul. He said: "There are two coaches down at the station—diplomatic—Polish Consulate. Their lighting's off, and the train is due to leave in an hour; repairs needed. Get your box of tools, Paul, and run along and see to it. It's urgent."

The two gleaming international coaches were standing at platform No. 1. One wagon-lit with wide windows was brilliantly lit—the other was in darkness. Paul went to the luxurious Pullman and laid his hand on the rail ready to climb in. Then a man swiftly sprang from the wall opposite and seized him by the shoulder. "What do you want, citizen?" It was a familiar voice, and Paul swung round. Only then did Artioukhin recognise Paul and his hand dropped from his shoulder; his voice lost its harshness, though his eye lit enquiringly on the box. "Where are you off to, mate?"

Paul briefly explained. Another figure appeared from behind the coach. "I'll call the conductor at once."

Paul followed the conductor into the coach, in which were seated a number of smartly dressed persons in travelling clothes. A woman sat at a table with a silk rose-patterned cloth; her back was to the door. When Paul went in she was chatting with a tall officer who was

standing opposite her. The moment Paul entered the conversation stopped.

Paul quickly examined the connections in that compartment, and then, finding no fault, went on with his examination. The fat conductor followed close on his heels; the man was covered with large brass buttons with the one-headed eagle. Paul said: "Everything seems in order here, and the batteries are working. Let's go to the other coach, the fault must be there."

The conductor turned the key in the door and they entered a dark corridor. With the aid of a hand-lamp Paul found the faulty spot where the short circuit had occurred. A few minutes later the first bulb in the corridor was alight, flooding the corridor with a dull, pale light.

Then Paul turned to the man who was shadowing him. He said: "You will have to open this compartment, as I shall have to change the bulbs, they've burned out."

"Then I shall have to call Madame, she has the key," and the conductor, refusing to leave Paul alone, went off and took him along too.

The woman led the way into the compartment, and Paul followed her. The conductor stayed in the doorway, blocking it completely. The woman sat down on one corner of the seat and patted her flaxen hair into place as she watched the fitter work. Then the conductor said in servile fashion: "Madame, will you pardon me a moment, the Colonel wishes some beer." The man found it difficult to bend his bull neck sufficiently. The woman drawled in a coquettish voice: "You may go."

This was all in Polish. The light fell so that Paul could only see the woman's shoulder and arm. They might have been carved in ivory. Her face was in

darkness. Paul worked nimbly with the screw-driver and changed the lamp, and a moment later the compartment was brightly lit. He then had to look at the other lamp, over the seat where the woman was seated. He stopped in front of her and said : " I must check this lamp, too." She said : " Oh, of course, I am in your way." She spoke pure Russian and rose lightly, but remained close beside him. Now he could see everything, the familiar arrow-like line of the eyebrows and the proud lips, and there was no doubt at all but that it was Nelly Leshchinski. The lawyer's daughter could not but notice his surprised glance. But whereas Paul had recognised her, she had not noticed that this fitter—who had changed so much in four years, was her turbulent neighbour. She raised her eyebrows scornfully in answer to his expression of surprise, and went to the door but paused there and tapped impatiently with the heel of her patent-leather slipper. Paul started work on the second lamp. When he had dismantled it, he glanced at the light and then, to his own surprise even, let alone to Nelly Leshchinski's, he asked in Polish : " Is Victor here too ? "

He had not turned round to ask the question, and he could not see her face, but the prolonged silence told of her astonishment. Then she said : " What, do you know my brother ? " " I might say I know him very well. After all, you and I were once neighbours," Paul said, and turned towards her. She started : " Why, you're Paul, the . . ." Paul said : " Yes, the cook's boy." She said : " How you have grown. I can remember you as a little ragamuffin." She looked him up and down, head to heels, with open insolence. Then she said : " And why do you ask about Victor ? As far as I recall, you and he didn't get on together." She spoke

in her singing soprano ; it was amusing to her to while away a moment like that.

The screw-driver worked hard. Paul said : “ There is a little debt unpaid ; when you see Victor tell him I still hope to repay it.”

She understood what debt was meant. She knew all about the Petlioura army incident, but a wish to make fun of him drove her on to say : “ Tell me, is it true that our house has been pillaged, and is to be demolished ? I am sure the summer-house and all the flower-beds are ruined, anyhow.” Paul was annoyingly taciturn. Now he answered : “ The house is now ours, not yours, and it’s not to our interest to destroy it.”

She sneered sarcastically and said : “ Oho ! So I see they’ve pumped you up too. But don’t forget that this is one of the coaches of the Polish Mission, and I am mistress in this compartment, and you’re a servant just the same as you always were. Here you are working to provide light for me, so that I can read comfortably on this divan. Your mother used to wash for us, and you used to carry the water. And here we are meeting again in the same situation.”

She spoke with triumphant malice. Paul went on cleaning up the ends of the cable, and then, looking down at the Polish woman with unconcealed contempt, he said : “ Citizen, I wouldn’t knock in a single rusty nail for you, but since the bourgeoisie have invented diplomats we’re going to keep our end up too, and we don’t cut people’s heads off, nor even speak rudely, like you.”

Her checks flushed crimson. She said : “ What would you have done to me if you had succeeded in taking Warsaw ? Made mincemeat of me too or used me as a mistress ? ”

She stood in the doorway, bending gracefully forward, and her sensitive nostrils—familiar with cocaine—quivered. Then the light over the divan came on, and Paul stretched himself straight. He said: "To whom are you any use? You'll die out without our sabres—cocaine'll do the work. I wouldn't even make a whore of a woman like you."

He took his case of tools in his hands and in two strides was at the door. She drew aside to let him pass. When he had reached the end of the corridor he heard her mutter under her breath in Polish: *Przeklętyj bolszewik!* "You damned bolshe!"

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Some time later Paul was on his way one evening to the library, when he met Kate Zelyonov. She grabbed the sleeve of his Russian tunic firmly, and jokingly barred his way. "Where are you off in such a hurry, politics and learning, eh?" "To the library, my dear," he said, "let me go." He adopted her manner and took her gently by the shoulders and put her to one side on the pavement. She freed herself from his arms and walked along beside him. She said: "Listen, Paul, you can't be learning all the time. . . . Do you know what? Let's go to a party this evening, you and I, there's one at Zina Gladys's. The girls have been trying to get me to bring you for a long time. You know you do nothing but politics. Don't you ever want a little amusement, relaxation? Why, Paul, if you cut to-day's reading your head will be so much the lighter." She tried hard to persuade him.

"What sort of party is this? What will be done there?"

Kate mimicked him mockingly : “ What will be done there ? Well, we shan’t say prayers, but we shall amuse ourselves—and that’s all we shall do. Why, you can play the bayan, can’t you ? And I’ve never once heard you. Now, do this just to please me. Zina’s uncle has a bayan, only he plays so badly. The girls are interested in you and you waste yourself over books. Now where is it written that a YCL-er should not have a bit of enjoyment ? Come with me. Say you’ll come before I get tired of trying to persuade you ; if you don’t I won’t speak to you for a whole month.”

Big-eyed painter Kate was a fine comrade and not at all a bad YCL-er, and Paul did not want to hurt the girl’s feelings ; so, although it was out of his run, and scared him a bit, he said he would go. The apartment of engine-driver Gladysh was crowded and noisy. The adults, in order not to be in the way of the young people, had gone into the other room, and the large room, and the veranda which gave on to the little garden, were crowded with about fifteen boys and girls.

When Kate led Paul through the garden to the veranda a game was already in full swing—the game called “ Feed my pigeons.” In the centre of the veranda two chairs were placed back to back, and on those two chairs, in obedience to the summons of the girl acting as master of ceremonies for the game, a boy and a girl sat. Then the M.C. called out “ Feed your pigeons,” and the pair had to bend back their heads in front of the whole crowd till they kissed on the lips. Then they played forfeits and postman’s knock, and each game they played demanded kisses ; and what was more, in postman’s knock, in order to escape from general supervision, the kissing had to be done not on the veranda in

the light, but in the inner room, with the light out. And for those who were not satisfied by those games, there was a pack of cards on a round table in the corner, and the cards were called "Flower flirtation." The girl next to Paul, who was called Moura, and was about sixteen years old, made sly eyes at him and handed him a card and said softly: "Violets." Some years earlier Paul had observed parties like this one, and though he had not taken part in them he had considered they were quite normal things. But now that he had broken for ever with the petty-bourgeois life of a tiny country town, the party seemed freakish and rather ridiculous. But that did not help—there it was, lying in his hand—a "flirtation card," and against the picture of violets he read: "I like you very much."

Paul looked at the girl. She met his eyes without flinching in the least. He said: "Why?"

The question was rather blunt, but Moura had her answer all ready, and she said "Roses" and gave him a second card.

Opposite the roses he read: "You are my ideal." He turned to the girl and, trying to speak more gently, asked: "Why ever do you waste your time on this rot?"

Moura was very put out and did not quite know what to do. Her lips crinkled in a spoilt way and she said: "Don't you like me telling you?"

Paul did not answer her question. He suddenly wanted to know exactly to whom he was talking, and so he produced question after question, which the girl gladly answered. In a few minutes he knew that she was going to the intermediate school, and that her father was a rolling-stock examiner. He also learned that she knew him and had long wanted to meet him.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Moura Volyntzev."

"Your brother is secretary of the yard cell?"

"He is."

Paul now knew to whom he was talking. Volyntzev was one of the most active YCL-ers of the district, but clearly he was not giving much attention to his sister, and there she was growing up into a humdrum little petty-bourgeois miss. This last year she had begun going to parties at her friends'. She had seen Paul a number of times at her brother's. And now she felt that this Paul did not approve of her conduct, and when she was called on to "feed the pigeons," and she caught sight of Paul's ironic smile, she refused point-blank.

They stayed on a little while longer, while Moura told him all about herself, and then Kate Zelyonov came up to Paul and said: "If we bring the bayan, you will play, won't you?" And then she screwed her eyes up roguishly and said: "So you've made each other's acquaintance, eh?"

Paul made Kate sit down beside him and, taking advantage of the laughter and chatter all round, said: "I'm not going to play, Moura and I are just going." "Oho! Bored? Is that it?" Kate drawled very significantly. "Yes," he said, "I can't stand it. Tell me; are there any other YCL-ers here besides you and me? Or are we the only ones caught in the pigeon-fancying business?"

To calm him Kate said: "They've already finished silly games, we're just going to start dancing." But Paul got up and said: "Right, my girl, dance away, but Volyntzev and I will be going, all the same."

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One night Okounev hovered about a long time by Paul's bed, evidently nervous about something, and then sat on the end of the bed and put his hand on the book Paul was reading. "I say, Paul, I've got something I shall have to tell you. In one way it's all nonsense, and in another quite the contrary. There was a sort of misunderstanding between Talia Lagoutin and me. You see, I used to think a lot of her once. . . ." He scratched his head awkwardly, and then, seeing his friend did not laugh, he gained courage. "Then Talia . . . well, so to speak . . . in other words . . . well, I won't bore you with it all, it's obvious enough, I suppose. Yesterday we made up our minds to try our luck, to try how pairing up will fit. I'm twenty-two, we're both old enough to vote. I want to build my life with Talia on a basis of equality. What have you got to say about it?"

Paul thought a bit. Then he said: "What can I say, Nick? You're both friends of mine, both out of the same stock. Other things in common, too, and Talia is a really fine girl. . . . I think it's all clear."

The following day Paul removed his things to the lads' hostel in the yards, and a few days later Anna Borchardt held a comradesly evening with refreshments—a Communist Party in honour of the comradesly union of Talia and Nicholas Okounev. It was an evening of memories and readings from the more exciting books they had. There was a great deal of fine chorus singing. Army songs carried far away through the evening air, and later Kate Zelyonov and Moura Volyntzev brought the bayan, and the beating of the deep bass strings and the silver trickle of its harmonies filled the room. That evening Paul played unusually well, and when, to everybody's amazement, lanky Pankratov started dancing,

Paul forgot himself, and the accordion obtained new strength and burst into a music of fire. The instrument spoke of past days, of fiery years and then of the comradeship of to-day, of the struggle and the joy they were living through. And when the accordion was handed to Volyntzev and he began playing a nimble dancing tune, who should start dancing like a whirlwind but electrician Paul. In a crazy southern dance Paul danced for the third and last time in his life.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE frontier-line consists of two posts, one against the other, silent and hostile, personifications of two worlds. One is well planed and well polished, and painted like a police-box, in black and white stripes. At its top is a single-headed bird of prey firmly fastened by strong bolts. The bird's wings are spread, and it seems to be gripping the striped post with its claws, while it stares malevolently—this one-headed carrion-bird—at the metal shield facing it, with its hooked beak reaching out and ready. Six paces away is the other post. This one is deeply set in the ground, a massive round oaken post, and on it is a metal shield bearing the hammer and sickle. Between the two worlds there is a gulf, although the posts are set in the level plain. It is impossible to cross those six paces unless you wish to risk your life.

This is the frontier. From the Black Sea, thousands of kilometres to the far north, to the Arctic Ocean, reaches the motionless chain of those silent sentries of the Soviet Socialist Republics, bearing the grand emblem of labour on iron shields.

The little town of Berezdov is miles from anywhere. Ten kilometres from Berezdov is the frontier, opposite the tiny Polish town Korec. From the town of Slavout to the town of Anapolié extended the district of the N battalion of Frontier Guards.

The chain of frontier posts ran over the snowy plains, plunging through forest clearings, diving into ravines and scrambling out again, standing out as landmarks on upland rises, and then reached the river, and from the high river bank they gazed out over the snow-covered plains of the foreign land.

A huge body in a heroic helmet detached itself from the post with the hammer and sickle and strode heavily and slowly along his beat. It was bitterly cold and the snow crunched under his felt boots. He was clad in a grey military coat with green facings and felt high-boots. Over his coat was draped a huge sheepskin cloak with tremendous collar ; his head was knit warmly in the cloth helmet. On his hands were fur gloves, the fingers all in one piece. The sheepskin cloak reached to his heels, and it was warm under it, even in a fierce blizzard. Over the sheepskin was the bandolier of his rifle. His cloak, falling in a stiff cylinder round him, scraped the snow as he went up and down his sentry path, smoking a roughly twisted cigarette. On this Soviet frontier, in the open plains, the sentries stand one kilometre from each other, so as to be able to keep each other in view.

Then towards the Red Army guard, down his own sentry path, came the Polish sentry on the other side. He was wearing clumsy soldier's boots, grey-green uniform and breeches, and on top a black overcoat with two rows of glittering buttons. On his cap was a white eagle, on his shoulder straps white eagles, on the tabs of of his collar—eagles. But those eagles did not make him any less sensitive to the cold, and the freezing air pierced him to the bone. He rubbed his numbed ears and clicked his heels together as he walked. His hands, in thin gloves, were stiff with cold. Not for one minute could the

Polish sentry keep still while on duty, for if he did the cold would grip his joints at once ; but he kept moving all the time and trotted every now and then. Then the two sentries drew level one with the other and the Pole turned back and went parallel to the Soviet sentry, on his side of the frontier.

It is forbidden to talk on the frontier, but when all around you is a waste and the only human beings are a kilometre away from you, who is to know whether the two men are walking in silence or breaking international law ?

The Pole wanted to smoke, but he had forgotten his matches back in barracks, and the wind was blowing from the Soviet side and most tantalisingly carrying across the smell of the Soviet sentry's smoke. The Pole stopped rubbing his frosted ear and glanced behind him : there might be a mounted patrol round inspecting, with a sergeant or an officer, and it might suddenly appear out of a hollow. But all around was deserted. The snow glittered dazzlingly in the sun. There was not one snowflake falling.

The first to break the sanctity of the law was the Pole. He slung his French repeating rifle, with a bayonet like a sword, back on his shoulder, and with difficulty—his fingers so stiff with cold—drew a packet of cheap cigarettes from his overcoat pocket, and said in Polish : “ Comrade, throw me a match over, please.”

The Soviet sentry heard this, but field orders on frontier service prohibit a soldier entering into conversation with anyone at all of the frontier folk ; also, he did not quite understand what was said. So he went on his beat, treading stoutly in his warm soft felt boots on the crunching snow. Then the Pole said—this time in Russian—

“Comrade Bolshevik, throw me a box of matches over, just to get a light.”

The Soviet sentry looked hard at his neighbour over the frontier. He could see plainly that the cold had got the “Polony” through to the marrow. And though he was a damned bourgeois soldier, after all his was a rotten life. Sending a fellow out in cold like that in a miserable little cloth overcoat, making him dance about like a performing animal and then nothing to light up with—no go, that. And so, without bothering to turn round to see if anyone might be looking, he threw across a box of matches.

The Pole caught the box and then broke match after match till at last he got a light—his numbed hands were clumsy. The box crossed the frontier back again in the same way, and then the Soviet sentry forgot himself and broke the rule—he said: “Keep it, I’ve got some others.” But from the Polish side came the answer: “No, thank you, I should get two years for having that little box in my possession.”

The Soviet sentry examined the box. There was an aeroplane on it, and in place of a propeller the aeroplane had a powerful fist, and the cigarettes, he saw, were the “Ultimatum” brand. “Yes,” he said to himself, “he’s right, hardly the sort for them.”

The Polish sentry continued to patrol parallel to the Soviet sentry—he found it lonely in the deserted plains.

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The saddles creaked rhythmically, the trot of the horses was soothingly even. The dark two-year-old had a hoary rime on the hair round his nostrils, and his breath was a cloud of white vapour melting in the air. The Battalion Commander’s dapple mare stepped gracefully

and played with her bridle, her slender neck taut. Both horsemen were wearing grey overcoats belted at the waist, and three red squares on the sleeves of each, but Battalion Commander Gavrilov's sleeves had green tabs, and the other's—red. Gavrilov was the officer in charge of the battalion stretched over seventy kilometres—his "beat." His companion was a visitor from Berezdov, Korchagin, Military Commissar to a battalion of territorials.

There had been a fall of snow during the night, and it was downy and soft, untouched by hoof or human foot. The two horsemen came out of the strip of wood and trotted over the open plain. About forty paces to the side were another pair of posts. Then Gavrilov reined in suddenly. Paul turned his horse round to find out the cause of the sudden stop. Gavrilov was leaning out of his saddle attentively examining a peculiar series of tracks in the snow, just as if somebody had made a tracing there with a toothed wheel. Some cunning little beast had gone that way, treading with each foot following in the same hole as the others, and endeavouring to conceal the tracks by making fantastic loops. It was difficult to tell where they came from. But it was not those animal tracks that had made the Commander rein in. Two paces away from those tracks were others, now powdered over with snow. Tracks of a man. The man had not tried to confuse his tracks. He had made straight for the woods, and the tracks showed clearly that he had come from Poland. The Battalion Commander rode on. The track led him to the sentry's path. A dozen or so paces away, on the Polish side, the footsteps were visible.

The Battalion Commander grunted: "Somebody's come over during the night. Once again they've got

through the third platoon ; there's not a word in the morning report. Damnation to them !” There were grey hairs in Gavrilov's moustache, and the hoar, too, from his own breath had silvered them, and they hung down sternly over his lips.

Two human figures were making their way towards the horsemen. One was small and dark, with the blade of his French bayonet glistening in the sun, and the other was huge, in a tanned sheepskin cloak. The dappled mare felt the grip of its rider's knees and put on speed and the two were soon up to the two men. The Soviet sentry pulled the bandolier of his rifle tight and spat out the cigarette stump on to the snow.

“How do you do, comrade? What's the news on your beat?” And the Commander held out his hand to the sentry—almost without bending down—the man was so tall. The heroic figure quickly stripped the glove from his hand, and the Commander shook hands with him.

From a distance the Pole watched. Two Red officers—and he knew that the three squares on their arms meant they were of the rank of major—and they greeted ordinary rankers as if they were friends ! For an instant he saw himself trying to shake hands with his own Major Zakrzewski, and the mere thought was so unseemly that it made him look round uneasily.

The Soviet sentry reported : “I have just taken over, Comrade Combatt.”

“Seen the tracks over there?”

“No, I haven't yet.”

“Who was on here during the night, two to six of the morning?”

“Sourotenko, Comrade Combatt.”

“Right. Keep your eyes open.”

And as he was riding away, he warned the sentry sternly : “As little parading up and down with those Poles as possible !” And when the horses were already trotting down the broad road leading from the frontier to Berezdov, the Battalion Commander—or Combatt—told Paul : “You need your eyes all the time on this frontier business. Restless work. Not so easy to get across by day, but it’s keep your ears pricked by night. However wide awake you may be you’ll miss something. Judge for yourself, Comrade Korchagin. In my sector the frontier goes right through the heart of four villages. That makes it very difficult. However you put your men, whenever there’s a wedding or other festivity on, the whole family gathers in spite of the cordon. Understandable, too—the cottages aren’t more than a stone’s-throw one from the other on the frontier line, and an old hen could wade the river. We can’t prevent a certain amount of smuggling either. Though nothing more than trifles. An old woman brings in a couple of bottles of Polish 90°-proof Zubrowka ; but still there are a good number of large-scale smugglers with men paid large money. Do you know what the Poles are doing ? They’ve begun opening large general stores in all the frontier villages—you can get whatever you want in them. And that, of course, is not done for the poverty-stricken peasants.”

Paul heard the Battalion Commander with interest. Frontier life was uninterrupted intelligence service. He said : “Tell me this, Comrade Gavrilov, does this business never go farther than a waggon-load of smuggled goods ?”

The Battalion Commander answered dourly : “That’s the bother of it. . . .”

Berezdov is quite a tiny town, one of those more dead than alive country places—formerly in the area where Jews were allowed to settle. It consists of some three hundred houses huddled together. There is a huge market-place with a couple of dozen miserable little shops ; the market-place itself is dirty with horse-droppings. All round the town peasant homesteads cluster. In the Jewish part, on the way to the slaughter-house, is an old synagogue, a dismal and depressing building.

There came a day when the Rabbi saw a new sign posted up on the gateway into the priest's house : "*Ukraine Young Communist League : Berezdov District Committee.*" One thing was clear—that sign could bode no good. He went on his way, deep in thought, and only observed a small notice on the door of his synagogue when he came right up to it. It read : "An open meeting of working-class youth is called for this evening in the Club. The Chairman of the Executive Committee, Comrade Lissitzyn, and the acting secretary, Comrade Korchagin, will speak. There will be a concert after the meeting given by the pupils of the nine-year-course schools." The Rabbi tore down the notice in fury. "So it's begun," he said to himself.

The squat little church of Berezdov was surrounded by a large garden, in the middle of which stood the priest's house. The rooms of the house were once the priest and his wife had lived in stagnant boredom and mutual detestation were as rotten and dilapidated as the lives of their inmates had been. In the main drawing-room, in which the reverend occupiers formerly had received only on great feast days, there was now a crowd every day, as the house had become the office of the Berezdov Party Committee. One little room on the right of the hall,

had a chalk notice on the door : " District YCL." Here Paul now spent part of his time, as he was combining the work of secretary of the newly formed District YCL with his work as Military Commissar to the second battalion of the territorials preparing for Red Army training.

Eight months had gone by since that comradely evening at Anna Borchardt's and yet it seemed but yesterday. Paul put a pile of papers to one side and then leant back and lost himself in thought. It was silent in the house—it was late at night, and the offices were empty. Trophimov, secretary of the District Party Committee, had just gone—the last to leave—and now Paul was alone. The window was curtained with the fantastic patterns of frost. There was an oil lamp on the table. The stove was hot. And Paul in thought went over recent events. In August the shops YCL group had sent him with a repair train to Ekaterinoslav as youth organiser, and till late autumn one hundred and fifty men had gone from station to station, repairing the ravages of intervention—the broken and burned rolling-stock.

Their route had taken them from Sinelnikov to Polog, and there, in the former kingdom of the brigand Makhno, there had been traces of destruction and pillage at every step. At Goulyai-Polié they had spent a week repairing the stone building of the water-pumping plant and bolting patches on the water cistern, which had been badly damaged by dynamite. Paul was an electrical fitter, unskilled in turner's work, but many a thousand nuts did spanners tighten in his hands. Then, in late autumn, the train came back to the home shops, and the shops received their hundred and fifty members back again.

At the onset of winter the timber rafts being floated

down the river jammed ; the river was in spate from the autumn rains and the waters had broken up the rafts and valuable timber was being lost. Again Solomenka sent its corps out to save the timber. Paul's longing not to be out of things made him hide a bad chill from his comrades, and when, a week later, the mountains of piled logs were growing high on the shore, the icy water and the chill autumn air awakened the enemy slumbering in his blood, and fever bore him down. For a fortnight he was racked by rheumatic fever, and when he came back from hospital he could only manage to work sitting at his vice. The master-workman in charge shook his head sadly. A few days later an unprejudiced commission declared Paul unfit, and he was discharged and awarded a pension. He refused the pension with indignation.

It was with a heavy heart that he had left his beloved shops. He had to walk with a stick ; every movement was agonisingly painful. His mother had written many times asking him to pay her a visit. Now he recalled the old lady, and what she had said when they last parted : " I only see you when you are damaged."

He went to the Provincial Party Committee and obtained two certificates rolled in a tube—one from the YCL and one from the Party—and without bidding more than one or two people farewell—so as not to reawaken the hurt in him—he set out to see his mother. For a fortnight she steamed and massaged his swollen legs, and in a month he could manage without a stick. Again there was delight in his heart, and dusk turned to daybreak. One day a train brought him to the central offices of the province, and three days later the organisational department handed him a document which assigned him to the provincial military commissariat for political work and general

supervision over territorial training units. A week later he was at Berezdov, that snow-engulfed little town, as Military Commissar to the second battalion. The regional committee of the YCL had set him the task of linking up the scattered YCL branches and creating an organisation in the new district. Thus his life brought ever new things.

It was hot outside. A branch of cherry tree protruded into the window of the office of the Chairman of the Executive Committee, and the sun set fire to the gilded cross on the steeple of the Roman Catholic church opposite the Executive Committee offices. In the patch of garden under the window there were tender, downy, tiny little goslings, as green as the grass round them, searching for food ; they belonged to the office caretaker's wife.

Incendiarism and the rattle of rifle fire had receded into the past. Now Nikolai Lissitzyn was appointed to the frontier zone. Life flowed quietly. Till late at night he pored over harvest reports, but the telegram he had just received revived old memories. The curt telegraphic language said : "*Absolutely confidential : Lissitzyn chairman execom Berezdov. Frontier observed Polish activity smuggle large band possibly terrorise frontier region. Take measures safeguard. Advisable transfer valuables finance regional centre retain no taxation monies office.*"

From his window Lissitzyn could see everybody who entered the offices. He saw Paul Korchagin. Then a moment later there was a knock at the door. "Sit down, let's talk it over." He shook Paul's hand ; for an hour they were closeted together. When Paul left it was

past midday, and Lissitzyn's little sister Nioura came running out of the garden. Paul used to call her Anioutka. She was a shy little girl, abnormally solemn for her years. She always smiled delightedly when she saw Paul, and this time after bidding him how-do-you-do in a shy childish way she tossed the hair back from her forehead and said: "Is Nick alone? Maria Mikhailovna's been wanting him for dinner ever so long." Paul said: "Run along, Anioutka, there's nobody else there."

The next day, long before daybreak, three waggons with well-fed horses drew up at the offices. The men with them were conversing in low tones. Then a number of sealed sacks were brought out of the finance department and loaded on a waggon, and a few minutes later the wheels could be heard rumbling away. The waggon was surrounded by a detachment of armed guards under Paul. They made the forty kilometres to the regional centre—twenty-five kilometres being through forest—in safety, and the papers and money were deposited in the safe of the financial department there. But a few days later a horseman galloped in from the frontier, and he and his foam-flecked horse made the idlers of Berezdov gape. At the gates of the Executive Committee offices the horseman dismounted heavily and gathered up his sabre and ran clanking up the steps in his heavy boots. Lissitzyn frowned and took the letter the rider had brought and signed for it on the envelope. Then, without giving his horse time to breathe, the cavalryman leapt into the saddle and set off back at once at the canter.

Only the Chairman of the Executive Committee knew the contents of that letter, but the comfortable citizens of the little town of Berezdov had good noses. Two out of three of the petty traders were definitely petty smugglers

and smuggling is a trade which develops a sort of instinct for danger.

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The sun climbed towards the zenith. The heat penetrated the deepest-set corners and everything living had retired under some sort of roof: even the dogs were under the penthouses and lay there, lazy and drowsy from the heat. It might have seemed that all living things had left the village with the exception of a hog blissfully grunting in the muddy pool beside the well.

Paul untied his horse and, biting his lip from the pain in his knee, mounted. The school-teacher was standing on the steps of the school, shielding her eyes with her hand from the sun. She smiled: "Till we meet again, Comrade Commissar." The horse pawed the ground impatiently and stretched its neck against the bridle. Paul said: "Good-bye, Comrade Rakitin. So that's fixed; the first lesson to-morrow."

The horse felt the bridle slacken and set off immediately at a trot. At that very moment wild howls reached Paul's ears. It was a woman shrieking, just as village women in those parts shriek when there is a house on fire. The harsh bridle swung Paul's horse sharply round and he saw a young peasant woman running in from the outskirts of the village. Rakitin went into the road and stopped her; and people appeared on doorsteps, mainly the old folk, the young and strong were all out in the fields. "Oh, good people, what awful things they are doing! You don't know, oh, you don't know!"

When Paul's horse had carried him to the two women there was already a crowd of people round the young peasant, plucking at the sleeve of her white shirt and

showering frightened questions on her, but it was impossible to make any sense out of her muddled cries. "They've killed him! They are fighting to death," was all she kept crying out. Then an old fellow with a curly beard came hopping awkwardly up, holding up his linen drawers with one hand as he went. He shouted: "Don't bellow so! Like a mad woman! Where, why, how? For God's sake stop that shrieking; oh, speak up, damn you!" Then the woman cried: "Our village and Poddoubtzi . . . fighting . . . over the field boundaries. The Poddoubtzi men are murdering our folk."

Now they knew how bad things were, and the women in the street began to cry and the old men to moan. The news flashed round the village, into every courtyard: "The Poddoubtzi crowd are murdering our folk with scythes." And everybody who could walk was pouring out of the houses armed with pitchforks or axes or simply staves, and making for the fields where a sanguinary conflict was being waged—the quarrel over the boundaries which came up every year.

Paul lashed his black horse so fiercely that it broke into a gallop at once and, spurred on by his cries as he rode to overtake the racing peasants, it leapt ahead at a wild pace. It laid its ears back to its head and galloped faster and faster. The windmill on the hill spread out its sails like arms as if to bar its way. From the windmill down to the right were the low meadows by the river. To the left stretched endless rolling country under rye. The wind ran over the sea of rye as if stroking it. It was quiet there and unbearably hot. The cries sounded from afar-off, from down where the river was like a silvery snake basking in the sun.

The horse galloped down the slope at an insane pace.

Paul knew that if it caught its foot it was the end of them both. But it was impossible now to stop the animal, so he lay close to its neck and let the wind whistle past his ears. They came galloping out on to the meadows at the same mad pace. A crowd of men were fighting there with unreasoning animal ferocity. A tough, tanned peasant had an opponent on the ground and was trampling him with his boots, trying hard to kick him in the wind. Paul bore down on that human scrimmage with all the weight of his horse and scattered the fighters ; then, before they could collect themselves, he had swung his horse fiercely round and was riding down again on the savage animals, sensing that the only way to separate that bleeding human mass was to make use of the same kind of savagery and work on their fear. He yelled with ferocity : “ Get apart, you swine ! I’ll shoot you all down, you blasted brigands ! ” And he drew his Mauser and fired just over a face distorted by passion. Then followed a leap of the horse and a shot, and some of the fighting peasants dropped their sickles and ran away. And in that way, prancing round the meadow on his horse and shooting all the time, Military Commissar Paul succeeded in separating them. The men scattered in all directions, trying now to escape from answering to the law for what they had done, and from that armed man, terrible in his fury, who had sprung from the blue.

Shortly after that the regional court came to Poddoubtzy, and by dint of questioning of witnesses the people’s judge strove a long time to discover the ringleaders. No lives had been lost in the fight ; those wounded recovered. The judge tried diligently and most patiently to explain to the sullen peasants standing in front of him exactly how savage and impossible their fight was. Then

one of them said : " It's all the fault of the boundaries, Comrade Judge, our boundaries got mixed. We fight over those boundaries every year." They could not all keep silent.

A week later a group of surveyors were going through the hayfields staking out the disputed boundaries. The elderly surveyor, streaming with sweat from the heat and much walking, rolled up his tape and said to Paul : " Thirty years it is I've been on this job. And these boundaries everywhere are the cause of strife. Just look at the line dividing these meadows, incredible ! A drunkard would walk straighter. And the arable land ? A strip three paces wide—one encroaches on another—sorting them out is enough to drive you crazy. And then every year splitting up more and more into smaller patches—a son separates from his father—splits their strip in two. I assure you that after another twenty years these fields will be nothing but boundaries and there'll be nowhere to sow at all. Why, as it is to-day there is ten per cent of the area occupied by boundaries."

Paul smiled and said : " Comrade Surveyor, in twenty years there won't be any land at all lying idle as boundary strips."

The old man smiled condescendingly at the younger. " You are thinking of a Communist society, I take it. Now come, you must know that is a thing of the very distant future."

" Have you heard about the Boudanov collective farm ? "

" Oh, that's what you're getting at."

" It is."

" I've seen the farm . . . but that's an exception, Comrade Korchagin."

The surveyor's men went on working, two youths hammering in pegs. And on either side stood a group of peasants who did not take their eyes off the work, to ensure that the pegs did not depart an inch from the former boundary, scarce traceable by the half-rotted posts sticking out of the grass.

The waggoner slashed at his hack and then turned round to his passengers—he was a long-tongued fellow—and said: “You’ve never seen anything like the way these Young Communist groups have sprung up about here; something quite new. And you might say the ringleader of it all is the teacher woman, Rakitin they call her, perhaps you know her. She’s only a chit of a girl, but she’s a regular mischief-maker. She’s stirring up all the women in the village, arranging meetings and having parties and there’s no peace from the woman. If you get a bit heated and box your wife’s ears—and you can’t get on without that—in the old days she’d rub her cheek and shut up, but now you can’t shut them up, even before you touch them. They start talking about taking you before the popular court and those that are a bit younger talk of divorce and quote all the laws to you. As for my old woman, a real quiet old woman she’s always been, now she’s a delegate. That’s being a sort of an elder, as you might say, a leading woman, and they come to see her from all over the village. When she started that, I thought of taking the reins and giving her a good thrashing, but in the end I decided to let well alone. Damnation to them all. She’s a good wife to me as far as managing the house goes and in every other way too.”

He scratched his hairy chest, bared by the opening of

his linen shirt, and gave the hack a perfunctory cut under the belly. The passengers were Razvalikhin and Lida Polievkyh. They both had business at Poddoubtzy—Lida was to confer with the women delegates to the Soviet, and Razvalikhin had organising work to do with the local cell. Lida whimsically asked the old waggoner : “ Don’t you like the YCL-ers then ? ”

He plucked at his sparse little beard and thought a bit and then said : “ No, not exactly. Youth is the time for playing about. Play-acting or anything like that. I like a good lark myself. When it all started we thought the lads were playing a game, but it’s turned out different. I’m told they’re severe about drinking, rowdyism, and so on. They’re more interested in drilling. Only they’ve gone a bit too far, they want to turn the church into a clubroom. That sort of thing won’t do at all, the older folk are very upset and against them for it. Otherwise what ? I’ll tell you—what’s wrong is that they won’t take in any but the down-and-outs of the village, the sort that go labouring for hire, or are no good at their farming ; they won’t take in the sons of decent families.”

The waggonette descended the hill and drove up to the village school. The caretaker put the travellers up and slept in the loft herself. Lida and Razvalikhin had just arrived from a long-drawn-out meeting. It was dark in the hut. Lida took off her boots, climbed on to the pallet bed and was asleep in a second. She was awakened by the harsh touch of Razvalikhin’s hands—there could be no doubt about his intentions. She cried : “ What are you after ? ” He said : “ Hush, Lida, what’re you making a noise about . . . can’t you see it’s a bit dull lying there alone, damn it all ! Can’t you think of anything more amusing than snoring ? ”

She said : " Take your hands away at once and get off my bed, damn you ! " and gave him a sharp push. She had never been able to bear Razvalikhin's sensual smirks, and now she had a fierce desire to say something scornful and insulting to him, but sleep overcame her and her eyes closed again.

" What're you playing at ? " he said. " I never heard of such ridiculous behaviour. Or perhaps you are straight out of an academy for ' well-born maidens ' ? . . . You don't mean to say I believe you ? Don't be such a fool, Lida. If you're really up-to-date, you should first satisfy my needs and then sleep as much as you like."

He even thought there was no need to waste words. He simply sat down again on the edge of her bed and put his hand on her shoulder as if he had a right to demand what he wanted. She was awake in an instant and cried : " Go to hell ! " Then : " Upon my word, I'll tell Korchagin to-morrow."

Then Razvalikhin seized her arm and whispered—exasperated : " A lot I care about your Korchagin. And don't you blab, I'll have you whatever you say."

There was a brief struggle between them, and then in the darkness rang out one hard slap, then another and another . . . and Razvalikhin went flying. In the darkness Lida found the door, pushed it open and ran outside. There she stood in the moonlight, beside herself with indignation, while Razvalikhin called savagely : " Come inside now, you fool ! "

He carried his bedding to a penthouse and spent the remainder of the night outside, while Lida put the door on the bolt and rolled herself into a ball on the bed.

The next morning, on the way home, Razvalikhin sat on the driver's seat and smoked cigarette after cigarette.

He was thinking : “ Damn and blast it, this pure creature is quite capable of blabbing to Korchagin. The blasted little fool. If only she looked pretty ; as it is, it’s too damn foolish. I must make peace with her at all costs, or there’ll be the devil to pay. Anyway, Korchagin’s got his knife into me.” So he shifted back and sat beside Lida, and pretended to be ashamed of himself, his eyes almost sad ; he was full of some complicated explanation of his conduct, and full of repentance. He got his way too ; as they drew into the town Lida promised not to tell anyone what had taken place.

One after another YCL groups sprang up in the frontier villages, and the district party YCL gave a great deal of attention to those first shoots of the Communist movement. Paul and Lida Polievkyh spent whole days in those villages. Razvalikhin was one of those who did not like village work ; he could not get on with the village boys, could not get their confidence and really did more harm than good. But Paul and Lida Polievkyh found it quite a simple, natural thing. Lida would get the village girls round her and make friends with a number of them and never lose contact with them afterwards ; she was able to interest them in the life and work of the YCL. And Paul was known to all the young folk of the district. The second battalion—Paul’s battalion—counted one thousand six hundred lads preparing for military service.

Never before had an accordion played such a great part in propaganda work as at those village meetings out of doors. His accordion made Paul “one of us,” and the path of more than one of those Ukrainian village lads started from that melodious enchantment, by turns passionate and blood-stirring in a lively

march, and tender and caressing in the sad cadences of Ukrainian songs. They listened both to the accordion and to the man who played it—railway shop-worker, now military commissar and secretary of the YCL. His songs and the other things he had to say to them were knit into a harmonious whole in their minds ; new songs were to be heard in the villages and their cottages held new books—not only psalters and dream-interpretations.

Things began to get hot for the smugglers ; they had to keep a look-out not only for the frontier guards, for the Soviet Government now had young friends and earnest assistants. Indeed, sometimes the young fellows tried to outdo the frontier guards in their zeal, and Paul had to intervene on their behalf. For example, one day Grishoutka Khorovodko, the blue-eyed secretary of the Poddoubtzy cell, a quick-tempered lad, and a hardened anti-religious debater, obtained news, through his own channels, that smuggled goods were one night to be brought to the local miller. He got his whole cell into action and, armed with their instructional rifle and two bayonets, the lads cautiously encircled the mill on the appointed night to wait for their prey. The frontier outpost of the GPU also heard of the smuggling operation, and brought out its men. During the night the two parties came into conflict, and it was only owing to the steadiness of the frontier guards that the YCL-ers were not all shot down in the fight which ensued. The GPU men contented themselves with disarming them and taking them three miles away to the next village and locking them up.

When this happened Paul was with Gavrilov. The next morning the Battalion Commander told him the report which had just come in, and Paul galloped off to

get his lads out. The officer of the GPU laughed and told Paul all that had happened. He said : " This is what we'll do, Comrade Korchagin. They're fine lads, we won't punish them, but to keep them from doing our work in future ; you give them a bit of a scare."

The sentry opened the door of the barn and eleven lads got up from the earth floor and stood shifting from one foot to the other in embarrassment. The GPU man made a hopeless gesture. " Just look at them. A fine mess they've made of things. Now I shall have to send them to the centre for trial."

Then Grishoutka flared up. " What mess have we made, Comrade Sakharov ? We only wanted to do what we could for the Soviet Government. We'd had our eyes on that stoat a long time, and you've locked us up as if we were brigands." He turned his back indignantly on them. Then, after some serious talk during which Paul and Sakharov had much ado to keep a straight face, they relented. Sakharov turned to Paul and said : " If you will take responsibility for them and give us an undertaking that they will do no more frontier work, but help in some other field, I'll consider the matter at an end." Paul said : " Fine. I'll answer for them, and I hope they won't let me down again."

The cell returned to Poddoubtzy singing all the way. The incident was kept quiet in the village. But the miller was caught soon after, and by the proper forces.

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Echoes of events in Germany reached the district ; the guns at the Hamburg barricades reverberated to that frontier region, and some of the hotheads grew restless ; the newspapers were eagerly read, and Octoberish winds

were blowing from the west. There was a stream of applications to the district YCL for admission to the Red Army as volunteers, and Paul had much ado to deal with deputations from various YCL cells, and to explain to them that the Soviet Union pursued a policy of peace, and had no intention whatever of going to war with any one of the neighbouring countries.

All this had little effect, for every Sunday YCL-ers from all the cells foregathered in Berezdov, and there were district meetings in the spacious presbytery garden. One midday the Poddoubtzy YCL cell marched in military order into the large courtyard of the District Party Committee's premises. Paul saw it from his window and went out at once. Eleven lads, under the leadership of Khorovodko, booted in high boots and with huge bags on their backs, had halted at the entrance. Paul was dumbfounded. "What's this all about, Grisha?" he asked.

But Khorovodko, instead of answering, winked at him and they went indoors. When Lida, Razvalikhin and two others were present Khorovodko shut the door, knit his colourless brows fiercely and said: "Comrades, I am carrying out a test mobilisation. I announced to my fellows to-day that a telegram had come from the district, of course highly confidential, to the effect that war with the German bourgeoisie is going to begin and it will soon begin with the Polish bourgeoisie too. And, so I said, there's orders from Moscow for all YCL-ers to go to the front, and those who are afraid can say so and they will be left at home. I ordered them not to say a word to anyone about the war, but each to furnish himself with a large loaf of bread and a piece of bacon, or if they'd no bacon, some garlic or onions, and assemble in secret in

half an hour outside the village, and then, I said, we'll be off to the district, and thence to the provincial centre, where we'll get our arms. They had all sorts of questions, of course, but I said: 'No questions, do as you're told.' I said anyone who refused should write his own refusal. Volunteer work, I said. So they dispersed and I was all on tenterhooks, afraid that perhaps nobody at all would turn up. There would be nothing for it then but for me to disband the cell and get a transfer somewhere else.

"So there I sat outside the village and waited and watched. Then first one, then another, came. Some of them had been crying, I could see, but were trying to hide it. Every man of them, the ten of them, have come, not one case of desertion. So you see what our Poddoubtzy cell is made of!" He ended proudly, and thumped his chest with his fist. And when Polievkyh began to dress him down for it, he just gaped at her in amazement. "What's that you're telling me? But I tell you this has been a first-rate test. To make it more real still I was going to take them to the centre, but they're a bit tired, so they may as well go home now. Only, Comrade Korchagin, you must make them a suitable speech. Otherwise it wouldn't do at all. . . . Tell them something about the mobilisation being put off, but give them full due for their heroic answer to the call."

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This year the October celebrations at the frontier were carried through with greater enthusiasm than ever before. Paul was elected Chairman of the October Committee of the frontier villages. There was first a meeting at Poddoubtzy, attended by five thousand men and women from three neighbouring villages, and

then, in a column a quarter of a mile long, with the battalion of the militia and a brass band in front, and with huge red banners, they marched from Poddoubtzy to the frontier. Maintaining strictest order, the column began its parade by passing down the actual frontier, ending up at the villages split in two between Poland and the USSR.

The Poles on the frontier had never before seen such a sight. At the head of the parade rode Battalion Commanders Gavrilov and Paul, immediately behind them was the thundering brass band, and then the rustle of banners and the marchers singing song after song. The village youth were dressed in their gay best, and there was the silvery ripple of the girls' laughing voices and the solemn faces of the grown men and women and the proud bearing of the old men. As far as the eye could see came the stream of human figures; one shore of that stream was the frontier, but there was not one foot stepped over the line, off Soviet soil. Paul allowed the stream of marchers to get ahead.

The Soviet sentries greeted the procession with a glad smile; the Polish men with dismay and shamefaced mien. Although the Polish command had been officially informed of this procession along the frontier in good time, there was some stir there. Detachments of field gendarmery were careering about and there were five times as many sentries as usual, with reserves hidden in hollows, ready for any emergency. But the procession went by on its own territory, noisy and full of joy, filling the air with its songs.

On a rise of ground stood a Polish sentry. The Soviet folk marched steadily towards him. The first sounds of the march reached the man. He lowered his rifle from

his shoulder and put butt to his feet and saluted, and Paul clearly heard his low voice cry: "Hurrah for the Commune!" Paul knew from the man's eyes that it was he who had spoken. A comrade! Under his Polish army coat beat a heart in sympathy with the marching people, and Paul answered softly in Polish: "Hail, comrade!" They came to another Polish sentry, with a grizzled moustache. Under the nickled edge of the peak of his cap his motionless, colourless eyes showed. Paul was still under the influence of what he had heard from the previous one, and as if to himself he said in Polish: "Good-day, comrade." But there was no answer. A smile came on Gavrilov's face. Apparently he had noticed it all. He said: "You want too much. As well as infantry men they have gendarmes on this frontier. Didn't you notice the stripe on his sleeve? That was a gendarme."

The head of the column was now descending the hill towards one of the divided villages. The Soviet half of the village was preparing a triumphant welcome for the procession. The whole population was gathered by the little bridge which led over the frontier river. The young folk of both sexes formed an avenue along the road. On the Polish side the roofs of houses and sheds were covered with people attentively watching all that went on, and on the doorsteps and against the fences of cottages were crowds of peasants.

When the procession reached the avenue of young people it struck up the *International*, and then on a roughly rigged tribune decked with greenery, stirring speeches were made by green youths and hoary old men. Paul too spoke—in Ukrainian, and his words were wafted over the river and heard on the Polish side. But the

authorities there decided to prevent such a speech from firing their hearts—a detachment of gendarmes arrived and drove the people inside with whips, and there were shots above the roofs.

The streets were deserted, and the young folk were driven from their roofs by bullets. All this was seen from the Soviet side—with frowns. Then an old man was shouldered up on to the platform by the young folk—an old stockman—and, quite beside himself, carried away by a wave of indignation, he cried: “All right! Just you see, children. That’s how they used to treat us, but now things like that never happen in this village, beating the people with whips. We’ve finished with squires and the like, and finished with whips on our backs. Lads, take care of this government you now have. I’m an old man and I don’t know how to make speeches, but I had wanted to say a lot to you. In all our rotten life under the Tsar we were like oxen dragging a waggon and getting nought but blows for it, too. . . .” And he shook his scraggy fist over the river and tears came to his eyes—the sort of tears that children and old men shed.

His place was taken by Grishoutka Khorovodko. As he listened to his turbulent speech Gavrilov turned his horse to see if it was not being noted on the other side. But the shore was empty and even the sentry on duty at the bridge had been removed.

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One rainy autumn night towards the end of November the brigand Antoniouk and the seven with him ceased laying a bloody trail. The monster went to the wedding of a rich colonist-farmer at Maidan-Villa; the Khrolinski Communists and the YCL got him.

Women's gossip had brought news of those visitors at the colonists' large farm, and in a moment the cell—twelve all told—were ready, armed with what weapons they had. They drove by light waggon to the Maidan-Villa estate, while a special messenger galloped at all speed to Berezdov. At Semaki the messenger came on Filatov's detachment, and they galloped off hot on the track. The Khrolinski lads surrounded the house and buildings and rifle-fire *pourparlers* between them and Antoniouk's band were opened.

Antioniouk and his men were snug in a little side building and able to shoot at anybody who got within sight. He made an attempt at a sally, but the Khrolinski lads drove them back, accounting for one of them with a bullet into the bargain. This was not the first time Antoniouk had been in a tight corner, and so far he had always got out with a whole skin—hand-grenades and darkness were his saviours. Perhaps he would have got away this time, too, as the Khrolinski boys had already lost two of their number—when Filatov arrived post-haste. Then Antoniouk realised that it was a very tight corner indeed, with no way out. Till morning he and his men sniped from every window of the little building, but at daybreak he was captured. Not one of the seven surrendered. This destruction of a bandit cost four lives—three of them given by the Khrolinski YCL.

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Paul's battalion was called up for the autumn territorial manœuvres. The battalion made the twenty-five miles to the camp in one day under a steady downpour; it took from early morning till late at night. Battalion Commander Goussiev and his Commissar rode horse-

back. The eight hundred men could scarcely walk by the time they reached the barracks, and they at once lay down and fell asleep. The manœuvres were to begin the very next morning. The newly arrived battalion had to be inspected, and was paraded on the parade ground. Shortly afterwards a number of cavalymen galloped up from the staff, and the battalion, which had already been issued with kit and rifles, was re-formed. Both the Fighting Commander, Goussiev, and Paul, had put a great deal of work into the battalion and were confident of its fitness. When the official inspection was over and the battalion had shown its ability to manœuvre and re-form, one of the Commanders, with a handsome but ill-natured face, sharply asked Paul: "Why are you mounted? Commanders and Military Commissars of battalions in training are not supposed to be mounted. You are under orders to hand the horses over to the stables and carry through the manœuvres on foot."

Paul knew that if he dismounted he would be unable to participate in the manœuvres—he could not manage even half a mile on legs like his. But how was he to tell that dandy, lost under a dozen straps and froggings, how things were? He merely said: "I cannot participate in manœuvres without a horse." "And why not?" Understanding that his refusal admitted of nothing but a plain explanation, Paul said in a flat voice: "My legs are swollen and I shall not be able to walk for a whole week on end. Moreover, comrade, I do not know who you are." The other said: "Firstly, I am the Chief of Staff of your regiment. Secondly, once again I instruct you to dismount. You may be unfit, but it is not my fault that you are in the army."

Paul felt that like a blow of a whip. He plucked at his

horse's bridle, but Goussiev's powerful hand restrained it. For a few seconds patience and the sense of insult struggled within him. But Paul was no longer the Red Army man who could transfer from unit to unit just as his whim took him. He was Military Commissar to a battalion, and the battalion was behind him at the moment. What an example of discipline it would be ! After all, he had not educated that battalion merely for this little whippersnapper ? So he freed his feet from the stirrups and dismounted and mastered the sharp pain in his joints, and went to the right flank.

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The next few days were exceptionally fine. The manœuvres were drawing to a close. On the fifth day they were in the neighbourhood of Shepetovka, which was their final objective. The Berezdov battalion had received orders to seize the station from the side of the village of Klimentovich. As he knew the district perfectly Paul showed Goussiev all the easy approaches, and in two sections the battalion made a deep detour, unobserved by the enemy, and outflanked them, and with a cry of "Ours !" broke into the station. In the opinion of intermediaries, the operation was a brilliant one. The station was occupied by the Berezdov battalion, and the battalion defending it was deemed to have lost half its men, and retired into the forest.

Paul took on the command of half the battalion. He was standing in the centre of the street with the commander and the political leader of the third platoon arranging the disposition of the men, when a Red Army man ran up to him out of breath and said : "Comrade Commissar, the Battalion Commander wishes to know if the level crossings

are mounted with machine-gunners. The Commission will be here in a moment." Paul and the Commanders made for the crossing. The Regimental Command was there all ready. Goussiev was congratulated on a successful operation, while representatives of the defeated battalion stood round looking sheepish, not even trying to justify themselves. Goussiev said : " It's not my merit—Korchagin here belongs to these parts and he guided us through."

The Chief of Staff rode close up to Paul and said scornfully : " So your legs work quite well after all, comrade, and I see you sport a horse merely for the show of it." He was going to say something else, but Paul's expression pulled him up. When he had gone Paul asked Goussiev quietly : " Do you know his name ?" Goussiev slapped his shoulder. " Forget it ; don't take any notice of the scoundrel. I think he's called Chouzhanin—he was a lieutenant before the revolution." And several times that day Paul tried to recall where he had heard that name, but he could not remember.

The manœuvres were over, and the battalion returned to Berezdov with a first-rate report, while Paul spent two days with his mother. He was completely exhausted. He had left his horse at Artem's place. For two days Paul slept the clock round, and only on the third went to see Artem at the shop. It smelt of home in that smoke-blackened building and he drew the sooty air in greedily. Those childhood surroundings were part of him and attracted him strongly now. It was as if he had lost something he loved. So many months he had not heard the shrieking whistle of railway engines, and just as the

emerald-blue of the limitless sea stirs the sailor every time he comes back to it after long separation, this stoker and fitter felt his own native habitat draw him. For some time he could not master that feeling.

He found that he and his brother had little to say to each other. He noticed an extra wrinkle on Artem's forehead. Artem was working on a movable crane. He had a second child. Life was clearly dealing hardly with him. Artem did not complain, but so much was plain. They worked together an hour or two, then parted. At the crossing Paul drew in his horse and looked back a long time at the station; then lashed his horse and rode at all speed home through the forest.

The forest roads were secure now. Brigands large and small had been eradicated by the Soviet authorities, their strongholds had been fired, and life in the villages round was more peaceful.

Paul cantered into Berezdov about midday, and Polievykh gave him a glad welcome outside the District Committee building. "At last you've come. We have missed you so." And she threw her arm round his shoulders and went inside with him. "Well," he said, "what good things have you to tell me? Have you been out to Groushevka? How are things there?" She told him everything while he stretched his tired legs and rested on the divan. "Yesterday," she said, "Rakitin was admitted as party candidate. That should still further strengthen our Poddoubtzy cell. Rakitin's a fine girl; I like her very much. You see, we've already made a breach in the teaching profession, some of them are coming right over to us."

Some evenings now three people sat up late at Lissitzyn's, round the large table—Lissitzyn himself,

Paul, Lychikov, and the new secretary of the District Party Committee. The door into the other room, where Anioutka and Lissitzyn's wife would be sleeping, would be shut, and the three at the table would be bent over Pokrovski's small *History of Russia*. Lissitzyn's only time for study was the night. And whenever Paul came back from trips to the villages round, he would find to his dismay how far the other two had leaped ahead.

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News came one day from Poddoubtzy: unknown persons had murdered Grishoutka Khorovodko during the night. When Paul heard that, he made for the stables and, forgetful of the pain in his legs, got there in only a few minutes. At furious speed he saddled his horse and, lashing it on both flanks with the reins, galloped for the frontier.

Grishoutka lay in the spacious hut of the village soviet, on a table decorated with greenery and the flag with the hammer and sickle. Nobody was being allowed in till the authorities had arrived; a frontier guardsman and a YCL-er were standing sentry at the door. Paul went in and turned back the flag from Grishoutka's face. He lay, wax-pale, with wide-open eyes in which a last look of pain was held, and his head was fallen to one side. The back of his head, smashed in with some sharp instrument, was concealed by a branch of fir. Whose was the hand raised against this lad, the only son of the widow Khorovodko, who had lost her husband in the revolution? Khorovodko's father had worked for the miller—later he had been a member of the village Committee of the Poor.

The news of her son's death broke the poor old woman

completely, and neighbours had to look after her while her son lay silent, preserving the secret of his end. Grishoutka's death roused the whole village, and the young YCL leader and village labourers' defender proved to have more friends than enemies. Rakitin was badly shaken by his death ; she kept to her room, crying ; when Paul went to see her she did not even raise her head. Paul sat down heavily and in a flat voice asked : " What do you think, comrade ? Who did it ? " She said : " Who else but the miller's gang. Don't forget it was Grisha stood in the way of their smuggling."

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Two whole villages turned out to Grishoutka's funeral, and Paul brought his battalion, and the whole YCL organisation came to bid farewell to their comrade. Gavrilov ranged two hundred and fifty bayonets of the frontier company on the square in front of the Soviet House, and to the sad strains of the funeral march they carried out the red-draped coffin and placed it in the centre of the square, where a grave had been dug to inter him beside Bolshevik-partisans buried there earlier.

Grisha's death had drawn together all those for whose cause he had stood, and the young people of the labouring class and the poor peasants promised the party group their support. Every speaker called indignantly for the death of the murderers, and demanded that they should be found and tried there, in that very square, publicly, so that everyone should know the face of their enemies.

Then there were three volleys, and newly-cut evergreens were laid on the floor of the fresh grave. That evening a new secretary was elected, Rakitin being

chosen. Meanwhile Paul received news from the frontier outpost of the GPU that they were on the track of the murderers.

A week later the second district congress of soviets was held in the Berezdov theatre. Lissitzyn, very stern, began his report triumphantly as follows: "Comrades, I am glad I can report to this congress that in the past year we have all accomplished much. We have firmly established Soviet authority in our district, and we have outrooted banditry and shaken the smuggling trade. Healthy organisations of the poor have sprung up in the villages, as have YCL groups, while party groups have grown larger. The recent koulak outburst at Pod-doubtzy, in which our comrade Khorovodko lost his life, has been investigated and exposed, and the murderers—the miller and his son-in-law—have been arrested and will shortly be tried by the assize-sitting of the provincial court. From a whole series of village delegations I have received a request that this congress pass a resolution calling for the application of the supreme penalty to those bandit-terrorists."

The hall resounded with cries—"Agreed. Death to the enemies of Soviet Power."

Polievykh appeared at a side door and beckoned to Paul. When he went out into the passage she handed him a letter marked "Urgent." He opened it. "*To the Berezdov District YCL Committee, copy to the District Party Committee. By decision of the Provincial Party Committee Comrade Korchagin is recalled from the district and put at the disposal of the Provincial Party Committee for command to responsible YCL work.*"

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So Paul had to bid farewell to the district where he had worked a whole year. At the preceding meeting of the District Party Committee two questions had been discussed : the first, the promotion of Comrade Korchagin to membership of the Communist Party, and secondly, a statement on his work to be made on the occasion of releasing him from his duties as secretary of the district YCL. Lissitzyn and Lida shook his hand firmly and gave him a brotherly embrace. And when his horse turned from the yard into the street a dozen revolvers gave him a parting salute.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE year 1924 marked its entry into history by a spell of intense cold. January raged savagely over the snow-covered land and in the second half of the month there were raging hurricanes and drawn-out snow blizzards. The south-western railway system was deep under snow-drifts and a fierce struggle was waged with the maddened elements. The steel prows of snow-ploughs bored into mountains of snow, forcing a path through for the trains. Frost and fierce wind broke the ice-coated telegraph wires and only three of twelve lines were working—the Indo-European telegraph and two trunk lines.

In the telegraph-room at Shepetovka Junction Main Station three Morse apparatuses kept up their insistent chatter, comprehensible only to an initiated ear. The girls were young and they had so far since starting work tapped out only twenty kilometres of tape, but the old man in the same office was just beginning his third hundred thousand. He did not bother to read the paper ribbons as they did, nor did he ever need to knit his brows over difficult letters or words. He just listened to the tappety-tap of the instrument and jotted down letter after letter of the code.

He wrote : " To all stations, all stations, all stations."

As he wrote down he said to himself : " Another one of these circulars about the struggle with the snow-drifts," while the wind raged outside and hurled handfuls of snow against the window. It seemed to him as if

somebody was knocking there and he could not help turning his head and admiring the beauty of the frost-tracery on the panes. No human hand could have carved an engraving so fine, such a pattern of fantastic leaves and stems. And the sight so absorbed him that he stopped listening to his apparatus, and when he turned back from the window he had to take the ribbon in his hand to read back : “ January twenty-first at five-fifty a.m.”

He hastily scribbled it down and dropped the tape again and rested his head on his hand and then began to listen once more . . . “ at Gorki there passed away. . . .” Slowly he wrote it down. What countless communications, both joyous and sad, had he not been the first to hear of—the grief or the delight of others. He had long ago ceased to think at all of the real meaning of those curt, broken phrases ; he merely received them as oral impressions, and transferred them to paper without any thought of their content. Here was a typical one—some fellow had died and somebody was being told about it. He was quite forgetting that the telegram had begun with the words usual to public announcements—“ To all stations, all stations. . . .” Meanwhile the machine went on clicking, and the old telegraphist translated the clicks into letters—V . . . L . . . A . . . D . . . I . . . M . . . I . . . R . . . I . . . L . . . Y . . . I . . . C . . . H

He was not moved by that. He was tired. Somewhere some fellow—*name : Vladimir, patronymic : Ilyich*—had died, and he was about to put down the tragic words—tragic for some other unknown person, who would cry from desperation and grief—but it was all nothing whatever to do with him—he was only an involuntary onlooker.

And the machine went on with its dots and then a dash, dots and then a dash, and out of those familiar clicking sounds the old man recognised the first letter of another word and wrote it down—"L." This was followed by an "E," and then next the "E" he carefully made an "N," even going twice over the linking centre line, and then immediately added an "I."—The last letter came automatically and was "N," and then the machine tapped out its pause, and for the tenth of a second the telegraphist's eye hovered on the word he had written—
LENIN.

Meanwhile the machine went on with its clicking, but the old telegraph-operator's thoughts had come on a familiar word, and they went back to it for a moment. He glanced at it again. What was that? *Lenin?* His eye put the whole text of the telegram into perspective. For some time he stared at the line. Then, for the first time in all his thirty years' service, he disbelieved what was written. Three times he checked the signs, but the words were persistent: "*January twenty-first at five-fifty a.m. at Gorki there passed away Vladimir Ilyich Lenin.*" The old man sprang to his feet and took the coiling ribbon of paper in his hand and stared at it. The two-yard-long strip definitely did confirm what he had been unable at first to believe. He turned a deathly-white face to his two girl colleagues and they heard a frightened cry from his lips: "Lenin is dead!"

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The news of that great loss slipped out of the instrument room through the wide-open door, and was swept about the station with the speed of the blizzard; it leapt into the raging snow and whirled over the tracks and the

junction points and in the form of an icy draught in through the half-open half of the great iron-bound doors of the railway workshops. In the shops there was a locomotive over the first repair pit ; the urgent repairs brigade was at work on it. Old man Polentovski had gone down himself into the pit under his engine and was pointing out the worn places to the mechanics. Zakhar Brouzzhak and Artem together were busy straightening out the bent fire-box bars. Brouzzhak was holding them on the anvil, Artem had the hammer. In the last year or two Zakhar had aged a lot, the things he had gone through had carved a great furrow of a wrinkle in his forehead, and on his temples the hair had gone white. His shoulders was bent too, and there was twilight in his retreating eyes.

Then, in the narrow space of the open door, a man appeared suddenly and the early evening shadows swallowed him up. The blows of the hammer drowned the man's first shout, but when he had run up to the men at the locomotive Artem's hammer was suddenly caught up in the air. "Comrades ! Lenin is dead !"

The hammer slithered slowly down from over Artem's shoulder and Artem's arm lowered it silently to the concrete floor. "What's that you say ?" Artem's hand, like a pair of forge-pincers, was scraping at the leather coat of the man who had brought the frightful news. And the man, snow-swept, panting, repeated his words, now with dull, breaking, voice—"Yes, comrades, Lenin is dead."

It was because the man did not shout now that Artem grasped the gruesome truth and only then realised who the man was—it was the secretary of the party group.

The men clambered up out of the pit and in silence heard the news of the death of that man known to all the world. Then to the right, against the doors, a locomotive shrieked so that they all started, and another from the depths of the station answered, then another. . . . And to their powerful, alarmed call was joined then the siren of the electricity power-station, a high, piercing note like the flight of shrapnel. Then this was drowned by the clean, coppery tone of the "S" express about to start for Kiev.

A GPU man started in surprise when the engine-driver of the Polish locomotive of the direct Shepetovka-Warsaw train—learning the reason for all the whistling—listened for a few moments more, and then slowly raised his arm and pulled down the little chain which opened the whistle-valve. The man knew as he did so that he was whistling for the last time, that he would never serve again on that route, but his hand did not leave the chain, and the whistle of his engine roused Polish couriers and diplomats, scared from their soft couches.

The station yards filled with people. They poured through all four gates, and when the huge repair building was over-full, the first words of grief were heard. It was the secretary of the Shepetovka District Communist Party, old Bolshevik Sharabrin, who spoke. He said : "Comrades ! The leader of the world proletariat is dead—Lenin is dead. The Party has sustained an irreparable loss ; the man who created and educated the Bolshevik Party in unrelinquished hostility to our enemies—has died. The death of the leader of the Party and of our class must be a clarion call to the best sons of the proletariat to join our ranks."

The sounds of a funeral march rang out, there were

hundreds of bared heads, and Artem, who had not shed tears for fifteen years, felt a quiver mounting in his throat, and his massive shoulders shook. It seemed as if the walls of the railwaymen's club would not hold the enormous mass of people. There was bitter cold outside, and all the fir-trees at the entrance were wrapped in snow and laden with icicles; but in the hall the heated Dutch stoves and the breath of six hundred men, all of whom wanted to take part in the memorial meeting of the party collective, made it stifling.

There was none of the usual murmuring, of the usual undercurrent of conversation, in the hall. Their great grief had muted their voices, and they conversed silently, and grief and alarm could be seen in hundreds of eyes. It looked like a gathering of a ship's crew towing the pilot who knew the shoals, and the ship being carried out to sea by a stormy wind.

The members of the Bureau took their places round the presidium table just as silently. Burly Sirotenko raised the bell cautiously and gave it a half-ring, and then put it down again, but that was sufficient, and gradually an oppressive silence took possession of the hall.

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Immediately following the report the group secretary Sirotenko rose to his feet. What he said surprised nobody, even if it was unusual at a morning assembly. He said: "A group of workers have asked the assembly to consider a declaration signed by thirty-seven comrades." And he read the following declaration: "To the Railway Collective of the Communist Party of Bolsheviks of the Station of Shepetovka on the South-Western railway. The death of our leader is a summons to us to join the

ranks of the Bolsheviks, and we apply for permission to attest at this assembly and be accepted in Lenin's party."

This was followed by two columns of signatures. Sirotenko read them out, pausing a few seconds after each, to give the assembly time to memorise familiar names. "Polentovski, Stanislav Sigmundovich—engine-driver—thirty-six years' service." There was a murmur of approval. "Korchagin, Artem Andreievich, turner, seventeen years' service. Brouzzhak, Zakhar Phillipovich, engine-driver, twenty-one years' service." The murmur in the hall grew louder, as the man at the table read out the names, and it was learned that they were all names of leading railway workers.

A pin could have been heard to drop when the first man on the list went up to the table. Old Polentovski could not but be moved as he related the history of his life.

"What am I to tell you, comrades? We all know what the life of a working man was like in the old days. He lived a slave's life and he died like a beggar. Well, one thing I'll admit, when the revolution came I thought I was an old man. My family weighed heavy on my shoulders, and then I never saw my way to the Party. And though I never helped the enemy, I was not a fighter either. In 1905 I was in the Warsaw shops, and I was a member of the strike committee and worked with the Bolsheviks. I was young then and a hot-headed fellow. But what's the use of raking over old things. Ilyich's death, I can tell you, has got me right in the heart. We've lost for ever our friend and protector, and I needn't say anything more about old age. Let somebody else, a bit better speaker, I'm not a man of words. One thing only

I can say to you : the Bolsheviks and I go the same road."

The old driver's grey head swayed stubbornly, and the glance of his eyes under the grey brows was firmly and unflinchingly aimed into the hall from which he awaited a verdict. There was not one hand raised to say "no" to this little old grey-haired man, and not one abstained from voting when the bureau asked the non-party people to give their opinion. And so Polentovski left the table a member of the Party.

Everybody in the hall was aware that something out of the ordinary was taking place. Where the old driver had stood now loomed the massive form of Artem. The fitter did not know what to do with his long arms, and so he plucked at his cap, which had ear-flaps. His short sheep-skin coat, worn bare at the edges, was unfastened, and the collar of his grey army tunic, neatly fastened by two brass buttons, made him look festively trim. He faced the hall and, for a brief second, caught sight of a familiar woman's face—among his crowd from the urgent-repairs shop was Galia, the stone-mason's daughter. She gave him a forgiving smile ; there was approval in the smile, as well as something else half expressed, to be guessed at only, in the corners of her lips. Then Artem heard Sirotenko saying : "Tell them your life, Artem."

Korchagin senior had difficulty in beginning. He was not used to speaking at large meetings. And only at that moment did he realise that he did not know how to put before them all the things life had shown him. He found difficulty in putting words together, and he was also too excited to speak properly. He had never felt like this before. He was very clearly aware that his life had taken a sharp turn, and that he was about to make the final

step towards something which would warm and give sense to his shrivelled and barren existence. He began : " My mother had four of us."

The meeting was silent—six hundred were attentive to what the tall master-workman with eagle nose and eyes hidden by a black canopy of brows would say. He said : " My mother went out as cook to the gentry. I don't remember my father much, he didn't get on with my mother, he used to drink more than was good for him. So we lived alone with mother. She couldn't manage to feed so many mouths. She was paid four roubles a month and her board, and for that she slaved from dawn to dark. I was lucky to get two winters in the elementary school, where I learned to read and write, but when I was in my ninth year my mother had no other way out but to apprentice me in the turner's shops—three years without pay, only board, just to learn the trade. The boss there was a German named Förster. He hadn't been keen to take me on, I was so small, but I was a sturdy kid and mother made me out to be two years older than I really was. I worked for that German three years, and learned no trade at all, just did the boss's odd jobs running for vodka and so on . . . he used to drink himself blind . . . and running about for wood or to the ironworks. His wife made me her little lackey, emptying the slops and peeling potatoes. All and sundry thought I was for kicking ; I used to get kicked just for the fun of it ; and if I didn't guess her whims at once she used to hit me across the face two or three times ; she was always in a savage temper because of her man's drinking. And had I run away, where was I to go, to whom could I complain ? My mother was thirty miles away, and, anyway, she hadn't a home for me. It was no better in the shop. The foreman

there was the boss's brother, and the swine used to amuse himself at my expense. He'd say, 'Boy, reach me up that iron bar, there,' and point to the corner where the smithy forge was. And I'd grab the bar—and find he'd just been working on it, just taken it out of the fire. There it lay all black, but hot enough to burn the skin off your fingers. I'd howl with pain while he rocked with laughter.

"I couldn't stand it, and in the end I did run home. But Mother didn't want me at home ; she only cried and took me back to the German. In my third year they did show me a thing or two, but they didn't stop knocking me about, and I ran away again and made for Starokonstantinov. I got a job there in a sausage factory, and spent a dog's life for nigh two years washing guts. Then my boss lost his factory at cards, and cleared out owing us four months' pay, so I got out of that rotten job. I took the train and got out at Zhmerink and tried to find work there. I owe thanks to a man in the railway yards there who took pity on me ; he got out of me that I knew a little about metal work so he made himself out to be my uncle and contrived to get me taken on. They accepted me as seventeen on account of my height, so I became assistant turner. It's nine years that I've worked here. There's my former life, you know about the present one."

Artem wiped his forehead with his cap and sighed deeply. Now he had to say the most important part of it, and it was the most difficult—he could not afford to wait till somebody asked about it ; so he beetled his thick eyebrows and went on : "Anyone has a right to ask me why I have not been a Bolshevik from the start of this flare-up. What can I answer them ? It isn't years, I'm a long way off being an old man, yet it's only now I've

found my right road. What have I to hide, though? We've missed the road—we ought to have begun away back in 1918 when we struck against the Germans. There was Zhoukhraï, the sailor, who had some talk with us about it. It was not till 1920 that I took a rifle in my hands. Then the business ended, we'd turned the Whites out into the Black Sea, so we turned round and came home.

“Then came marriage, and children . . . I let home things absorb me. But now that our comrade Lenin has died, and the Party has thrown out the call, I've been looking over my life and I see what's lacking in it. It's not enough to defend things, we have to go into it like one family in place of Lenin, to make the Soviet world as permanent as iron. It's our duty to become Bolsheviks—why, isn't it our own Party?”

Thus, simply, ashamed of the strange way he had spoken, yet completely sincerely, Artem Korchagin ended his speech and felt he had thrown a burden off his shoulders so that he could stand upright to wait for questions.

Sirotenko said: “Perhaps somebody would like to ask a question.” The ranks of workers stirred, but there was no immediate response. Then a stoker as black as a beetle, who had come straight from his engine to the meeting, called out firmly: “What do we want to ask him about? Don't we all know him well? Give him his papers and that's all.”

Then Gilyaka, a sturdy smith, ruddy now from the heat and from nervous strain, called out in a hoarse voice, as if he had a cold: “His sort don't look for funk-holes, he'll be tough. Let's vote, Sirotenko!”

Then, from the back benches, where the YCL-ers were sitting, somebody who could not be made out in the half-

darkness, got up and said : " Will Comrade Korchagin tell us why he has settled on the land, and whether his position as a peasant doesn't make him deviate from a proletarian psychology ? " At this there was a slight wave of disapproval, and somebody shouted : " Speak in simple language. "

But Artem had already begun his answer. He said : " That's right, comrade. The lad's quite right, I have settled on the land. That's true enough, but it hasn't made me lose my working-class consciousness. But that's all ended as from to-day. I'm going to move my family nearer the yards, there'll be less doubts then. Anyway, this land business has been stifling me. "

Once again Artem's heart started when he saw the raised hands, and when he went back to his place he walked straight and felt no weight in his body at all. He heard Sirotenko behind him say " Unanimously. "

Zakhar Brouzzhak was the third to take his place by the chairman's table. He was not given to words, was this old assistant of Polentovski, himself long years an engine-driver, and when he was ending his story, and came to recent days, he said in a low voice, yet such that they could all hear : " And I have a duty to finish my children's work. They did not die for me to sit at my back door whining about it. So far I have done nothing to make up for their death, but now the death of our leader has opened my eyes. Don't go into my past, life begins all over again for us now. "

Zakhar was upset by the memories revived in him, and he frowned hard, but when a general raising of hands accepted him in the Party without a single sharp question being put, his eyes grew clear again and he held his grey head high. The examination of this new shift went on

far into the night. Only the best of them were accepted into the Party—those who were well-known and had shown by their lives what sort they were.

The death of Lenin made thousands of workers become Bolsheviks. The loss of the leader did not break up the ranks of the Party any more than pruning a tree kills it.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Two people were standing at the entrance to the concert hall of the hotel. One of them, a tall man in pince-nez, wore a red armlet with the word "Commandant." Rita Oustinovich said: "Is the meeting of the Ukrainian delegation to be held here?" The tall man answered officiously: "Yes; and what do you want?" Rita said: "Please let me in." The tall man was partly blocking the doorway. He looked Rita up and down and said: "Can I see your mandate? Only delegates with rights of vote or discussion are allowed in."

Rita took from her bag a ticket printed in gilt, and the tall man read: *Member of the Central Committee*. His officiousness vanished in an instant, and he became polite and rather familiar. "If you please, allow me, you will find vacant seats on the left-hand side."

Rita picked her way among the rows of chairs, found a vacant place, and sat down. Evidently the meeting was near its close. She began to listen to the Chairman, who was speaking. The voice seemed familiar to her. "Well, comrades, representatives to the Council of Elders of the All-Russian congress have been elected, and also for the Soviet of delegates. There are two hours left before the commencement. Will you please submit your credentials again for examination."

Then Rita recognised Akim—he it was gabbling through the list of names. At each name a hand shot up with either a red or a white mandate in it. Rita

listened with tense attention. There was suddenly a familiar name—Pankratov—and she looked round to see the hand raised, but she could not distinguish the docker's familiar features in the sea of other heads. The list went on rapidly, and there was a familiar "Okounev" and then, immediately following, another—"Zharki." Zharki she could see. He was sitting half-turned towards her not very far away. His profile stirred her memory. . . . Yes, she remembered him now, it was Zharki; she had not seen him for some years.

The list went on and on, till at last one of them made her start. *Korchagin*. And a long way in front of her an arm went up and down again. How strange it was, she felt an agonising want to see the face of that unknown namesake of her perished comrade. And she kept her eyes fixed in that direction, trying to reach him, but all heads seemed alike. So she got up and went down the aisle towards the front rows. Then Akim finished reading. There was a general clatter of chairs being moved back, and a buzz of loud voices and young laughter, while Akim tried to master the din and shouted: "Comrades, try not to be late. Remember, the main theatre . . . at seven o'clock. . . ."

There was a jam at the exit. Rita saw that in such a stream of people she would find none of those whose names she had just heard. The only thing was to keep her eyes on Akim and find the others through him. She made for him, let the final batch of delegates get past her. Then at her back she heard somebody say: "Well, Korchagin, old fellow, now we might as well be going too." And then she heard a voice, so familiar, so unforgettable, answering: "Yes, let's go."

She swung round to look. She saw a tall swarthy young man in a khaki tunic with a narrow Caucasian belt tightly drawn in at the waist, and blue breeches. She stared at him with wide-open eyes, and when his arms were round her tenderly and his voice murmured with a quaver, "Rita!" she knew that it really was Paul. She cried: "You are alive?" And those words told him everything. She had not known all this time that the news about his death had been a mistake!

The hall had emptied, and through the open window could be heard the din of the great thoroughfare of Tverskaia Street outside. A clock rang out six in a clear note, and yet it seemed to both that they had only just met. But there was the clock warning them that it was time to be on their way to the Big Theatre (the *Bolshoi*). When they were already on their way down the wide staircase to the street she looked Paul up and down again. He was now half a head taller than she. He was just the same as of old, only more manly and more restrained. She said: "Just think, I haven't even asked you what you're doing now."

He said: "I am secretary of the District Youth Committee."

They were outside, among the hoots of cars speeding by and the movement and voices of the crowds. They did not say much on their way to the theatre, but their thoughts were of one thing. The theatre was beset by a sea of people—a turbulent persistent sea, dashing itself against the massive stone building—trying to get into the corridors guarded by Red Army men. But they would let through nobody but delegates, and the delegates had to go waving their mandates proudly aloft, down a gangway of guards.

The sea consisted of Young Communist Leaguers. Though they had not succeeded in getting visitors' tickets they all wanted at any cost to get in for the opening of the Congress. Quick-witted lads contrived to get into groups of actual delegates and then, waving a scrap of red paper to imitate a mandate, managed sometimes to get right up to the doors. Some even managed to get inside. But once there they came on the members of the Central Committee on duty, or the commandant, who were directing visitors to the galleries and delegates to the floor, and then, to the huge delight of other "ticketless," they were turned out of the building again. The theatre was unable to hold even a twentieth part of those who wanted to get in.

Rita and Paul had great difficulty in forcing their way to the door. Delegates were steadily arriving by tram and by car, and there was a great crush at the doors. It began to be difficult for the Red Army men—YCL-ers themselves—to keep order, and they were crushed against the theatre walls, while there were loud cries of "Press on, boys, press on!" "Call Chaplin out, call out Sasha Kossarev, they'll let us in!" "Press on, lads, we're winning. . . ." "That's got 'em. . . ." At the same time as Paul and Rita, a keen-eyed stripling with an International Communist Youth badge slipped in through the door and showed his papers and then rushed headlong into the foyer. One instant and he was lost in the stream of delegates. Rita pointed to the seats behind the stalls and said: "Let's sit here." They found seats in the corner.

Rita said: "I want an answer to one question. Although it's old history now, I think you'll answer it—

why did you break off your lessons with me, and our friendship ? ”

He had expected the question from the first moment of their meeting and yet it threw him into confusion. Their eyes met and Paul saw that she knew. He said : “ Rita, I think you know. That was three years ago, now all I can do is condemn Paul for what he did then. Altogether Paul Korchagin has made mistakes great and small all through his life, and one of the big ones was the one you speak of.”

Rita smiled. “ A wonderful introduction,” she said, “ but what I want is an answer ! ”

Paul said softly : “ I am not the only one to blame. *The Gadfly* and his revolutionary romanticism is also to blame. Books depicting characters of a masculine type, strong-minded and strong in revolutionary spirit, fearless and irrevocably consecrated to our task had made a lasting impression on me and left me with a desire to be just like them. So you see I treated my feelings for you *à la Gadfly*. It’s ridiculous to me now, but more still is it aggravating.”

“ In other words, *The Gadfly* was over-estimated ? ”

“ No, Rita, at bottom, no. Only the gratuitous tragical element of agonisingly testing one’s will was over-estimated. But as for the fundamentals in *The Gadfly*, for the man’s manliness, his unlimited power of bearing trials, as for that type of man who can bear suffering without revealing it to each and all, I do stand for that. I do stand for the type of revolutionary for whom individual things are nothing in comparison with the general cause.”

“ Paul, all we can do is regret that this conversation

is taking place three years later than it should have done," Rita said, and she smiled somehow absently, as if thinking of something else.

Paul said : " Am I not right, Rita, that you are sorry because I never could have been more to you than comrade ? "

She said : " No, you could have been more. "

He said : " Then things can still be mended. "

" It is a little late, Comrade Gadfly. "

Rita smiled at her own joke and explained it. She said : " I have a little daughter now. And my little daughter has a father, who is also a great friend of mine, and we all three live in harmony, and for the present it is an unbreakable trio. "

Her fingers lay on his arm. It was a movement of concern for him, but the next instant she realised that it was not necessary. Yes, in those three years he had grown up, not only physically. She knew that it was hurting him—his eyes told her that—but without any gesture in it he said : " And still I retain infinitely more than I have just lost. "

They rose. It was time to find seats nearer the front, and they made for the stalls where the Ukrainian delegates were sitting. Then the orchestra struck up, and huge banners blazed red, and illuminated letters cried : " The future is ours. " There were thousands in the stalls and the boxes and the galleries, and they fused in that theatre into one powerful transformer of an energy which would never die down. The enormous theatre had received within its walls the flower of the young guard of a great industrial race. There were thousands of eyes, in each of which was reflected the same slogan as burned

on the heavy curtain—"The future is ours." Meanwhile they were still pouring in. A few more minutes and the heavy velvet of the curtain would slowly part and Chaplin, full of emotion, would lose his composure for an instant at the astounding magnificence of the moment, and begin: "I declare the Sixth Congress of the Russian Communist League of Youth open."

Never had Paul felt the grandeur and might of the Revolution so brilliantly or so profoundly, or felt such indescribable pride or unique delight, now that life had brought him as warrior and builder to this victorious triumph of the young guard of Bolshevism.

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The Congress demanded the full time of its participants, from early morning to late at night, and Paul only saw Rita again at one of the final sittings. He caught sight of her in a group of Ukrainians. She said: "I am leaving to-morrow the moment the Congress is over. I can't be sure whether we shall have a chance of a farewell chat. So I have prepared two volumes of my diary which refer to our past, and a little letter for you. Just read them and post them back to me. They will tell you all the things I have had no opportunity of telling you."

He shook her hand and gave her a searching glance, as if to print her face on his memory. The next day they met as agreed at the main entrance and Rita gave him a little packet and a sealed letter. There were a number of people about, so they bid each other good-bye very restrainedly. He could detect great warmth and some sorrow in her misty eyes. A day later the railway bore them in opposite directions.

There were several coaches full of the Ukrainian delegates. Paul was in the Kiev party. That night, when all were asleep and Okounev was snoring lightly beside him, Paul moved nearer to the light and opened the letter.

“ My dearest Paul, I could have told you myself, but it will be easier this way. I only want one thing : I should not like the things we spoke of at the beginning of the Congress to leave a deep trace in your life. I know you are very strong, and so I believe what you said. I have no fixed views about life, and exceptions can be made (though, it is true, very rarely), if they are the result of really profound feeling. You deserve such an exception, but yet I have put aside my first impulse to pay my debt to our youthful account. I do not think it would have given us any greater happiness. But you should not be so harsh towards yourself, Paul. Life is not solely meant for struggle, but also for the happiness decent feelings can give.

“ As for the remainder of your life, I mean its basic content, I have no qualms. Yours ever, Rita.”

With far-away thoughts Paul tore the letter to pieces and held his hands out of the window and felt the rush of air tear the fragments from his fingers. By morning the two volumes of diary were read through, and made into a parcel again and tied up.

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Two years had gone by. Dispassionate time had counted out the days and months ; and life, multi-coloured and impetuous, had filled those days (which had seemed monotonous), always, with something new. One hundred and sixty millions, a great nation of people

who, for the first time in history, had become masters of their own vast land and its incalculable natural riches, had worked heroically and intensely to restore a war-ravished economy. The country was growing stronger and gathering strength, and one could now see smoke pouring from factory chimneys which but yesterday had been lifeless, and grim in their neglect.

For Paul Korchagin these had been two years of tempestuous movement, and he had not even noticed their passage. He was incapable of living quietly and meeting every morning with steady lazy yawn and going to bed punctually every night at ten. He was in a constant hurry to *live*; not only in a hurry himself, but anxious to urge others on too.

He was miserly about time for sleep. Often a light could be seen in his window late into the night, and people there gathered round a table—reading and studying. In two years they had worked through the third volume of *Capital*, and had gained an understanding of the delicate mechanics of capitalist exploitation.

Razvalikhin appeared in Paul's district, sent by the Provincial Committee with the suggestion he should take up the work of secretary of the district YCL. Paul was away when Razvalikhin arrived, and in his absence the Bureau sent Razvalikhin out to one of the sub-districts. When Paul came back and learned what had been done he said nothing. A month went by, and Paul turned up in Razvalikhin's sub-district. There was not much to learn, but these things were noted: Razvalikhin drinking and gathering all the rotters round him and keeping the better comrades out of things. Paul reported all this to the Bureau. The other comrades of the Bureau were all

for reprimanding Razvalikhin severely, when Paul surprised them by saying : " I am for expelling him without the right to apply for membership again." Everybody thought this much too severe, but Paul said again : " This scoundrel must be expelled. We've given this rotten little high-school product a chance of becoming a man, and all he's done is put on a sort of party gloss." And Paul related the Berezdov episode.

Razvalikhin shouted : " I categorically protest against Korchagin's statement. This is a personal feud, there's lots of people could invent things against me. Let Korchagin produce real evidence, facts. I might invent a yarn about his smuggling activities—well, would you expel him on the strength of that ? No, let him produce real evidence."

" Just you wait a moment, and we'll furnish the evidence," Paul said.

Razvalikhin left the room. Half an hour later Paul succeeded in passing a resolution which read : " Razvalikhin to be expelled as a person alien to the YCL."

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But when summer came his friends went one by one away for their holidays. Those who were poorly went to the seaside. They all dreamt of rest as soon as summer came round, and Paul let his comrades go—worked to get them special tickets and assistance to sanatoriums, and they left pale and worn out, but happy. Their work then fell on his shoulders, and he bore the burden like a willing horse dragging a waggon uphill. They would return sunburned and in high spirits, full of energy, and then others would take their turn. Thus the whole summer they would

be short-staffed, but life would not arrest its pace, and there was never a day without Paul in his room. Thus summer passed.

Autumn and winter Paul hated ; they meant much physical suffering to him. And this coming summer he awaited with particular impatience. He found it agonisingly difficult to admit even to himself that he was getting weaker every year. There were two ways out : either he could confess his inability to bear the difficulties of intense work, confess in short that he was an invalid, or he could remain at his post until he broke down completely. He chose the second path. But one day at the Party Bureau of the District Committee a Doctor Bartelik, in charge of the district health service, an elderly man and an old party member of the illegal days, sat down beside him and said : “ Korchagin, you don't look up to much. Have you been before a Medical Commission? You haven't, eh? I thought I couldn't remember it. But, old man, you ought to have yourself vetted, you know. Now, you come round on Thursday, late afternoon.”

Paul did not go. He was busy. But Bartelik did not forget about him, and one day he fetched Paul himself. And, after a painstaking examination (Bartelik himself taking part as neuropathologist), the following verdict was passed : “ The Medical Commission considers Paul Korchagin should be given immediate leave for a lengthy cure in the Crimea and further treatment, or serious consequences are inevitable.” This was preceded by a lengthy list in Latin of illnesses, from which Paul gathered only so much that the chief fault was not in his legs, but in a serious lesion of the central nervous system.

Bartelik saw the Commission's finding through the

Party Bureau, and there was not one voice against immediate release of Paul from his duties. But he himself suggested he should wait till Sbitniev, who was in charge of the organisational department of the District YCL Committee, returned. He was afraid of leaving the committee in unsafe hands. And, although Bartelik was against it, the Commission agreed.

There were three weeks left before the first holiday in Paul's whole life. In the drawer of his desk lay his papers for a sanatorium at Eupatoria. He now worked harder than ever and had a plenary session of the district YCL committee ; he did not spare himself at all, in order to be able to leave with a mind at ease. And then, on the very eve of departure and of his first sight of the sea, which he had never seen, there was an ugly incident, a thing he could not possibly have anticipated.

He had dropped in to the Agitprop room of the Party after office hours, and was sitting in the nook by the open window behind the bookshelves, waiting for a conference. When he went in the room was empty. Soon after he arrived a small group came in, and though he could not see them from behind the set of shelves, he recognised one of them by his voice. It was Failo, who was in charge of district finance and industry, a tall, handsome man of military bearing. Paul had often heard rumours that Failo was a drinker and ready to pester any pretty girl. Failo had some time been an irregular Red soldier, and he boasted of a silver watch which he said Rakovski himself had given him in 1918 ; and if ever he had a suitable opportunity he would laughingly tell how he lopped off the heads of Makhno's men, a dozen a day. Paul simply could not stomach him. On one occasion a

young YCL girl had come to Paul in tears with a story that Failo had promised to marry her, but after living with her a week would not even speak to her. When it came to the Control Committee Failo wriggled out of it, and the girl had no proofs. But Paul had believed her story.

The newcomers in the room had no idea Paul was there. One of them said: "Well, Failo, you dog, how are things? Who's your latest conquest, eh?" The questioner was Gribov, one of Failo's friends, a man of the same type. Gribov, for some unknown reason, was considered to be a good propagandist, although he was extraordinarily ignorant and limited, in fact, a great dolt. But he was very conceited about his fame as propagandist, and at every suitable, and every unsuitable occasion too, referred to it.

Failo said: "Congratulate me, boy! I settled that Korotaiev girl's hash last night. And you used to tell me I'd never succeed. No, young fellow, when I set my eye on a wench you can jolly well bet on it that . . ." He ended with a foul phrase.

Paul felt an immediate nervous shiver—a symptom of intense irritation. This girl, Korotaiev, was in charge of the District Women's Section. She had come there at the same time as Paul, and on joint work Paul had become good friends with her, as she was a very genuine Party worker, sensitive and attentive to every other woman, and, in fact, to anyone who came to her for protection or advice. She had earned the general respect of the committee. She was single. There was no doubt but that Failo was speaking of her.

Gribov said: "Is this true, Failo? I can hardly believe it." Failo said: "You mean to say I'm lying? What

do you take me for, then? I've mastered more difficult wenches than Korotaiev. You only have to know how. Every woman calls for a special method of approach. One lets you have her the very first day, though of course they're the rubbish. You have to run after others a whole month. The chief thing is to get to know their individual psychology. You need a special approach every time. Why, my dear fellow, that's the whole trick, but I'm an authority, of course." He chuckled till he caught his breath from self-satisfaction, while the group of hearers began to itch for details. Paul had got to his feet and was clenching his fists; he could feel his heart thumping madly.

"Of course there could be no thought of getting Korotaiev just anyhow, with fine words, and yet I wasn't going to give up, especially since I'd bet Gribov a case of port. So I started play-acting . . . just dropped in to see her a number of times. I saw she was on her guard against me. And bear in mind that there's a bit of talk going round about me—perhaps she'd heard something. In short, flank attack failed. . . . So I tried to strike from the rear. Ha-ha! Started a lot of talk, if you get me, about being in the War and killing so many people and being such a rolling stone, and having had more than my share of sorrow, and never could find a suitable woman for myself, and so live like a lonely cur . . . without anybody to be nice to me or say a kind word. . . . And kept up that sort of wail, just kept on. In short, struck at her weak spot. A lot of trouble I put into it, too. I even thought once of giving it all up and ending the farce; but, it's a matter of principle with me, and that's why I kept on. And at last she let me hold her little paw.

And then, for being so patient, instead of a woman I found I'd got a virgin. Ha-ha! Too funny." And Failo went on with his revolting story.

Paul could never properly remember how he found himself up against Failo, shouting "You beast!" Failo cried: "Who do you mean is the beast? Am I, or you, who eavesdrop?" Clearly Paul said something else, as Failo then snatched at his chest and said: "So you think you can insult me like that?" and struck Paul with his fist. He was a little drunk. What happened then was that Paul picked up an oak stool and with one blow felled Failo. Paul had left his revolver in his office; only that circumstance saved Failo's life. But nevertheless the harm was done, and on the very day he was to have left for the Crimea Paul faced a Party Court.

The whole Party organisation assembled in the town theatre, as the incident had stirred them all, so that the trial turned into a fierce polemic on the general ethics of Party members' conduct. The actual instance which was the subject of the court was put into the background by general questions of conduct, personal relationships, and Party ethics. The incident was a symptom. Failo's very conduct before the court was challenging. He smiled insolently and said that his case should be decided by a common court and that Korchagin would get hard labour for the assault, and he categorically rejected cross-examination. He cried: "What? You want to take advantage of my case to have a little gossip? Pardon me, you won't. You can plant what you like on me. And as for this attack the women make on me, the reason for that, if you want to know, is simply that I don't pay them all the attention they'd like. And that isn't worth

the candle. If this were the year 1918, too, I'd have settled my account with this lunatic Korchagin in my own fashion. As it is, you can manage without me here." And he left the court.

When the President of the court asked Paul to relate what happened, Paul spoke quietly, though it was clear that he had difficulty in restraining himself. He said: "Everything which is being discussed here happened because I did not restrain myself. The time has long gone past when I used my fists more than my head. This was an accident, and Failo got it on the head before I realised what was happening. This is the only time I have done such a thing for several years, and I condemn my own action, although in actual fact the blow was deserved. Failo is a revolting phenomenon in our Communist conduct. I cannot understand and never shall understand how a revolutionary, a Communist, can at the same time be such a foul beast and such a scoundrel. This incident has set us all talking about our way of life, and that is the only positive result of the whole business."

A vast majority of the Party members voted for the expulsion of Failo from the Party. Gri' ov was seriously reprimanded and warned against future perjury. The other participants in the conversation were named and reproved.

Bartelik told the court of the condition of Paul's nerves and the theatre protested vigorously when the Party Representative suggested Paul should be reprimanded. The Party Representative then withdrew his demand, and Paul was found "not guilty."

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A few days later the train was speeding Paul towards Kharkov. The District Party Committee had agreed to his insistent application to be placed at the disposal of the Central Committee of the Ukraine YCL. He was given a fair character, and left. One of the secretaries of the Ukraine YCL Central Committee happened to be Akim. Paul went to see him and told him the whole story. In the description of Paul, after the words "unfailingly faithful to the Party," Akim read, "Maintains the proper status of a Party member, but under exceptionally rare circumstances is hot-tempered to the point of losing control of himself. The cause of this is a serious injury to his nervous system."

"So, after all, Paul, old boy," Akim said, "they've entered the fact on an otherwise good record. But don't you worry about it, that sort of thing happens sometimes to the healthiest of us. You go south and convalesce a bit. We'll see where you'll work, when you come back." And Akim took his hand and shook it.

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The Central Committee's Sanatorium—"The *Communard*." Beds of roses, the sparkling spray of a fountain, and a large garden with the white walls of the buildings round covered with vines. White uniforms and bathing costumes. A young woman doctor entered his name. A spacious room in the corner block, a bed of dazzling white, cleanliness and perfect calm. Paul changed and then, refreshed by his bath, hurried down to the sea. As far as the eye could reach was the magnificent calm of that dark-blue expanse of polished marble sea. Away in the distant pale-blue haze it ended; the molten sun was

reflected in it, lapping flame. In the far distance the masses of a mountain range showed through the morning mist. His lungs drank in deeply the enlivening freshness of the sea breeze ; he could not tear his eyes away from the grand repose of that deep-blue world of water. Little ripples murmured on the golden sand of the shore and crept caressingly up towards his feet.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

NEXT to the sanatorium of the Central Committee was the large garden attached to the Central Polyclinic. The patients used the garden to go through on their way back to the sanatorium from the beach. Paul loved resting in the garden up against one of the grey limestone walls, in the dense shade of a cypress. He was rarely bothered by other people there ; also, he had a view of the constant stream of people up and down the garden paths. It was, in addition, a good spot for listening to the music in the evenings, at some distance from the irritating bustle inseparable from any large watering-place. And this particular day he had come to his nook, and was lying luxuriously in a bamboo rocking-chair, dozing. Paul had been bathing, and the water and the sunshine had tired him. His Turkish towel and an unfinished novel lay on another rocking-chair at his side. His condition of tense nervous irritation and his headaches had persisted during these first few days at the sanatorium, and the professors were still studying his complicated and unusual ailment. But numerous soundings and tappings had sickened him and wearied him. The house physician, a charming young Party member with the odd name of Jerusalemchik, began to have difficulty in finding him when he was wanted, but she was still patient in her efforts each time to persuade him to go with her to one or another specialist.

He said : " I assure you, comrade, I'm tired of all this. Five times a day I have to go over the same old rigmarole

to them. It's 'Was one of your grandmothers a lunatic?' and 'Did your great-grandfather not suffer from rheumatism?' . . . Damn it all, how do I know what he suffered from, I never saw him. And when they all try to make me confess to having had gonorrhœa or something worse still, I'll confess I feel like giving them a crack over their bald pates sometimes. I say, let a fellow have a breather. Or, I can tell you, if they go on studying me the whole six weeks I shall turn into a public danger."

Dr Jerusalemchik smiled and answered him with a joke, but a few minutes later she slipped her arm in his and was telling him an interesting story, and taking him to the surgeon.

But to-day there was to be no examination. There was an hour till lunch. Then through his half-sleep Paul heard footsteps. He did not open his eyes; he said to himself, "They'll think I'm asleep and go away." Vain hope; the rocker creaked and the somebody sat down. Then a faint odour of scent told him it was a woman sitting beside him. He opened his eyes. The first thing he saw was a dazzlingly white frock and sunburned legs and feet wearing morocco-leather baboushes—then he saw a little head, close trimmed, two large eyes and a row of sharp little teeth. The girl gave him rather a shy smile and said: "I beg your pardon, perhaps I am disturbing you."

Paul said nothing, which was hardly polite; only he was still hoping she would go away. But she said, "Is this your book?"—and she took the book and turned over its pages.

He said, "Yes, it is." There was a whole minute's silence. Then she said: "Comrade, tell me, are you in the Central Committee Sanatorium?"

Paul gave an impatient twitch and said to himself : " What on earth has brought her here ? And that's what they call resting. Now she'll be sure to ask what my complaint is. I shall have to go away." He said rudely : " No, I'm not."

The girl said : " Yet I think I have seen you there."

Paul was already getting up when behind him he heard a contralto voice ask : " Whatever have you hidden yourself away here for, Dora ? " A sun-tanned, plump, fair-haired girl in a sanatorium beach-costume sat down on the edge of the rocking-chair. She shot a momentary glance at Paul, while the other said : " I have seen you somewhere, comrade. Didn't you work once in Kharkov ? "

Paul said : " Yes, I did work once in Kharkov." He was determined to put an end to that interminable catechism. " At what work ? " " Driving a refuse-cart," he snapped, and then could not help starting at the burst of laughter his reply produced. The girl then said : " It would be impossible to say you are particularly polite, comrade."

Thus their friendship began, and Dora Rodkin, member of the Bureau of the Kharkov Town Party Committee, many a time afterwards called to mind the comic beginning of their friendship.

One day, in the garden of the *Thalassa* Sanatorium, where Paul had gone for one of the afternoon concerts, he unexpectedly came on Zharki. And, however strange that may sound, it was through a fox-trot. After a fat mezzo-soprano who accompanied her singing of *The Night was burning with the ecstasy of love*, a man and a

woman tripped on to the stage. The man was dressed in a red opera hat, but otherwise he was half-naked, with only a coloured fringe round his loins, though he had on an immaculately white collar and cuffs and tie. In other words, a stupid parody of a savage. The woman was pretty-pretty, with a great quantity of material on her body, and to the delighted buzz of a crowd of New Economic Policy middlemen with ox-like necks, who were standing behind the arm-chairs and beds of the sanatorium part of the audience, this pair began to slink about the stage in a wriggling sort of fox-trot.

It would have been difficult to imagine a more revolting sight. The well-fed hulk of a man in his idiotic opera hat and the overdressed woman writhed in indecent postures, stuck one to the other. A greasy great body behind Paul began to wheeze, and he had just turned round to go when in the front row, right against the stage, somebody got up and cried out furiously: "Enough of that prostitution! Go to hell with you!" And Paul saw it was Zharki.

The vamping pianist stopped, the fiddle squeaked and became silent, and the two dancers on the stage stopped their wriggling. Then there was an angry scraping of chairs and shouts against the interrupter: "What piggishness, interrupting a turn like that!" "The whole of Europe dances." "Outrageous!" But then, the secretary of the Cherepovetz Ukrainian YCL, a lad named Sergey Zhbanov, put two fingers of each hand into his mouth and whistled shrilly. Others supported him and an onlooker might have thought that the pair of the stage had been blown away. Then the yapping compère of the party, a man like a broken-down lackey,

came and announced that the concert party was going to leave.

Paul went to the front to find Zharki, and that evening the two sat for hours in Paul's room. Zharki was working in the Agitprop of one of the District Committees. Zharki said: "Did you know I am married? Soon we shall have a daughter, or else a son." "Oho," Paul said, "and who may she be?" Zharki took a snapshot out of his pocket and showed Paul. "Recognise her?" It was Anna Borchardt. . . .

A moment later Dora and a group of others came in to see Paul. Zharki closed the door. Dora's eyes lit on his decoration, and she asked Paul: "Your comrade—is he a Party member? Where does he work?" Paul was astonished at her point-blank question, but he explained to her briefly exactly who Zharki was. Dora then said: "Then he can stay. These comrades have just arrived from Moscow, and they will tell us the latest Party news." And she explained: "We decided to hold a sort of closed circle in your room."

Nearly all of those present were Old Bolsheviks—except Paul and Zharki. And Bartashev, a member of the Moscow Party, told them all about the new opposition, led by Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev. Bartashev said: "It is absolutely essential for us to be at our post at such a tense moment, and I am leaving to-morrow."

Three days after that meeting in Paul's room the Sanatorium had emptied prematurely. Paul too, left without staying as long as prescribed.

He was not kept waiting long at the Central Committee of the YCL. He was appointed secretary of the District Committee in one of the industrial districts, and

Trotsky, Zinoviev &

less than a week later the YCL members in that town heard his first speech.

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Late that autumn, the District Party Committee car, with Paul and two other Party workers on their way from one of the outlying districts round the town, skidded into the ditch by the side of the road and overturned. They were all injured. Paul's right knee was crushed. A few days later he was taken to the Kharkov Surgical Institute, and after examining the swollen knee and taking some Röntgen photographs the surgeons decided on an immediate operation. Paul consented. Then the obese professor who headed the consilium said: "So tomorrow morning," and rose to go, and the others followed him out.

A light little room for one. Impeccable cleanliness and that specific hospital smell, which he had long forgotten. He looked about him. A table with snow-white cloth, a stool—that was all. A nurse brought his supper. He refused it. Half-sitting on the bed, he wrote letters. The pain in his leg hindered thought, and he felt no desire to eat. When he had written one quarter of his letter, the cubicle door opened softly, and Paul saw a young woman in white coat and head-covering beside him. In one hand she held a portfolio, in the other a sheet of paper and a pencil. She said: "I am your house physician; I am on duty to-day. I have to fill this in and you will have to answer all sorts of questions."

She smiled sweetly, and the smile made the cross-examination less unpleasant. For a whole hour Paul

told her not only about himself, but also about his great-grandmothers.

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In the operation-room were a number of persons with masked faces. The nickel-plated instruments flashed; there was a narrow table with a huge basin under it. In the background hasty preparations for the operation were going on. Paul looked about him. A sister was laying out lancets and pincettes. His house physician, Dr. Bazhanov, began undoing the dressings on his leg. She said: "Comrade Korchagin, don't look, your nerves might not . . ." And Paul smiled ironically—"Whose nerves?" he said.

A few minutes later his face was covered completely by a mask, and the professor said: "Don't be frightened, we're just going to give you chloroform. Breathe deep through your nose and count." A stifled voice from under the mask answered "Right. In advance I apologise for any unprintable expressions that slip out." The professor could not but smile. Then came the first drops of chloroform, stifling, evil-smelling. Paul heaved a deep sigh and began to count, trying to pronounce clearly. Thus he entered the first act of his tragedy.

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Artem tore the envelope nearly in two and then clumsily unfolded the letter—he was all nerves, he did not know why. His eyes snatched at the first lines, ran over them, drank them in.

"Dear Artem! We see very little of each other, once or twice a year at most. But does the number of

times we meet matter? You say you and your family have moved from Shepetovka to the Kazatin yards, so as to cut well away. I understand you to mean—cut well away from that backward, petty-bourgeois psychology of Stiosha and her family, and all that. It's not easy to change people of Stiosha's type, I am afraid even you won't succeed. You say 'it's difficult to learn when you're getting on in years.' But you aren't doing so badly. You are in the wrong too, in being so stubborn in refusing to give up work in the railway yards, and start work as Chairman of the Town Soviet. Didn't you take part in the fight for Soviet Government? Take up your part in it, then. Accept the town Soviet work to-morrow as ever is, and start at once.

“Now about myself. Things aren't too good. I have begun spending too much time in hospitals, they've cut me open twice and I've lost a good bit of blood and energy, and still there's nobody to tell me it's the end of it.

“I have lost touch with work, I have discovered a new profession called 'patient.' I have put up with really more than enough suffering, and the sum total is—lost the use of my right knee, acquired a number of seams on my body, and finally made a medical discovery—seven years ago I had a blow in the backbone, and now they tell me that that blow may cost me dearly. I am ready to put up with anything if only I can get back to my place in the ranks.

“There is nothing in life more terrible to me than to drop out of the ranks. I can't even bear to think of it. That is why I consent to everything, but there is no improvement so far, on the contrary, the clouds are gathering. After my first operation I went back to work

as soon as I could walk, but it was not long before they brought me back. At the moment I have just reserved my ticket for the Sanatorium *Mainak*, at Eupatoria. I leave to-morrow, Don't fret, Artem, they won't bury me so easily. I've life in me enough for three. We'll do some good work yet, you and I, old brother. Take care of your own health, don't try lifting too much. Repairs cost the Party dearly. We all learn from experience, and study gives us knowledge, but not to waste on hospitals. My love to you, Paul."

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At the same moment that Artem was knitting his thick brows and reading his brother's letter, Paul was saying good-bye to Dr Bazhanov at the hospital. As they shook hands she said : " So you are leaving for the Crimea to-morrow? What are you going to do with yourself till the train? " Paul said : " I'm expecting Comrade Rodkin to come—I'm spending the day and to-night at her home, and she is going to see me off tomorrow."

Dr Bazhanov knew Dora, as Dora had often been to see Paul. She said : " Comrade Korchagin, have you forgotten what we said about your meeting my father before you left? I have told him all about your case, and I should like him to have a look at you. That could be arranged for this evening." Paul agreed immediately, and that evening Irina Bazhanov led him into her father's large surgery.

With his daughter present the famous surgeon gave Paul a meticulous examination. Irina had brought the X-rays and all the analysis reports from the clinic. Paul

could not but notice the sudden pallor of Irina's face after one of her father's lengthy answers in Latin. He watched the professor's huge bald head, and tried to decipher the look in his penetrating eyes, but Bazhanov was impenetrable. When Paul left Bazhanov said good-bye very nicely—he explained that he had to hurry away to a meeting, and would leave it to his daughter to tell Paul his diagnosis.

Paul lay down in Irina Bazhanov's room—a room furnished with exquisite taste, and waited for her to speak. But she did not know how to begin or what to say ; it was very difficult for her. Her father had told her that for the present medicine knew no means of arresting the particular kind of destructive inflammatory process which was going on in Paul's body. He was against surgical intervention. He had said : “ The tragedy of complete paralysis awaits this young man, and we are quite powerless to prevent it.” As doctor and friend she found it impossible to tell Paul everything, and she gave him only part of the truth, and that very carefully expressed. She said : “ Comrade Korchagin, I am sure the Eupatoria mud will bring about a sharp change for the better and that in the autumn you will be able to return to your work.” But when she said that she was forgetting that two very keen eyes were watching her.

Paul said : “ From what you say, far more than from what you avoid saying, I see the great seriousness of my position. Don't forget that I have asked you always to be quite sincere with me. There is no need to hide anything from me, I shall not faint, nor shall I cut my own throat. But I do want to know what I have to expect.”

She fended his probing off with a joke.

That evening Paul did not learn what lay ahead. When they parted Irina Bazhanov said softly : " Never forget, Comrade Korchagin, that I am one of your friends. All sorts of possibilities lie ahead of you. If ever you need my help or my advice, write to me. I shall always do all that I can."

From her window she watched the tall leather-coated man, leaning heavily on a stick, move slowly from the doorway to a prowling phaeton he had hailed.

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Eupatoria again, and southern heat and noisy sun-burned people in gold-embroidered skull-caps. In ten minutes the car brought the passengers to a two-floored building of grey limestone—Sanatorium *Mainak*. The doctor took them to their rooms. He asked Paul : " What sort of permit is yours, comrade," as he brought Paul to room No. 11. Paul said : " The Central Committee of the Ukraine Communist Party." " Then we shall put you together with Comrade Ebner. He is a German and he asked us to find him a Russian companion," the doctor said, and knocked on the door. They heard a badly pronounced " Come in " from inside.

Paul set down his suitcase and turned to the fair-haired man with lively blue eyes, lying on the bed. The German gave him a warm smile. " *Gut' Morgen, Genossen,*" he said, " I ought to say *zdravstvoui*," and he held out a pale, long-fingered hand. A few minutes later Paul was seated on the German's bed and a lively conversation was going on in that international lingo where words

play a secondary part and incomprehensible phrases are helped out by guesses and gesticulation and mimicry—in short, all the tricks of unwritten Esperanto. Paul had already learned that Ebner was a German worker. During the 1923 uprising in Hamburg Ebner had been shot in the hip, and now the old wound had opened again and laid him low. But in spite of his sufferings he maintained good spirits and so earned Paul's immediate respect.

Paul could not have wanted a better companion. He was not one to bewail his lot and talk about his complaints from morning to night. On the contrary, he made you forget your own cares. "Only," Paul said to himself, "what a pity I don't know a scrap of German."

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In a corner of the garden were a few rocking-chairs, a bamboo table and two invalid chairs. Here, after their daily treatment, five patients spent the whole day; the other patients called them the "Executive Committee of the Comintern." In one of the invalid chairs Ebner reclined—in the other, Paul, who was forbidden to use his legs at all. The other three were a ponderous Esthonian named Weimann, a worker of the People's Commissariat of Trade in the Crimea Republic, Martha Laurin, a Lett, a hazel-eyed young woman like an eighteen-year-old girl, and Ledeniev, a tall stalwart figure with hair grizzled at the temples, from Siberia. In fact, there were five nations represented—a German, an Esthonian, a Lett, a Russian and an Ukranian. Both Martha and Weimann spoke German, and Ebner used them as interpreters. Paul and Ebner had been brought

together by sharing a room ; Martha and Weimann had been brought together with Ebner by having a language in common ; the initial link between Ledeniev and Paul was chess.

Until Innokenty Pavlovich Ledeniev arrived Paul had been the sanatorium chess champion ; Paul had won the championship from Weimann after a tense struggle. Weimann, once defeated, lost his phlegmatic attitude towards things, and for a long time he could not forgive Paul for defeating him. Then a tall elderly man appeared, though extraordinarily young-looking for his fifty years, and he challenged Paul to a game. Paul had no suspicion whatever of his danger and calmly opened with the Queen's gambit, to which Ledeniev responded by advancing his centre pawns. As champion Paul had to give every new chess player a game, and there was always a good crowd of onlookers. But as early as the ninth move Paul discovered that Ledeniev's steadily advancing pawns were shutting him in, and he saw he had a dangerous opponent ; he had been foolish to take the game so lightly. And after three hours of tense play, and despite all his efforts and concentration, Paul was obliged to resign. He saw his own defeat before any of those round, and he glanced at his opponent. Ledeniev gave him a kind fatherly smile. Clearly he, too, already saw that it was his game. But Weimann, who was very excited and anxious for Paul to lose, and did not try to hide it, still could not see anything. Paul said : " I always hold out to the last pawn," and Ledeniev nodded in approval at the remark which only he could understand.

In five days Paul had played ten games with Ledeniev ;

seven he lost, two he won, and there was one draw.

Weimann was triumphant. He cried: "Bravo! thank you, Comrade Ledeniev; what a beating you've given him! Serves him right. He'd beaten all us old players, but in the end one of the old-uns has brought him a cropper! Ha-ha-ha!" And he turned to his defeated conqueror and cried: "Well, how do you like losing?"

Paul lost the title of *champion*, but instead of that chess honour, he found a very near, dear friend in Ledeniev. Paul's defeat at chess was no accident. He had only grasped the surface strategy of the game; a merely "good" chess-player had lost to a master who knew all the secrets of the board. The two men found also that they had a date in common: Paul was born the very year that Ledeniev joined the Party. They were two typical representatives, one of the old and the other of the young guard of the Bolsheviks. One had great experience of life and politics, and years of underground work, Tsarist prisons, and then of important State work, behind him; the other had fiery youth and eight years of struggle which were enough to consume many another's whole life. And both old and young had fiery hearts and ruined health.

In the evenings Paul and Ebner's room served as a club. The club was the source of all political news. The evening parties in cubicle No. 11 were lively. A frequent incident was for Weimann to try to relate a dirty story—he was a great lover of them—and then to find himself under fire from Martha and Paul at the same time. Martha had a way of cooling him by subtle biting

to stories

irony ; if that did not succeed Paul stepped in. For example, Martha said one day : " Weimann, you might ask us first, we may not all appreciate your ' humour ' . . ." and Paul then chipped in : " I simply can't understand how a fellow like you . . ." Then Weimann pouted his fleshy lower lip out and his narrow little eyes shifted scornfully from one to the other, and he said : " We shall have to introduce an Inspectorate of Morals at the Central Political Education Department and make Paul chief inspector. I can make allowances for Martha, she has her professional feminine opposition, but here's Paul wants to make himself out an innocent little boy, something like a YCL pet. . . . And anyway, I don't like people teaching their grandmothers. . . ."

After this particular lively passage of arms about Communist ethics the question of dirty stories was submitted to general discussion. Martha translated the various views expressed to Ebner, and Ebner in his mixture of German and broken Russian said : " I agree wid Paul, erotische anecdoten not very good." And Weimann had to retire. He covered his retreat as well as he could with jokes, but from then on he told no more stories of that kind.

Paul first took Martha to be a YCL-er. She seemed to him about nineteen. Imagine his amazement when one day in conversation with her he learned that she had been a Party member since 1917, that she was thirty-one, and that she had been one of the active Lett party members. In 1918 the Whites condemned her to death by shooting, but she was exchanged by the Soviet Government with others for White prisoners, and was now working on the *Pravda* newspaper, and finishing

her university studies at the same time. How the friendship began Paul could never discover, but the little Lett woman, who was a frequent visitor of Ebner's, became an inseparable member of "the five." Old Party member Eglit, another Lett, used to tease her and say: "Steady now, Martochka my girl, what about poor old Ozol back there in Moscow. These goings-on won't do at all!"

Every morning a little before the bell went there was a noisy cock-crow in the sanatorium—Ebner was a first-class mimic. All the efforts of the staff to find the stray cock were fruitless, and this gave Ebner great delight.

After a month Paul suddenly felt bad, and the doctors made him take to his bed. This saddened Ebner very much, as he had taken a great liking to this young Bolshevik who never complained, was always full of life and bubbling over with energy, and had lost his health so early in life. When Martha told Ebner that the doctors predicted a tragic future for Paul, Ebner was very upset.

Throughout his stay at the Sanatorium Paul was forbidden to walk. He contrived to conceal his sufferings from others, and only Martha guessed them—from the unusual whiteness of his cheeks. A week before he left, Paul received a letter from the Ukraine Central Committee, informing him that his leave had been extended two months, and that the sanatorium reported that in the present state of his health it was out of the question for him to return to work. A draft of money accompanied the letter. Paul took this first blow just as he had taken Zhoukhraï's blows when he was learning to box—the blow knocked him down, but he was soon up again.

Then there was an unexpected letter from his mother.

The old lady wrote that not far from Eupatoria, in a small port, lived an old friend of hers, Albina Kützam, whom she had not seen for fifteen years, and that she would very much like Paul to go to see her. This unexpected letter was to play a great part in Paul's life. A week later the whole sanatorium gave Paul a warm send-off at the harbour. Ebner embraced him warmly and kissed him like a brother. Martha had disappeared, so Paul left without saying good-bye to her. And the next morning a phaeton, bearing Paul from the docks, drew up at a tiny house set in a tiny garden, and Paul sent the man who had accompanied him to ask if the Kützams lived there.

There were five in the Kützam family: Albina Kützam, the mother, a fat woman, getting on in years, with heavy, oppressive black eyes and traces of former beauty in her worn features, her two daughters, Lolly and Taya (or Thais), and Lolly's little son and the old man, who was displeasing and fat and resembled a boar; he worked in the co-operative. The younger daughter, Taya, did ordinary labourer's work; the elder, Lolly, had been a typist, but she had recently separated from her husband, who was a bully and a drunkard, and was now unemployed. She spent her days at home, busying herself with her little boy and helping her mother with the house work. There was also a son named George, but at the moment he was away in Leningrad.

The Kützams gave Paul a warm welcome; only the old fellow rewarded Paul with a wary, even malevolent look. Paul patiently told his mother's old friend everything he knew about the Korchagin family's affairs, and at the same time learned what he could about the way she and her family lived.

Lolly was twenty-two. She had auburn hair quite simply bobbed, and a broad, open face, and she immediately became great friends with Paul and gladly introduced him to all the family secrets. From her Paul learned that the old man held the whole family in a despotic, unfeeling grasp, and destroyed any initiative or any show of individual will. He was narrow-minded, limited, and pettifogging. He terrorised the family, and in this way had lost his daughters' affection and earned the profound hatred of his wife after her twenty-five years of struggle against his despotic ways. The daughters took their mother's part, and incessant family quarrels darkened their whole life. Thus the days passed, full of endless injuries and insults of all kinds, petty and large.

George was the second child. Judging by Lolly's account, he was a typical coxcomb, a conceited, bumptious fellow, who cared only for guzzling food and drink and dressing foppishly. As soon as he had finished his high-school course George, being his mother's pet, had demanded money from her to go to Moscow. He said: "I shall go to the university. Lolly can sell her ring and you can sell your frippery. I must have money—it's all the same to me how you raise it." He knew very well that his mother would refuse him nothing, and he took the most shameless advantage of this. His sisters he treated scornfully, with condescension, considering them a lower species; and now the mother still sent him every farthing she could get out of the old man and Taya's earnings as well. As for the beauty himself, he had failed gloriously in his examinations, and now was living the opposite of quietly with his uncle, and terrorising his mother by telegrams for money.

Paul did not see the younger sister till late that evening. The mother went out to the ante-room and whispered to her about the visitor's arrival, and when Taya was introduced to Paul she shook hands shyly and blushed to the tips of her ears. Paul held her strong, calloused hand in his for some seconds. She was eighteen. She was not beautiful, but her large hazel eyes, her finely drawn, somewhat Mongolian eyebrows, the fine line of her nose and her fresh, wilful lips made her attractive ; her working overall was tight for her firm young breasts.

The sisters lived in two diminutive rooms. Taya's room contained a narrow iron bedstead, a chest of drawers covered with numerous knick-knacks, and with a mirror on it, and a score or more of photographs and postcards on the walls. In the window were two flower-pots with a crimson geranium and some pale rose asters. The muslin curtains were held back by a pale-blue ribbon. Lolly teased her and said : " Taya doesn't usually like to let representatives of the masculine sex see her room, but, you see, she makes an exception for you."

The following evening the family was drinking tea in the old folk's part of the house. Taya was in her room and could hear the general conversation. Her father intently stirred the sugar in his tea and kept looking over his spectacles at the visitor sitting in front of him. He declared : " I condemn these modern family laws ; marrying when they like and divorcing when they like. Complete freedom." Then he caught his breath and there was a fit of coughing. When that was over he pointed to Lolly and said : " This young lady, for example. She comes together with her rascally fellow without asking anybody's approval, and then the next

moment it's divorce without asking anyone ; and now we're expected to be delighted to bring up a stranger's offspring. Shameful goings on ! ”

Lolly blushed painfully and hid her eyes from Paul, as they were full of tears. Paul said : “ What, do you think she should have gone on living with that parasite ? ” And he kept his glance fixed on the old man—his eyes flickering with savage little flames.

The old man said : “ She should have thought twice before she married him. ”

Then the mother intervened. She mastered her indignation with difficulty and said : “ Listen, what is the point of starting this sort of talk in front of a stranger ? Find something else to talk about, not that. ” The old man turned sharply towards her and snapped : “ I know what I'm talking about. Since when have I been supposed to bear your reproofs ? ”

That night Paul lay a long time thinking about the Kützams. Chance had brought him among them, and now he was an involuntary participator in a family drama. He wondered how he could help mother and daughters to escape from their bondage. His own difficulties made it hard for him to take any step, his future was full of question marks, and never before had it been so difficult for him to act. There was only one way out, and that was to break up that family—for mother and daughters to leave the old man for good. That was not so simple a matter. He could not take up the organisation of that family revolution, as in a few days he was to leave, never, perhaps, to meet them again. So was he to let things run their own course and avoid disturbing the dust of that cramped little house ?

But the revolting figure of the old man gave him no rest. He concocted a number of plans, yet they all seemed impossible. The following day was a Sunday, and when Paul came back from the town he found Taya at home alone. The others had gone round to visit some relatives. Paul went into her room and, as he was tired, simply sat down. He asked her why she never went out to stroll or to find amusement. She answered in a low voice: "I just don't want to." He then recalled his night thoughts and decided to tell her what he had been turning over in his mind.

He went straight to the point, so as to be able to finish before they were interrupted. He said: "Listen, Taya, you and I can speak plainly and intimately to one another"—he had plunged straight to the familiar Russian "thou"—"what do we two want with all this Oriental ceremony? I shall soon be leaving you. I've made your acquaintance at the very worst time, just when I've got in a muddle myself, or things would take a different course. If this were a year ago we'd all clear out of here together. There's work for workers such as you and Lolly. You've just got to cut away from your old father, nobody'll ever get daylight into his head. But we can't do that as things are. I myself don't know yet what's going to become of myself, so I'm disarmed, so to speak. So what's to be done? I'll try to get taken back at my job. The doctors have said all sorts of crazy things about me, and the comrades want me to go on taking cures indefinitely. Well, we'll put all that straight first. . . . I'll then get into touch with my mother, and we'll see then how we are to end all this business. But whatever happens, I won't leave you as you are. Only there's one thing

Taya, my girl, all of you, and you in particular, will have to turn your lives inside-out. Have you the strength to do that, or the desire ? ”

She raised her head and answered softly : “ I have the desire, I don't know whether I have the strength.”

Paul understood her hesitation. He said : “ Taya, my dear, don't fret about it. We'll see to that, once you have the desire. Now tell me another thing, are you really very tied to your family ? ”

This caught her unawares, and she did not answer at once. Then she said : “ I am very sorry for mother. Father has bullied her her whole life, and now there's George, and I am very sorry for her . . . although she doesn't like me as much as she does George. . . .”

They said a lot to each other that Sunday, and shortly before the others came home Paul jokingly said : “ What a funny thing it is the old man never married you off to anyone ! ”

She made a frightened gesture and said : “ I shall never marry. Lolly's been a lesson to me. Not for anything in the world.”

Paul smiled broadly. He said : “ Is this declaration supposed to be a declaration for life ? And if some dashing lad turns up, the right lad, I mean—what then ? ”

“ Not even then. They're all the right lads while they're after you.”

Paul laid a hand on her shoulder to calm her. He said : “ Very well. Unmarried life, too, isn't such a bad thing. Only I will say this, you're a bit hard on all us young fellows. Lucky you don't suspect me of courtship yet, or I'd get it hot,” and in friendly fashion he stroked the girl's arm with his cool hand. She said softly : “ Your sort look

for different wives from the likes of me. What use are we to you ? ”

.

A few days later the train was bearing Paul towards Kharkov. Taya, Lolly and their mother and her sister, Roza, had seen him off at the station. When they said good-bye Albina made him promise not to forget the children, but to help them get out of the hole they were in. They parted like blood relations, and Taya's eyes were wet. For a long way he could distinguish Lolly's waving handkerchief and Taya's striped blouse.

In Kharkov he stayed with his friend Peter Novikov—he somehow did not want to be a bother to Dora. When he felt rested he drove to the Central Committee, and there he waited till Akim came in. As soon as they were alone he asked to be appointed to work, but Akim shook his head definitely, and said : “ Out of the question, Paul ! We have the finding of the Medical Commission and the Party Central Committee which says : “ In consideration of the serious condition of Paul Korchagin's health he must be sent to the Neuropathological Institute for treatment, and is on no account to return to work.”

Paul said : “ Oh, these doctors, what won't they say ; look here, I'm asking you to find me somewhere *to work* ! What the devil's the use of all this slopping round the clinics.”

Akim would not listen to him. He said : “ We simply cannot go against this finding. Look here, my dear Paul, can't you see it's for your good too.”

Paul was so insistent that Akim could not resist him, and in the end agreed to find him a job, and the next

day he was already at work in the secret section of the Central Committee secretariat. He had a notion that all he needed to do was start work again and all his lost energy would come back to him. But from the very first day he saw he was mistaken. He spent the whole eight hours sitting in his office without a break, simply because he had not the strength to go down three floors to meals—he felt constant numbness in one limb or other, leg or arm. At times his whole body refused to work, and he felt he had a temperature. Then one day when he should have left for work he found he could not get up at all, and while the fit was passing off he went through agony, seeing that he was going to be a whole hour late. In the end it came to being reprimanded for constant lateness, and then he saw that it was the beginning of the most terrible thing in his life—being incapacitated for active work.

Twice Akim helped him out by moving him to other work, but in the end the inevitable happened, and before two months were up he was bedridden again. Then he remembered what Irina Bazhanov had said to him when they had parted and he wrote to her. She came to see him the very same day, and from her he learned the most important thing—that it was not obligatory for him to go to a clinic. He tried to be funny about it. He said: “So I’m getting on so well I am not worth treating.” The joke fell rather flat.

As soon as he felt a little stronger again he reported to the Central Committee, but this time Akim was adamant. He definitely insisted on Paul’s going to a clinic. Paul said in a dull voice: “On no account. What’s the use of it? I know that from a good source. All I’m

good for is to draw a pension and retire. But that won't work with this lad. You won't be able to prevent me working. I am only twenty-four, and I'm not going to spend the rest of my days with a disabled pensioner's book, travelling round the hospitals knowing all the time that it's no good. You have got to give me a job which I can manage. I can work at home or live in some sort of institution. . . . The only thing is, don't make me a pen-pusher putting numbers on papers. The work I want must satisfy me that I'm not out of things."

His voice was troubled and clearly insistent, and Akim was aware of the feelings of this young man who until so recently had still been all fire. He grasped the tragedy of Paul's life, and knew that for one like Paul who had given his whole life to the Party there was something frightful in a complete break, in giving up the struggle and going to the rear, and so he made up his mind to do all that he could. He said: "Very well, Paul, only don't worry about it. There's a meeting of the Secretariat to-morrow. I'll raise the question. I promise you I'll do all I can."

With difficulty Paul got to his feet and gave Akim his hand. "Akim," he said, "can you conceive of life driving me into a corner and crushing me to a pancake? So long as my heart beats"—and with sudden strength he seized Akim's hand and pressed it against his own chest, so that Akim could feel the rapid, feeble, beats—"so long as that beats, you won't detach me from the Party. Nothing but death shall make me inactive. And don't forget that, old boy."

Akim did not answer. He knew that this was no bombast, but the cry of a badly wounded warrior. He

understood that people like Paul were incapable of speaking or feeling in any other way.

Two days later Akim told Paul that there was the possibility of responsible work in the editorial offices of a central periodical, but that it was necessary to find out whether he was really capable of work on "the literary front." The Editorial Committee gave Paul a preliminary interview. The Assistant-Editor, a woman with long experience of illegal pre-revolutionary work, and a member of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukraine, put a number of questions to him.

"Your education, Comrade?"

"Three years elementary school."

"No Party political courses?"

"None!"

"Well, as far as that goes, there are good journalists made without it. Comrade Akim has spoken in your favour. We can give you work which won't necessitate your being here, work to do at home, and altogether we'll do what we can to fit things in. But the work I have in mind demands wide knowledge. Especially in the field of literature, and language too."

All this told Paul defeat was ahead. After half an hour's chat it became clear that he knew too little, and when he wrote an article the Assistant Editor, with her red pencil, crossed out three-quarters of it for stylistic faults, and a fair number of spelling mistakes too. She said: "Comrade Korchagin, you show great promise. If you work hard you stand a chance of being a literary worker, but at present your writing is somewhat illiterate. Your article shows that you do not know Russian properly. That is

not surprising, since you have had no opportunity of learning. I am most sorry to have to say we cannot make use of you. I repeat, you show great promise. If your article were worked up, without changing the content at all, it would be first-class. But what we need is people who can work up other people's articles."

Paul got to his feet, leaning on his stick. His right eyebrow was twitching. He said: "Well, I really agree with you. How can I be a literary worker? I used to be a good stoker, and then a fair fitter. I used to be able to ride pretty well, and stir up the YCL, but on your front I'm an unsuitable lout." And he bid her good day and went out.

At the bend in the passage he nearly fell. A woman with a portfolio under her arm helped him. "Comrade, what is the matter?" she cried, "you're so pale."

After a few seconds he came round completely, and then gently dismissed the stranger and went out, bearing heavily on his stick.

From that day Paul went downhill. There could be no thought of work. More and more often he had to spend the whole day in bed. The Central Committee gave him release from work and asked the Central Social Insurance to grant him a pension. He received the pension and his ticket as an invalid at the same time. The Central Committee made him a special grant.

Then he received a letter from Martha, inviting him to stay with her and rest. Even if he had not received her invitation, Paul was thinking of going to Moscow, with the hazy hope of finding work in the All-Union Central Committee; that is to say, hoping to find work which required no movement. But in Moscow, too, all they did

was advise him to undergo treatment, and promise to place him in a good hospital. He refused the offer.

Nineteen days slipped by in the flat Martha shared with her friend Nada Peterson. Paul was often alone all day, as both Martha and Nada were out early, and home late. Paul did nothing but read all day—Martha had a great number of books ; the two girls were home in the evenings, and some of their friends would come in.

Then there were letters from that Black Sea port—the Kützams inviting him there. Life was drawing its knots tighter—they were still hoping for his help. And one morning Paul was gone from the quiet flat in Goussiatnik Alley, and the train was speeding him to the south, towards the sea, away from the damp, rainy autumn towards the warm shores of the southern Crimea.

He watched the telegraph posts flash by. His brows were firmly knit and there was a deep stubbornness in his dark eyes.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

BELOW him the sea broke on the chaotic pile of broken rock, and the dry sea wind blowing from far-away Turkey caressed his face. The harbour was an irregular bow in the coast, protected from the sea by a breakwater of iron girders and concrete. The mountain ridge fell away to the sea at that point, and the little toy houses of the town were scattered far up the mountain side.

In the old park, on the outskirts of the town, it was quiet. The neglected paths were overgrown with grass, and the yellowed maple leaves, brought down by autumn, were slowly falling on them. An old cabby, Persian by origin, had brought Paul there ; and as he had helped his strange fare dismount he had been unable to restrain himself and had said : " What do you come here for ? No girls here, no theatre. What you will do here, I do not see. Let me drive you back, Tovarish." But Paul paid him off and the old man went.

There was not a soul to be seen. He found a seat over an arm of the sea and sat down and let the now feeble rays of the sun fall on his face. He had come here to this silence to think out what he was coming to and what to do ; it was high time to consider his position and make up his mind what he was going to do.

On this, his second, visit, the conflict in the Kützam family had come to a head. When the old man heard he had come he had been furious and there had been a terrible row in the house. The leadership of the revolt

against the old tyrant naturally fell to Paul. The old man suddenly met with energetic resistance on the part of his wife and daughters, and from the first day of Paul's visit the house was split into two hostile camps. The door leading to the old folk's part was nailed up and one of the tiny side rooms was let to Paul as a lodger. The old man collected the rent weekly in advance. He soon appeared to be reconciled, seeing that his daughters had declared their independence and would no longer make a call on his purse. For diplomatic reasons the mother stayed with her husband. The father never once showed his nose in the other part of the house. He wished to avoid any meeting with the detested intruder, though he made up for it by puffing and blowing about like a locomotive whenever he was out in the garden, or the yard.

Prior to working for the Co-operative the **old man** had had two trades—those of shoemaker and carpenter, and he still used his free time to earn a little at them, with a workshop fitted up in an outhouse. Shortly, in order to annoy the lodger, he moved his bench right under his window and revelled in furiously knocking in nails, knowing very well that by doing so he was hindering Paul in his reading. He used to wheeze to himself: "Just you wait, I'll smoke you out of here. . . ."

Far away on the horizon the smoke of a steamer hovered like a dark trail of cloud. There was a flight of sea-gulls shrieking as they swooped seawards. Paul took his head between his hands and fell into gloomy thought. His whole life flashed before him, from childhood to the past few days. Had he spent those twenty-four years of his life badly or well? He went through the years one after another, like a dispassionate judge,

testing, and he had great satisfaction in admitting to himself that he had not lived that life so very badly. It had been full of mistakes, foolish mistakes; youthful mistakes, though mostly mistakes of ignorance; but the principal thing was that during the burning days of struggle he had not slept, he had known how to do his bit in the iron fight for power, and there were a few drops of his blood too, on the red standard of the Revolution.

Moreover, he had not given up till he had been obliged to. But now he was stricken down and obliged to fall out of the front line and had only one thing left—hospitals at the base. He recalled a bullet mowing down a man near Warsaw, and the man falling right under the hoofs of a horse. The comrades then had hastily bound up the wound and handed their fellow over to the Red Cross men, and hurried on against the enemy. The squadron had not been able to stop its advance because of the loss of one fighter. The struggle for the great idea was like that and must be like that. It is true there were exceptions. He had seen machine-gunners without legs sitting on the waggonettes carrying their guns, and they were the most terrible fighters the enemy met, their machine-guns swept death and destruction, and in iron endurance and sharpness of eye they were the pride of the regiments. But they were rare, men like that.

What was he to do now, smashed up, without hope of ever returning to the ranks? Had he not managed to get Irina Bazhanov to admit to him that worse lay ahead? What was he to do? The question, unsolved, was like a menacing black hole in front of him. Why live at all, now that he had lost the thing most dear to him—the

ability to carry on the struggle? What use was his life going to be now and in his joyless future? What was he to do with it? Just eat and drink and breathe? Just be a helpless witness of the forward progress of his comrades in the struggle? Be a burden to his comrades? Should he then scrap his body, now that it had betrayed him? A bullet in his heart—and have done with it! He had not lived so badly, so he ought to be able to end it in decent time. Who would condemn a warrior who did not wish to drag out the misery of it? And his hand went to his pocket and fingered the smooth metal of his Browning, and his fingers made practised movements—taking the butt in their grip. Slowly he drew the revolver out of his pocket. He said to himself out loud: “Who would ever have thought that you would come to this?”

The muzzle was staring him scornfully in the face. Then he put the revolver on his knees and swore savagely. He said to himself: “Paper heroics, my boy! Any fool at any time can kill himself. That is the most cowardly and the easiest way out. Put that revolver away and never let anybody know you thought of it. Find out how to live even when life has become unbearable. Make your life useful.”

He got up and went to the road. A peasant on his way down from the hills gave him a lift in his ox waggon to the town. When he got there he bought a local paper at one of the street corners. In the paper he read of a meeting of the town Party members in the *Demyan Biedny Club*. He did not get home that night till late. At the meeting he had, without knowing it, made his last public speech.

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Taya was not asleep. She was worried because Paul

was out so long. He had little to say about himself, but she sensed that he was going through an unhappy period. The clock in her parents' room struck two when she heard the gate. She threw a jacket over her shoulders and went out to unlock the door. Lolly was asleep in her room, muttering in her sleep. Taya was delighted to see Paul, and when he had come inside she whispered: "I was beginning to be quite worried about you." He whispered back: "Taya, my dear, nothing will happen to me till I die. What, Lolly's asleep, is she? Do you know, I don't want to sleep at all. I want to tell you something of what's happened to-day. Let's sit in your room, or we shall waken Lolly."

Taya hesitated. What, sit and talk during the night? And if her mother knew, what would she think? Yet she could not tell him that, or he would be hurt. Whatever could he want to tell her? But even while she thought about it she led the way to her room.

When they had sat down in the dark room, so near each other that she could feel his breathing, he said in a hushed voice: "This is what I want to talk about, Taya. I've been in a fog some time—whether to go on living or not; but to-day I held a meeting of my personal *Political Bureau* and passed a resolution of great importance. Don't be surprised at my telling you all this." And he told her all he had experienced during recent months and much of what had gone through his mind sitting in the park outside the town.

"So that's the position. Now I'm coming to the most important part. This business in your family is only just beginning. You've got to get out of here into the fresh air, as far away as possible from this stagnant hole. Got to begin life over again. And since I've got mixed up in the

scrum let's go through with it. Both your personal life and mine to-day are pretty blank. I've made up my mind to set fire to it all. Do you understand me? Now, will you be my partner, my wife?"

So far Taya had heard him with great excitement, yet at the final word she started, so unexpected was it. He said: "I'm not asking for an answer to-day, Taya. You think it all over well first. You're puzzled to find somebody making a suggestion like that without all the usual flummery of courtship. But what's the use of all that humbug, here's my hand, look, here. . . . If you take it that I'm deadly serious you won't be far out. I've a lot I can give you, and so you have to give me. I'm clear about it all—our union is to last until you grow into a real person, one of *ourselves*, and I'll see to that, or I'm not worth a brass farthing. Till then we must stick to each other. And when you grow up, you will be free of all obligations. Who knows, things may turn out so that I'm a complete wreck, and you must know that if that happens I shall never want to tie you down." Then, after a short pause, he said in a voice of great warmth and tenderness: "I'm offering you my friendship and love here and now." And all the time he kept her fingers in his hand, and was as calm as if she had already said "yes."

"You won't deceive me, you won't throw me up the moment you get tired of me?"

"Words, Taya, are no guarantee. You can only believe—believe that folk of my stamp don't let their friends down." He added bitterly: "unless they let me down!"

She said: "I won't say anything to-day, this is all so unexpected."

He rose to his feet. "Bed now, Taya," he said. "It'll soon be light."

He went to his own room and lay down without undressing. He fell asleep the moment his head touched the pillow.

On the window table in his room were piles of books from the Party library, a pile of newspapers and a number of note-books full of material. There were a bed supplied by her mother, two chairs, and on the door which led to Taya's room, a huge map of China pricked out with little black and red flags. Paul had secured the local Party Committee's assurance that they would keep him supplied with books, and he soon began to receive large bundles. Lolly used to be astounded to see him reading and making notes all day, from early morning to supper, with only short breaks for meals, which Paul and the two sisters took in Lolly's room. During supper he used to tell them of what he had been reading.

This was the first time for eight years that Paul had so much free time and not a single duty, and he read with the ravenous thirst of a novice, and sat over his books as much as eighteen hours a day.

It is impossible to say what effect that would have had on his health had Taya not said laconically one day: "I have shifted the chest-of-drawers, so the door between your room and mine can be opened. If you want to see me about anything you can get straight in without going through Lolly's room." Paul's face lit up and Taya gave him a glad smile—their union was concluded.

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The mother began to notice the hidden happiness in

Taya, and there was now a delicate darker shade under her eyes, so bright otherwise from the fire inside—sleepless nights were showing their effect. Also the sound of the guitar and Taya singing began to be heard in the little house more often. But the woman awakened in her suffered, because their love was furtive. She used to start at the least rustle, always thought she could hear her mother coming. She was very troubled too as to what she should say if she was asked why she now bolted the other door to her room at night. Paul saw all this and said to her tenderly, reassuringly: "What are you afraid of? After all, when you come to look at it, you and I are the masters here. Sleep, and don't worry. Nobody else has a right to intrude on our life together." And she pressed her cheek against his chest and, reassured, fell asleep with her arms round her loved one. He lay listening to her breathing a long time, without stirring, afraid of breaking her peaceful sleep. He was full of profound tenderness towards this girl who had entrusted her life to him.

The first to learn the cause of the light in Taya's eyes was her sister, and from that day the two were estranged. Then the mother learned—or, more accurately, guessed. She was immediately antagonistic. She had not expected that of Paul Korchagin. One day she said to Lolly: "He is no match for our Taya. What will come of it all?" She began to be full of uneasy thoughts, but yet she could not bring herself to have it out with Paul.

Then young folk from the town began to visit Paul, and the little room was sometimes crowded out. The old man heard a noise like a swarm of bees—sometimes singing too, choruses, Crimean songs and Paul's favourite airs. These were meetings of a circle of the Workers' Party

Group which had been entrusted to Paul after his letter demanding a propaganda job. And so his days passed. Once again he had laid both hands to the wheel, and life, after a number of unexpected tacks, was once more set upon its proper course. Paul was dreaming now of getting back to active Party work through study and through literature.

But life brought one hindrance after another, and he met them all, alarmed only about one thing—how long were they to delay him in his progress towards his aim? One day, the unsuccessful student George Kützam turned up from Moscow, with a wife, and without any hesitation he took his father's side, and together with his wife's family—which was anti-Soviet—began to stir up trouble, endeavouring at any cost to get Paul out of the house and separate him and Taya.

A fortnight after George's return Lolly got work in one of the neighbouring districts, and moved there with her mother and little son. Paul and Taya then moved to a little seaside town a considerable distance away.

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Artem rarely heard from his brother, but whenever he found an envelope with the familiar angular writing on his desk in the town Soviet, he lost his usual calm as he read it through. And once again, as he opened the envelope, he said to himself with grudging tenderness: "Oh, Paul, little brother Paul. If only we were near one another, how welcome your advice would be on all sorts of matters."

Paul wrote: "Dear Artem, I want to tell you about myself; I don't think I write to anybody as I do to you, you know me and will understand every word. In this

struggle of mine on the health front, life's pressing me pretty hard these days. Blow after blow. I scarce get up after one when there's another more merciless than the first. The worst of all is that I'm powerless to do anything. First I lost the use of my left arm. That was a blow, but then my legs got me down, and whereas before I could scarcely move about—in the space of my room only—now I have great difficulty even in getting from bed to table. But the worst is that there's almost certainly more to come. I simply don't know how it will end.

“I never leave the house now ; from my window I can only see a corner of sea. Is a more gruesome tragedy possible than the union in one man of a treacherous body which refuses to obey him, and a Bolshevik heart—a will which never ceases to draw me towards you all, to labour, to the active army advancing now down the whole front, to where the wall of men of steel is forging ahead ?

“I still believe I shall get back into the ranks, that my bayonet will join the others in the storming party. I cannot but believe, and I have no right not to. Ten years the YCL and the Party educated me in the art of resistance, and the words of our leader relate to me too : ‘The fortress does not exist which Bolsheviks could not take.’

“My life now is one of study. Books, books, and still more books. I have already done a great deal, Artem. I have worked through the whole of our classical literature, and I have gone through the first course of the Communist Correspondence University and passed. In the evenings I hold a circle of Party youth, and I get my connection with practical Party work through those comrades. Then there is my dear Taya, her growth and

her progress, well, yes, and her love, and her tender care for me too. We get on splendidly together. Our budget is simple and plain—thirty-two roubles a week, my pension and her earnings. She is following my road to the Party; she worked for a time as domestic servant, and now she is dish-washer in a restaurant (there are no factories in this town).

“The other day Taya proudly showed me her first delegate’s mandate, for the women’s section. It was more than a mere scrap of cardboard to her. I follow the birth of a new person in her and do all I can to help. The time will come for a large factory and a workers’ collective to do the formal shaping. So long as we live here she is following the only feasible path. . . . Your loving brother, Paul.”

Life followed its usual course, with Taya at work and Paul studying. He had only just begun that work with a Party circle when a new misfortune came stealthily upon him—paralysis deprived him altogether of the use of his legs. Only his right arm now was left. He bit his lips till they bled when, after long completely vain efforts, he understood that he really was incapable of walking ever again. Taya showed enormous courage in concealing her despair and the bitterness of being impotent to help him. He smiled as if guilty of something and said: “Taya, darling, there’s nothing for it but you and I to divorce. There was nothing in our agreement about this. My lass, I’m going to think it over very seriously to-day.”

She would not listen to him. It was difficult to restrain her sobs. She crushed her head against his chest and the sobs she stifled shook her.

Then Artem learned of his brother's new misfortune and wrote to their mother, and she gave up everything else and went down to see Paul. Mother, Paul and Taya now lived all three together ; the elder woman got on very well with her daughter-in-law. And Paul continued his studies.

One evening, during a rainy winter, Taya came home with news of a new triumph—she had been elected to the Town Soviet. From that day Paul began to see less of her. Taya used to go straight from the sanatorium kitchen where she washed dishes to the Women's Section of the Soviet, and she more often than not did not arrive home till late at night, and tired out, though full of things to tell Paul about. The day was drawing near when she would be made a Party candidate, and she was preparing for it with great excitement.

But then came a fresh misfortune. The disease was carrying on its work. Paul's right eye became inflamed, burning with intense pain, and the inflammation passed to the left eye too. For the first time in his life Paul realised what blindness meant—everything in the room was draped in black muslin. Now a terrible obstacle, terrible because seemingly insurmountable, had crept across his road and was barring further progress. There was no limit to the despair of his mother or his wife, but he met it with icy calm and said determinedly to himself : " I must wait and see. If it really does turn out that there is no possibility whatsoever of making further progress, if all I have done so far to find a way of doing some work is cancelled by blindness, and it is out of the question for me to re-join the ranks of my Party—then suicide is the only thing."

He wrote letters to his friends, and they wrote to him,

enjoining him to be firm and continue his struggle. It was during those terrible days that Taya, full of happiness and excitement, came home one evening and said : " Paul, darling, I am a Party candidate now."

And Paul, as he heard her story of how the cell had accepted this new comrade, recalled his own first steps in the Party and he took her hand and squeezed it hard and said : " So, Comrade Korchagin, you and I now constitute a Party fraction !"

The next day he wrote to the secretary of the District Party Committee asking him to call. That same evening a mud-spattered car drew up and Wolmer, a middle-aged Lett with full beard, was shaking Paul's hand. " Well, how's life ? Now what does this shirking mean ? Up you get, sir, we'll send you into the country at once," and he laughed.

The secretary of the District Committee spent two hours with Paul, and even forgot that he had a council meeting that evening. He strode up and down the room listening to Paul's excited words, and at last he said : " Now you just drop this talk about the circle. What you need is rest, and then we'll find out about your eyes. Things may not be past repair yet. Perhaps you ought to make a trip to Moscow ; now what have you to say to that ? Think it over."

Paul interrupted him. He said : " Comrade Wolmer, what I need is people, live people. I cannot live alone. I need human contact more than ever I did. Send me young folk, the greener the better. In your villages they're turning very left, aiming right away at communes ; collective farms are too straight-laced for them. Why even the YCL will run before it walks if you don't keep an eye on it. I used to be the same, I know."

Wolmer stopped short. "Now how do you know about all that? Why, the news has only come in from the District to-day?"

Paul smiled. "Have you forgotten all about my little wife, comrade? You accepted her yesterday in the Party. Well, *she* told me."

"What, Korchagin, the kitchen-maid? So that's your wife, is it? Ha, that's news to me. . . ." And, after a moment of thought, Wolmer clapped his hand to his forehead and said: "I know whom we'll send you, why, Liov Berseniev! You couldn't find a better comrade. You're much the same in temperament, you two. You two together would make a two-phase high-tension transformer. You see, I used to be an electric fitter, so that's why I go in for comparisons like that. Why, Liov can fix you up a radio set, he's a radio professor. Believe it or not, I sometimes stay round at his place till two in the morning listening in. Even got my wife suspicious—asked me where I was spending my nights, called me an old rogue."

Paul smiled and asked: "And who is this Berseniev?"

Wolmer was tired of running up and down. He sat down and said: "Berseniev is our notary-public, but he's as much a notary as I am a ballerina. Not so long ago he was a great worker. Been in the revolutionary movement since 1912, and in the Party since October. In the Civil War worked in army-corps dimensions—ran the revolutionary tribunal in the Second Cavalry: ironed out the White lice together with Zhloba in the Caucasus. Then a time at Tzaritzyn, then on the Southern Front, then in the Far East, working the Supreme Military Tribunal of the Republic. Regular fire-eater. Then TB got the lad down. So from the Far East he comes

here. Here in the Caucasus he worked as chairman of a provincial court, then vice-chairman of a district court. Then his lungs got him right down, and with the threat of it doing him in altogether they got him here. That's how we got such an extraordinary notary public. It's an easy job, and, well, he's alive. Then on the sly they let him have a cell, then got him into the District Committee, then they foisted the political school on him, then work in the Caucasian Committee, and he's unfailingly member of any important commission on any tangled or ticklish question. Apart from all that he's a great man with the sporting gun, and then he's a passionate radio fan, and although he's only got one lung, it's difficult to believe he's not perfectly fit, he's just bursting with energy. I'm sure he'll die somewhere hurrying from the District Committee to the courts."

Paul cut in with a sharp question : " But why have you put so much work on to him ? He works harder here than he did before he came."

Wolmer screwed up his eyes and cocked his head at Paul and said : " Now if we give you a circle and some other job, Liov will be saying : ' Why do you put so much work on him ? ' " And himself he said : " Better a year working furiously than five gaping in a hospital condition. Clearly we shall be able to spare our folk only when we have constructed Socialism."

Paul said : " That is true. I too vote for a year of life against five of gaping, but even so we are sometimes criminally spendthrift of what forces we have. And I have now come to see that this is not so much heroism as something elemental and irresponsible in us. I have only now come to realise that I had no right to disregard my health so badly. I have found out that it was not heroic

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at all. Very likely I should have lasted a few more years had I not been such a Spartan. In short, the infantile disease of leftism is one of the basic dangers of my situation."

Wolmer was thinking: "That's what you say now, but if you were on your feet again you'd forget it all. . . ." But he said nothing.

Two days later, in the evening, Liov Berseniev came to see Paul. It was midnight before he left. Liov left his new friend feeling he had met a brother whom he had lost some years previously. The next morning there were men climbing about the roof fixing up an aerial, while Liov was doing the inside fitting and relating interesting yarns from his experience. Paul could not see him, but from Taya's account he knew that Liov was fair-haired, had light blue eyes, was well built and nervously quick in his movements, that is to say, just as Paul imagined him from the first moment of their meeting.

When dusk fell three valves glowed, and Liov ceremoniously handed Paul earphones. There was a chaos of sounds in the ether. There were port morse telegraphs like birds twittering, and somewhere—evidently near at hand—the sparking of a ship's instrument. Then out of the rustle of sounds and cracklings the condenser and coils found and brought louder a quiet confident voice saying: "Hello, hello, this is Moscow calling." And the little apparatus with its aerial caught sixty world stations. The life from which Paul had been cut off then burst in through the membrane of the phones and he felt its tremendous breathing. When Berseniev, who was very tired, saw Paul's eyes light up, he smiled.

All were asleep in the great house. Taya was restlessly muttering in her sleep. She did not get home till late, tired and chilled through. Paul saw little of her. The further she went into her work, the rarer became her free evenings, and Paul recalled what Berseniev had once said : “ If a Bolshevik’s wife is a Party comrade they rarely see one another. That’s two things to the good, as they don’t get tired of one another, and have no time to quarrel ! ”

What could he say against it? He should have expected it, that was all. There had been days when Taya had given him her every evening. There had been more warmth and tenderness then than now. But *then* she had only been his friend and his wife, and *now* she was his pupil and his Party comrade. And he understood that the further she went on the Party path, the less hours would be his. That he accepted as something that had to be.

He was granted his circle, and once again the house was a-buzz in the evenings. Those hours Paul spent with the younger folk were for him a new source of courage. The rest of his time his mother had difficulty in getting the earphones off his head and feeding him. Radio was giving him something that blindness had taken away—the possibility of studying, and in that ceaseless urge he was able to forget the agonising pains which continued to consume his body, able to forget the inflammation in his eyes and all the harshness and cruelty which life was showing him.

When the aerial transmitted to him the news from Magnitostroi of what his young comrades had achieved, those who had taken the place of his own generation, he was deeply happy. He pictured the blizzard, savage

as a flock of she-wolves, and the terrible cold of the Urals. The wind howled and through the night, smothered by snow, that detachment of the second generation of YCL-ers, in the blaze of arc-lamps, roofed the huge buildings, and thus rescued from snow and cold the first chains in a factory combine of world dimensions. The timber job on which the first generation of the Kiev YCL had fought the snow seemed a trifling thing now.

The country had grown up, people had grown up.

And on the Dnieper the waters broke through steel barriers and poured in and drowned machines and human beings ; and once again it was the YCL that rushed to meet the elements and, after a fierce battle lasting two days, without sleep or rest, succeeded in forcing the rebellious element back into its steel jacket. In that grandiose struggle the new generation of the YCL marched ahead, and, among the heroes, Paul with delight heard one familiar name—Ignat Pankratov.

YCL

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THEY spent a few days living in the store-room of the archives of one of the Government departments—the head of the archives was helping to get Paul into a special clinic. Only now did Paul come to realise that it was a comparatively simple and easy matter to be courageous while he had good health and youth, but that when life was crushing you down it was a matter of honour. Taya said : “ Paul, before we left I had a letter from mother in which she said that father has been dismissed from the Co-op and is now working as a carpenter in some building work.” Paul gave a slight start.

And now a year and a half had gone by—eighteen months of indescribable suffering. Professor Auerbach at the clinic told Paul quite definitely that he could not restore his sight. In the distant future, when the inflammatory process had ceased, he might attempt an operation on the pupils. To reduce the inflammation he proposed surgical intervention. Paul’s consent was asked, and he agreed to let the surgeons do what they thought fit to him.

During the hours spent on operating tables, while his neck was cut about and his para-thyroid gland was being removed, death, on three occasions, brushed him with her black wing. But life was tough in Paul. Every time, after frightful hours of suspense, Taya found her loved one deadly white, but alive, and as quietly loving as ever. He said : “ Lass, don’t you fret yourself about me, they won’t

do me in so easily. I'm going to live a little longer and play the fool, if only to spite the arithmetical calculations of these learned sawbones. They are all quite right as far as my health goes, but they're badly mistaken in making me out a hundred per cent incapacitated. We'll see about that yet."

Paul had by now firmly decided on the road by which he would return to the ranks of those who were building a new civilisation.

Winter had ended and spring had thrown open the plastered-up winter windows, and Paul Korchagin, bloodless, recovered from the last operation, came to the realisation that he could not bear to stay in hospital any longer. Living so many months surrounded by human suffering, amid groans and the prayers of the condemned, was incomparably harder than bearing his own pains. When a further operation was suggested he answered coldly and sharply, "No more. I've had enough. I've given a good part of myself to science, and I want what's left for myself."

That same day Paul wrote to the Central Committee asking for assistance to remain in Moscow, where his life companion was working; for, as he said, there was no point in further wanderings. This was the first time he had turned to the Party for help, and the Moscow Soviet responded to his letter by giving him a room. He left hospital consumed by one desire—never to return there again. The humble room in a quiet alley off Kropotnik Street seemed the height of luxury to him, though often, as he fell asleep at night, he still could not believe that he had left the hospital behind him. Taya was now

a full Party member. She was diligent in her work, and, in spite of all the tragedy of her personal life, she did not fall behind the other shock workers. The group in which she was working singled out that taciturn young woman for their confidence: she was elected to the Factory Committee. Pride in his companion, who had now become a full Bolshevik, did much to lighten Paul's heavy lot.

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He had a visit one day from Irina Bazhanov, who had come to Moscow on business, and they had a long chat. Paul told her with great fire of the road by which in the distant future he intended to get back into the ranks of Party workers. She noticed the silver streaks at his temples and said softly: "I can see you have gone through a great deal, but still you have not lost your unquenchable enthusiasm. What could be better? It is fine to hear you have made up your mind to begin the work you have been preparing for these five years. But how will you manage?"

Paul smiled and reassured her. "To-morrow a comrade is bringing me a frame cut out of pasteboard. I can't write without a guide. One line runs into another. It took me a long time to find the way out, and now I have it—the board with slots cut in it will keep my pencil on a straight course. It isn't easy to write when you don't see what you have written, but it is not impossible. I am sure of that. For a long time I could do nothing, but now I have begun to write more slowly, and make each letter carefully, and it turns out pretty well."

He began work. His idea was to write a story about

Kotovski's heroic Cavalry Division. The title came of itself, *Children of the Storm*. And from the day he began his whole life was concentrated on the creation of the book.

Slowly, line by line, the pages were born. Everything else was forgotten, the things he was describing and the first tortures of creative work had him in thrall—dazzlingly clear, unforgettable pictures imagined so sharply that he found it impossible to put them on to paper. The words came pale and lifeless and passionless. Everything he wrote had to be memorised, every word of it. Whenever memory lost the thread, the work was held up. His mother watched his mental strain with alarm. In the process of writing he had to recite whole pages, even whole chapters, and there were moments when his mother really thought her son had gone mad. Whenever he was writing she kept away from him. She would wait till the time came to gather up the sheets of paper slipped to the floor, and she would then say timidly: "Paul, darling, why don't you do something else? Who ever heard of anybody doing nothing but write . . .?"

He laughed at her concern and assured her that he had still not gone quite mad.

Three chapters of the projected book were finished, and Paul sent them to a group of old Kotovski Division comrades for their opinion; he soon had an approving answer, but on the way back the manuscript was lost in the post! The labour of six months was gone. It was a great shock to him. How bitterly he regretted that he had kept no duplicate.

When he told Ledeniev of his loss, Ledeniev said:

“Why on earth were you so careless, man? Now it’s no use crying over spilt milk. Begin over again!”

Paul said: “But don’t you understand, Innokenty Pavlovich, it’s six months’ labour stolen. Eight hours daily strain. What parasites we still have, curse them.”

Ledeniev did his best to calm him. He was obliged to begin again. Ledenev brought the paper and had it all typed out, and six weeks later the first chapter was re-written.

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Paul and his mother and Taya shared a flat with a family named Alexeiev. The eldest son, Alexander, was secretary of one of the town sub-districts of the YCL, and he had an eighteen-year-old sister, Galia, who had just passed out of the factory-workers’ school. Galia was a girl full of life, and Paul asked his mother to enquire if she would perhaps help him by acting as his amanuensis. Galia gladly consented, and she came to see him, and, smiling and helpful, learning that Paul was writing a story, said: “Comrade Korchagin, I should just love to help you. That would be very different from writing out dull circulars for father about keeping the flats clean.”

From that day the literary work moved forward at twice the speed, and in a month Paul had accomplished so much that he himself was surprised. Galia, with her lively sympathy and willingness, was a great help to him. Her pencil slipped quietly over the paper, and she read the parts she liked best over to him several times, genuinely glad at his success. She was almost the only person in the house who believed in his work; the others really thought that it would come to nothing, and that

he was only trying to find some means of whiling away his forced inactivity.

Then Ledeniev, who had been away on duty, came back to Moscow, and when he had read the first chapters, said : " Go on with it, my boy ! You'll win ! Comrade Paul, you've great triumphs ahead of you. I am firmly convinced that your dream of getting back to active Party work will soon be fulfilled. Don't lose hope, old boy."

Galia came in regularly now, and her pencil rustled over the paper ; words telling of those memorable past days covered sheet after sheet. In the moments when Paul was lost in thought and under the power of those memories, Galia would watch him and see his eyelashes quiver and his eyes change expression as they reflected the movements of his thought, and it was hard to believe that he really could not see ; there was such life in those pure, unsoiled pupils. When the day's work was finished Galia would read it over and see him frown as he drank in every word. " Why are you frowning, comrade," she would ask, " why, it's very fine." And he would say : " Oh, no, it's not, Galia."

After some unsuccessful pages he would take paper and frame and write himself, and sometimes he revolted against the pasteboard guide and flung it away, because it cramped him. And then, in unlimited fury against that life which had robbed him of his sight, he would break the points of one pencil after another, and bite his lips till they bled.

Towards the end of the work forbidden feelings would break through his ever-watchful will more easily. The forbidden feelings were sorrow, and a whole string of simple human ones, burning and tender, which in

nearly every other man or woman had a right to exist, but not in him. Were he to give in to but one of those feelings, things would have ended in tragedy.

In the late evenings Taya came home from her factory, exchanged a few whispered words with Paul's mother, and went straight to bed.

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The last chapter was written, and for some days Galia read the whole novel to him. The next day the manuscript was sent to the cultural propaganda department in Leningrad. If they found it worthy of life, they would pass it on to a publishing house, and then . . . at the mere thought his heart thudded. Then . . . it would be the beginning of a new life, won by years of tense, persistent labour. The fate of that book was to decide Paul's fate. If his manuscript were turned down it would be the end for him. If it were only criticised, if its failings were such that by further work on it he himself could remove them, then he would immediately renew the attack.

It was his mother took the heavy package to the post. Days of tense expectation then began. Never in his life had Paul awaited a letter with such painful tension. He lived from the morning delivery to the evening. And still no answer from Leningrad. The silence of the publishers became menacing, and then day by day the foreboding of defeat began to grow stronger, and it became quite clear that a blank rejection of his book would be his destruction. He would be unable to go on living. There would be no more point in existence.

In such moments there came to his mind that park by the sea on the outskirts of the town, and again and again

he put the question to himself: "But have you done everything you could to escape from that iron ring crushing you down, and to get back to the ranks, and make your life useful?" And the answer every time was: "Yes, as far as I can see, I have done everything possible."

Many days later, when expectation had become quite unbearable, his mother who was no less agitated than he was, suddenly cried: "A letter from Leningrad!" It was not a letter, but a telegram—from the District Committee, just a few detached words on the little form: "*Novel warmly approved will be immediately published congratulations on your triumph.*"

His heart pounded. His innermost dream had achieved reality. The iron ring was broken, and once again, with a fresh weapon, he was in the active ranks and a living man.

THE END

OSTROVSKI

