

ANDREI  
PLATONOV

# CHEVENGUR



Translated by  
ANTHONY OLCOTT





Andrei Platonov

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*Translated by Anthony Olcott*

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**Andrei Platonov (1899-1951)**

*Chevengur*

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Foreword by Anthony Olcott

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## FOREWORD

### I

Andrei Platonov was born Andrei Klimentov on September 1, 1899 (N.S.), in the provincial town of Voronezh. His father, Platon Firsovich Klimentov, was an uneducated metalworker, employed in the Voronezh train repair station. The family lived in the small settlement of Yamaskaya Sloboda, the Voronezh municipal equivalent of below-stairs; the people who made their homes there buried the city dead, kept its prisoners, cleaned its toilets, and repaired its trains. Platonov began his education in a church school, where he got both the rudiments of learning and, through the encouragement of one exceptional teacher, a sustaining drive for self-education. The exigencies of the family financial situation, however, cut short Platonov's childhood in the spring of 1914, when he began to work. As he later put it, "At one time there were ten people in the family, and I was the oldest son, the only worker besides my father. Father was a metalworker and could not feed such a horde."<sup>1</sup> The most eloquent description of those early years Platonov wrote in a 1924 autobiography for a Party file: "I worked in many places, for many masters."<sup>2</sup>

At that time, Yamaskaya Sloboda was bounded on one side by Voronezh and on the other by the railroad tracks, beyond which lay only wheat-fields, forests, and the high steppe. In his early stories Platonov described how he and his companions hunted wild songbirds, played hookey from work, and dreamed. When the fields proved too far away, the local children could always play in one of the four cemeteries that lay within Yamaskaya or could run to the end of Millionskaya Street (on which the Klimentov family lived) to peek through the bars of the prison gate. From there in 1905 they were able to watch soldiers firing on the striking prisoners. In short, Platonov's earliest years were spent in a kind of half-peasant, half-proletarian world, a world in intimate contact with most aspects of human existence. In his foreword to his book of poetry *The Blue Depth*, Platonov summed up his childhood in the following words:

*In Yamaskaya there were wattle fences, gardens, wastelands of burdock, not houses but huts, chickens, boot-makers, and many muzhiks on the Zadonsk highroad. The bell of the "Chugunnaya" church was the only music of the sloboda, and on quiet summer evenings it was emotionally heeded by old women, the poor, and me. On holidays (high to the slightest degree) vicious fistfights were organized with Chizhevskaya or Troitskaya by Yamaskaya . . . they fought to the death, to wild ecstasy. . . .*<sup>3</sup>

More important than his environment were the interests and activities of young Platonov in which others could not share. As he wrote in the autobiographical story "Markun," "Every evening after dinner, when his little brothers went to bed, he lit the lamp and sat down to think."<sup>4</sup>

To judge from its recurrence in several stories, one of Platonov's main interests was tinkering, inventing. He was particularly engrossed with the possibility of a perpetual motion machine. Platonov's brother speaks as well of a period of serious interest in Esperanto, at which Platonov apparently had some success. However, as Platonov later confessed, this was the closest thing to a foreign language he ever knew.<sup>5</sup>

In those years Platonov also spent a great deal of time philosophizing, recording his thoughts, opinions, and observations in an attempt to derive a larger system of explanation for his world. Later some of these musings undoubtedly found a place in such works as "Markun," "From a General Composition," and "City of Gradov." Finally, Platonov also wrote and read. *What* he read is uncertain, for his works bear few clear traces of any author's influence, and his contemporaries remember no more than that Platonov seemed always to have a book in hand. Certainly though, one must agree with the critic who wrote that "Andrei Platonov was an educated writer, superlatively educated. World literature for him was no untouchable 'storehouse,' but a constant support in his work."<sup>6</sup> His writings of the earliest years are also uncertain; although the poems in his collection *The Blue Depth* are said in the preface to have been written in the period 1914-1922, the poems are printed without dates, so that it is impossible to know which might be early works, which come later. The same foreword states as well that Platonov in his youth wrote stories, some of which were published in a collection; no trace of such publication remains.

Platonov's first attested works coincide with the arrival of the Revolution in Voronezh, which was, like provincial towns all over Russia, the site of fevered activity. The town swelled with the influx of refugees from the famished, frozen northern cities; among them were writers, publishers, journalists, and artists, so that Voronezh quickly developed a thriving newspaper community. Platonov's first story was published in 1918 in a magazine for railroad workers, and by 1920 he had become a permanent staff member of the group of Bolshevik newspapers printed in the town. Platonov worked not as a reporter, but as a writer, using the newspapers and magazines of Voronezh as a forum for his poems, stories, theories, and philosophies. The subject of the greater part of these, and apparently of the greater part of Platonov's interest, was the nature of the Revolution and its significance.

Platonov joined the Party in 1920, but left again at the end of the next year, "voluntarily, because of youthfulness and an unforgivable reason,"<sup>7</sup> as he mysteriously explained in a 1924 document. In the same document he spoke of his intention to rejoin the Party, but there is no evidence that he ever did so. Rather literary activities seem to have occupied much of his

time. He was active in the organization of the Communist Union of Journalists, in 1918, and in the formation of the Voronezh Union of Proletarian Writers, in 1920. The "Chronicle" section of the Voronezh newspapers from those years speak often of impending poetry readings, speeches, and reports to be given by Platonov.

Literature was not, however, Platonov's only activity, for at this same time he was attending the Voronezh Polytechnicum; he graduated, an electrical technician, in 1921. This interest in electricity led to the publication of Platonov's first book, a pamphlet extolling the virtues of electrification, in 1921. Another preoccupation of Platonov's early years was land reclamation and watershed control. Voronezh is located in the chernozem, or black earth belt, one of the world's most fertile zones. The climate, however, is continental and sharply erratic, so that the area suffers from irregular rainfall. Platonov began reclamation work in 1917 and in 1922 he acquired a plot of land on the Voronezh river which he used to test crop and irrigation systems.

In 1922 Platonov resigned from the newspapers to work on various reclamation and irrigation commissions. By 1924 he was responsible for an entire complex of reclamation and irrigation projects in the Voronezh region, and he had ceased publishing. He was so successful as an engineer that in 1926 Narkomzem (the People's Land Committee) assigned him to Tambov, where he was intended to duplicate his Voronezh feats. Platonov's career in reclamation, however, was nipped by the realities of what he termed a "Gogolian province."<sup>8</sup> Youngest of all the workers, an outsider, and the boss nonetheless, faced with a bureaucracy which later found its way into "City of Gradov," Platonov soon came to regard Tambov as "my exile"<sup>9</sup> and turned once more to writing. When things deteriorated so badly in Tambov that his superiors were threatening him with imprisonment and death, Platonov resigned and moved his family to Moscow, where he gave himself over once and for all to writing.

Soon after the move he published his first collection of stories, *The Epifan Locks*; although the book contained some works from Platonov's Voronezh years, the bulk of the stories, including the title work, was new. This book remains the best printed of all Platonov's works, for his typesetters showed great ingenuity in visually counterpointing and emphasizing Platonov's use of letters, archaisms, substandard vocabulary, and even handwriting. Platonov's experiments in language and his interest in the physical fact of a text gained him an immediate audience and, more significantly, a reputation as a disciple of Boris Pilnyak.

In fact there was a short collaboration between the two writers. Their first joint effort was a play entitled *Fools on the Periphery, or The Din of Vipers*, a somewhat heavy-handed satire on the materialism of the new Soviet middle class. The play was never staged or published, for when it was read at various literary gatherings it "evoked . . . a sharply negative opinion,"<sup>10</sup> in the words of one account. Their second collaboration was more

successful, a satirical sketch about the reorganization of the Voronezh regional government; again the target was the emerging bureaucratic structure, or as they put it, an investigation of why "there are many sideburns in Voronezh, and they all have briefcases."<sup>11</sup> Again their work was strongly attacked, and their collaboration ended.

In 1929 Platonov moved out from Pilnyak's shadow to demonstrate that he could be called "anti-Soviet" in his own right; this he did with the publication of the story "Makar the Doubtful," yet another satirical depiction of Soviet bureaucracy. The reaction was savage. Leopold Averbakh, the head of RAPP, fulminated that the story proved Platonov a petty bourgeois who mouthed kulak slogans, a "petty anarchisticating metaphysician."<sup>12</sup> Platonov found himself almost entirely cut off from print, not able even to publish a letter in his own defense, as an answer to his critics. In all of 1930 he succeeded in printing only one short sketch, a journalistic description of the ingenuity and skill of a group of kolkhozniks. Perhaps because he appeared to have capitulated, or perhaps due only to the general confusion of those years, Platonov was able in 1931 to publish his "For the Future Good," a loose-jointed satirical journey through collectivizing Russia. It is this story which Yevtushenko says inspired Stalin to write "scum" on Platonov's manuscript.<sup>13</sup>

The response of the Soviet press was equally direct. "We are forced to use this word—pasquinade—to describe Platonov's work,"<sup>14</sup> wrote one reviewer, while a second was even more to the point, simply entitling his review "Slander!"<sup>15</sup> The most devastating attack came from Alexander Fadeev, the editor who had, as he later wrote, "let 'Makar the Doubtful' slip into print, for which Stalin gave it to me in the rear."<sup>16</sup> Fadeev atoned for his laxness by writing, among other things, that "One of the kulak agents . . . is the writer Andrei Platonov, who for several years now has strolled the pages of Soviet journals in the guise of a 'spiritual beggar,' somewhat simple, not unkind, a holy fool, an inoffensive 'Makar the Doubtful.'"<sup>17</sup>

This storm of criticism ended the first and most fruitful segment of Platonov's career, almost as though his critics had agreed to rid themselves of Platonov by denying him access to print. Despite drastic modifications of his style and choice of topics, Platonov had little success as an author until the beginning of World War II. He abandoned satire and took up new themes: Moscow and its changing face; the extension of civilization to Central Asia; the growth of German fascism. None of these themes, however, allowed him to publish more than a few stories. Posthumous publication has shown that Platonov wrote about twice as much on each topic as was published, which suggests that he was being blocked before he could begin.

The only thing that kept Platonov from disappearing through sheer poverty was that in the mid 1930s he found a group of strong supporters in the editorial board of the journals *Literary Critic* and *Literary Overview*. The board (among whom was Georgy Lukacs) enabled Platonov to publish a

number of reviews, critical statements, and parodies, both under his own name and under pseudonyms. In 1936 the board rendered him a more important service, when they broke entirely with the critical function of their journal *Literary Critic* and published two of Platonov's stories, "Immortality" and "Fro." As an unsigned introduction explained, they did this to protest the editorial routine which passed over good stories, closed out good writers, and deprived Soviet readers of good fiction. This article attacked such contemporary phenomena as the "cult of optimism" and the political determination of artistic value; not surprisingly, this served to make the publication of Platonov's stories something of a challenge.

The challenge did not go unanswered, including one article which Platonov characterized privately as a denunciation and publicly as slander,<sup>18</sup> but in this instance Platonov found support; the most negative articles were in turn attacked by other critics, and the entire polemic gradually shifted away from Platonov toward a more general discussion of the positive hero in Soviet literature.

Still, Platonov was far from free of the intense pressure of the late 1930s. In 1938 his son (and only child) was arrested and sent to a labor camp in the far north; photographs show how Platonov aged almost overnight. With the aid of Sholokhov the boy was released and returned home, in the spring of 1940, but the damage was already done. The boy returned already fatally ill with tuberculosis.

In October 1941, the family was without warning seized and taken under guard to a train, on which they were slowly evacuated to Ufa, in Bashkiria. His family lived a year in Ufa, but Platonov left almost immediately, for he was mobilized as a war correspondent for the newspaper *Red Star*. He served first on the southern front, where he heard the story for his "Inspired People," the account of five Red sailors who stopped a German tank advance by tying grenades to their bodies and throwing themselves beneath the treads; the story became an instant war classic and was republished many times during the war. Platonov was then transferred to the western front, where he served during the campaign through Belorussia. These years prove a reprise of the Voronezh years, for once again Platonov was a journalist, publishing rapidly and often. Despite the lapses in quality inherent in this type of work, these years were for Platonov the richest he had had since leaving Voronezh, for in that short span he published nine books and nearly fifty articles and stories.

Nevertheless, these years were not easy, for they saw first the disappearance of Platonov's father, when the Germans retreated from Voronezh, then the death of his son in 1943, and finally his own infection with tuberculosis, in 1944. Platonov was returned from the front on a stretcher and was given six months to live. Largely through the efforts of his wife, Platonov not only survived but managed to continue writing.

In 1946 Platonov published a story, later titled "Homecoming," which

examined how a good but not perfect man who had "too much grown unused to domestic life"<sup>19</sup> returned from the war to his wife and children. The story is honest, touching, and quite positive, for Platonov showed how the returning soldier successfully found the moral strength to return to the problems of civilian and domestic life. It is incomprehensible, therefore, why V. Ermilov, editor of *Literary Gazette*, attacked Platonov's story as slander of the Soviet family.

The concluding paragraph of Ermilov's article will perhaps convey something of what Platonov had to live through:

*The reader is bored with A. Platonov's love for every type of spiritual untidyness, his suspicious love of sick—in the spirit of the most nasty "Dostoevskiiism"—situations and sufferings. . . . He is bored with the psychological guignols in the style of decadence, the unhealthy attraction to all petty passions and filth, the attraction which has always distinguished the author of "Homecoming." . . . The Soviet people breathes the clean air of heroic hard work and creation in the name of communism. The monstrous, unclean little world of A. Platonov's heroes is repellent and hostile to the Soviet people.*<sup>20</sup>

In that time when Anna Akhmatova became "half nun, half whore," Ermilov's last sentence reads more as an order than a statement, and other journalists were not slow to take the hint. This time Platonov enjoyed no supporters and the attacks did not abate. By 1949 Platonov's name was appearing on lists of those "homeless cosmopolitans" who were to be "Unmasked" and "crushed to the end."

Platonov's last published fiction appeared in 1948, a parable about two crumbs, one of gunpowder and one of bread, printed in one column of a children's newspaper. When even this innocuous preference for bread over gunpowder drew a blistering attack in *Pravda* accusing Platonov of "rotten pacifism,"<sup>21</sup> it was finally clear that Platonov had become a literary non-person, his name to be admitted into print only in attacks. Faced with heavy medical expenses, totally bedridden, and now with a daughter and grandson to support, Platonov was in a desperate situation. Once again it was Sholokhov who saved him; he had been made general editor of a series of translations of folk tales from minority languages into Russian. He offered Platonov the volume of Bashkir folk tales, and the book was an instant success. From there Platonov turned to the retelling of classic Russian folk tales, which if anything proved an even larger success. Even now these stories are reprinted almost yearly, in both central and provincial presses, singly and in collections, in Russian and in translation. His translations of Bashkir folk tales have even been translated back into Bashkir.

This last flicker of success did not last long: Platonov finally died of tuberculosis on January 5, 1951, and was buried next to his son at Vagon-skaya Cemetery. The funeral was attended by few of his Writers' Union

colleagues, and the short necrology he was given in *Literary Gazette* was virtually the last appearance of Platonov's name in the Soviet Union for almost a decade.

The changes of the Khrushchev years and the enthusiasm of writers like Aksenov and Nagibin allowed Platonov to begin what became by the early 1960s a second and posthumous career; not only were most of Platonov's earlier stories reprinted, but large numbers of his stories were published for the first time. This latter group includes some of Platonov's best and most important works, demonstrating that he had been a far more productive and imaginative writer than he had appeared earlier, particularly after 1931. In the mid-1960s the appearance of a large collection of Platonov stories became an almost annual event, and Platonov's name began to appear in other connections, in plays, movies, adaptations, and criticism. Interest and approval reached such heights that in 1969 critics were even writing of the forthcoming publication of *Chevengur*,<sup>22</sup> the existence of which was then unknown.

At approximately this time, however, Platonov's name once again fell under a cloud, for several reasons. One was that some of his manuscripts, most notably that of *The Foundation Pit*, were beginning to be published in the West and, worse, to be read back into Russia on the Western radio stations. Another reason was chance; in 1968 an evening in honor of Platonov's memory at the Writers' Union was used to gather signatures on a petition in support of D. Ginzburg, then on trial, and Platonov's name was blackened by association. His reputation and literary fortunes may also have been influenced by the fact that many of his old critics were still alive.

The situation in force since that time is one of grudging acceptance. Platonov's existence as a writer is not disputed, and in fact some recent critics have even been able to complain of Platonov's excessive influence on contemporary authors.<sup>23</sup> Publication, however, has slowed considerably, and there has been virtually no new publication in the Soviet Union of unpublished manuscripts. This is a pity, for it seems likely that a great many of Platonov's works remain unpublished. Still sufficient numbers of Platonov's works have appeared in print, both in the Soviet Union and abroad, in Russian and other languages, to allow a reader an in-depth acquaintance with Andrei Platonov, who occupies a distinct position in the history of Russian—and world—literature. This translation now provides access for the English reader to *Chevengur*, Platonov's longest, most ambitious work, and his only novel.

## II

The history of *Chevengur* is a curious one, for although large portions of the novel have been published, in translation and in the original, this is the first publication of Platonov's novel as an integral unit. *Chevengur* was probably

begun in 1927 or 1928, and was almost certainly finished by 1928; in that year no fewer than three of the five stories Platonov published were actually fragments of *Chevengur*. As Platonov explained in a letter to Gorky, however, the novel itself was rejected because "they say that in the novel the revolution is incorrectly portrayed, that the entire work will even be understood as counterrevolutionary."<sup>24</sup>

Although Platonov felt the novel "contains an honest attempt to portray the beginning of communist society,"<sup>25</sup> Gorky's answer that the work was "unacceptable to our censorship"<sup>26</sup> continues to prove correct. Platonov's subsequent publication of "Makar the Doubtful" and "For the Future Good" made the appearance of the novel even more unlikely, and the manuscript disappeared into his desk, not to re-emerge until 1964, when once again fragments of it began to be printed as stories. For the most part these fragments are only that, but in at least one case ("Three-Eighths Thread Stock"), a story was created by heavily editing a section of the manuscript to expose a single story line. In all, portions of *Chevengur* have appeared under seven separate titles, and at least one of these fragments has acquired a solid existence in its own right, as the novella *Origin of a Master*. No mention has been made since 1969 of possible publication of the novel as a whole, so for the Soviet reader it must remain no more than shards.

The western reader of Russian is somewhat more fortunate, for in 1972 YMCA Press published *Chevengur* in Russian. However, that edition was not entirely without difficulties either. One is that, although the book's foreword mentions that *Origin of a Master* is in fact part of the novel, the fragment was still omitted. More serious is that pages which link the two fragments were also not printed, making it difficult to know how they are joined. In fact, as published, *Chevengur* began with a sentence fragment. An opportunity to compare the Paris text with a manuscript prepared by Platonov further showed that the former text had in some places been jumbled, and that the latter contained some incidents which the former did not. It should be noted, however, that Platonov returned periodically to his manuscript, making minor changes; most likely the Paris manuscript was an earlier redaction of the novel, while it was the later one which Platonov considered definitive.

In this translation I have tried to convey as accurately as I could the idiosyncrasies of Platonov's language while at the same time creating a work comprehensible in English. Any failures in this attempt are my own. Material support, however, has been given by the American Council of Learned Societies, which gave me a Grant-in-Aid, and by Stanford University, which made me a Postdoctoral Fellow. Without this support this translation would not have been possible.

*Anthony Olcott*  
*Hamilton, New York*  
*March 1978*

## NOTES

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*CHEVENGUR*

There are fringes of decay around old provincial towns. People come here to live straight out of nature. One such man appeared, his piercing face exhausted to the point of melancholy. He was able to fix or equip any manner of thing, but himself lived life unequipped. Nothing, from frying pan to alarm clock, had failed in its time to pass through the hands of this man. Nor had he ever refused to resole shoes, cast wolf shot, or stamp out phony medals to sell at old-fashioned country bazaars. But for himself he had never made anything, neither family nor dwelling. Summers he simply lived in nature, carrying his tools in a sack and using the sack as a pillow, more for the safe-keeping of his tools than for softness. He protected himself from the early morning sun by sticking burdocks to his eyes in the evening. Winters he lived on the remnants of his summer earnings and paid the church watchman for a room by ringing the night hours. He was not unduly interested in anything, not in people or nature, except for mechanical things of all sorts. Because of this he regarded people and fields with indifferent tenderness, not infringing upon the interests of either. On winter evenings he occasionally made unnecessary things such as towers of wire, ships cut from pieces of roofing tin, paper dirigibles, and so on, exclusively for his own pleasure. It often happened that he even delayed filling someone's chance commission, so that, for example, when he was given a vat to fix with new handles, he spent the time instead building a wooden clock which he intended to run without works, powered just by the rotation of the earth.

These unpaid activities did not please the church watchman.

"You'll go begging in your old age, Zakhar Palych! That vat there's been standing all day and all you do about it is bang the ground with a hunk of wood . . . and no way of knowing for what!"

Zakhar Pavlovich remained silent. The human word was for him the same as the whispers of a forest for its inhabitants, something which was no longer heard. The watchman smoked and calmly looked into the distance. He did not believe in God after so many worship services, but he knew for certain that nothing would come of Zakhar Pavlovich's work. People have been living in the world for a long time and have already invented everything. However, Zakhar Pavlovich thought just the opposite:—as-long-as any natural raw material goes untouched by human hands, people are far from having-invented everything.

Every fifth year half the village used to leave for the mines and the cities and the other half went into the forest, because of crop failures. It had been known for ages that even in dry years grass, vegetables, and grain ripened well in the forest clearings, and the half of the village that stayed threw themselves on these clearings to save their greens from being snatched away by floods of greedy wanderers. This time, though, the drought repeated itself

in the second year too. The village locked its huts and went out on the high-road in two detachments, one to beg its way to Kiev, the other to Lugansk to work. Some few villagers returned to the forest and the overgrown gulches and went wild, eating raw grass, clay, and bark. Virtually all who left were adults; the children had either died off of their own accord earlier or had run away to become beggars. Mothers who were nursing gradually tormented their infants to death by not allowing them to nurse their fill.

There was an old woman, Ignatevna, who cured children of hunger. She gave them a potion of mushrooms cut with sweet grass and the children died peacefully away, dry foam flecked on their lips. The mother would kiss the child on its aged, wrinkled forehead and whisper, "He's through suffering, praise God!"

Ignatevna stood there and said, "He passed on, the quiet little thing. . . . He's better off than the living, lying there like that . . . now he's listening to the silver winds in heaven. . . ."

The mother admired her child, believing his sad lot to be cured.

"Here, take my old skirt for yourself, Ignatevna. I've got nothing else to give. And thank you. . . ."

Ignatevna spread the skirt out to the light and said, "Cry a bit, Mitrevna, you really should. . . . This skirt though . . . it's worn clear through. Throw in a scarf at least, or maybe give me your iron."

Zakhar Pavlovich remained in the village alone. He liked deserted places. Nevertheless though, he lived more in the forest with a hermit. The hermit had a dugout and they ate boiled grass, the benefits of which the hermit had learned earlier.

In order to forget his hunger, Zakhar Pavlovich worked all the time. He taught himself how to make in wood everything he had ever made in metal. The hermit, though, had done nothing his entire life, and now even more so. Until he turned fifty he did nothing but look around, to see how and what things were, waiting to see what would come of the general fuss in the end. Then he would be able to start acting at once, as soon as the world had calmed down and been explained. He was not at all afflicted by the world, so he had not lifted his hand, not to a wife for marriage nor to any generally useful activity. He had been startled at birth and lived so into old age, blue eyes on his youthful face. When Zakhar Pavlovich carved an oak frying pan the hermit was astounded, since even so nothing could be fried in it. Zakhar Pavlovich, though, poured water into the wooden frying pan and succeeded in bringing the water to boil over a slow fire without burning the pan. The hermit was frozen in amazement.

"A mighty business . . . I ask you, where do you go to figure that out? . . ." And the surrounding universal mystery made the hermit's hands fall away. Not once had anyone explained to the hermit the simplicity of events, or perhaps he was after all slow-witted. In fact, when Zakhar Pavlovich tried to tell him why the wind blows, instead of standing in one place,

the hermit was even more amazed and understood nothing, even though he accurately felt the wind coming up.

"No, really? Tell me, tell me. . . . The sun's overcooking, must be? A pretty business!"

Zakhar Pavlovich explained that overcooking was not a pretty business, but simply heat.

"Heat?!" The hermit was astounded. "Says you, you witch!"

The recluse's amazement only hopped from one thing to another, but nothing in his consciousness was transformed. Instead of a mind, he lived with a feeling of trusting respect.

During the summer Zakhar Pavlovich remade in wood all the things he knew. The warren and its manorial lands were established with the items of Zakhar Pavlovich's technological art—a full assortment of agricultural tools, machines, instruments, and household devices, all completely of wood. It was strange that there was not a single item which repeated nature, such as horses, wheels, or the like.

In August the recluse went into the shade, lay belly down and said, "Zakhar Pavlovich, I'm dying. Yesterday I ate a lizard. I brought you two mushrooms, but fried the lizard for myself. Wave some burdocks over my outsides—I love wind."

Zakhar Pavlovich waved the burdocks, brought water, and helped the dying man drink.

"You aren't going to die after all—it only seems that way to you."

"I'll die, I swear to God I'll die, Zakhar Pavlovich." The recluse was afraid to tell a lie. "My innards won't hold anything . . . an enormous worm is living in me, he's drunk up all my blood. . . ."

The recluse turned onto his back.

"What do you think, should I be afraid or not?"

"Don't be afraid," answered Zakhar Pavlovich positively. "I'd die right now, myself, but you know how it is, when you're working on different things. . . ."

The recluse was glad for the sympathy, and towards evening died without fear. Zakhar Pavlovich was bathing in the spring during his death, and found the hermit already dead.

Zakhar Pavlovich woke up in the night and listened to the rain. It was the second rain since April. "The recluse would sure be surprised," thought Zakhar Pavlovich. The recluse, however, was soaking by himself in the darkness of the streams pouring evenly from heaven.

Something sad and muffled began to sing through the sleepy windless rain, so far away that where it sang, probably there was no rain and it was day. Zakhar Pavlovich immediately forgot the recluse and the rain and the hunger, and got up. The noise was a faraway machine, a living, laboring steam locomotive. Zakhar Pavlovich went outside and stood in the damp of the warm rain, the rain which sang of a peaceful life, of the breadth of the

long earth. The dark trees stood upright and dozed, embraced by the caresses of the peaceful wind. They felt so good that they became exhausted, and rustled their branches without the slightest wind.

Zakhar Pavlovich paid no attention to the joy of nature, for he was excited by the unknown, now-silent locomotive. When he again lay down to sleep he thought, "The rain and that thing are acting, while I sleep and hide in the forest for nothing. The recluse died, and so'll you. In his entire three score and ten that one didn't get a single thing ready—he looked everything over and adapted to it, was amazed by everything, saw a magical business in every simple thing, and couldn't raise a hand to stop something from being spoiled. He just grubbed up mushrooms, and didn't even know how to find those. He just up and died, never threatened nature in anything."

In the morning there was a big sun, and the forest sang with all the fullness of its voice, letting the morning wind pass beneath its underleaves. Zakhar Pavlovich noticed not so much the morning as the change of shifts—the rain had gone to sleep in the soil, and had been spelled by the sun. Because of the sun the commotion of wind was raised, and it ruffled the trees. The grass and the bushes began to mumble, and even the rain, not resting, once again got to its feet and, aroused by the tickling warmth, formed its body into clouds.

Zakhar Pavlovich put as many of his wooden implements as he could into his sack and went off into the distance along the women's mushroom path. He didn't look at the recluse—the dead are unprepossessing, although Zakhar Pavlovich had known one man, a fisherman from Lake Mutevo, who had questioned many people about death, and was tormented by his curiosity. This fisherman loved fish most of all not as food, but as special beings that definitely knew the secret of death. He would show Zakhar Pavlovich the eyes of a dead fish and say, "Look—there's wisdom! A fish stands between life and death, so that he's dumb and expressionless. I mean even a calf thinks, but a fish, no. It already knows everything." Contemplating the lake through the years, the fisherman thought always about the same thing, about the interest of death. Zakhar Pavlovich tried to talk him out of it, saying, "There's nothing special there, just something tight." After a year the fisherman couldn't stand it any more and threw himself into the lake from his boat, after tying his feet with a rope so that he wouldn't accidentally float. In secret he didn't even believe in death. The important thing was that he wanted to look at what was there—perhaps it was much more interesting than living in a village or on the shores of a lake. He saw death as another province, located under the heavens as if at the bottom of cool water, and it attracted him. Some of the muzhiks that the fisherman talked with about his intention to live awhile with death and return tried to talk him out of it, but others agreed with him.

"What the hell, Mitry Ivanich, nothing ventured, nothing gained. Try it, then come back and tell us." Dmitry Ivanich tried—they dragged him from the lake after three days and buried him near the fence of the village graveyard.

Zakhar Pavlovich was passing by the graveyard now and he searched for the fisherman's grave in the palisades of crosses. There was no cross on the fisherman's grave—he had grieved no heart by his death, not one pair of lips remembered him, for he had died not in the grip of powerlessness, but in the grip of his own inquiring reason. The fisherman left no wife—he was a widower, and his son was little and lived with others. Zakhar Pavlovich had gone to the funeral, and had led the boy by the hand, a gentle and intelligent boy, not quite like the father and not quite like the mother. Where was this boy now? In these hungry years he had probably died among the first, a complete orphan. The boy had walked decorously, without grief, behind the coffin of his father.

“Mister Zakhar, did father lay himself out like this on purpose?”

“Not on purpose, Sash, but out of tomfoolery. He's put you at a loss now. He won't soon catch any fish, now.”

“And why are the ladies crying?”

“Because they're snivellers!”

When they put the coffin down next to the grave, no one wanted to bid farewell to the dead man. Zakhar Pavlovich got on his knees and touched the fisherman's fresh bristly cheek, washed at the bottom of the lake. Then Zakhar Pavlovich said to the boy, “Say goodbye to your father. He's dead for good. Look at him and they you'll remember him.”

The boy lay on the body of his father, on his old shirt that smelled of native living sweat, because they had put on that shirt for the coffin—the father had drowned in another. The boy squeezed the hands and a fishy dampness wafted from them. There was an olive wood ring on one finger, in honor of the forgotten mother. The boy turned his head to the people, was frightened by the strangers, and mournfully began to cry, gathering the father's shirt into folds as his protection. His sorrow was wordless, deprived of the knowledge of his remaining life, and therefore implacable. He so grieved for his dead father that the dead man would have been happy. Then all the people at the grave also began to cry from sorrow for the boy and from that premature sympathy for themselves, that each of them would also have to die and be cried over.

With all his grief, Zakhar Pavlovich still remembered what was to come.

“They'll howl for you, Nikiforovna!” he said to one woman who was sobbing and rapidly keening. “You aren't howling out of sorrow, but so that they'll cry for you when you die. Take the boy home—you have six of them anyway, and you can find some trick to feed another one in all those.”

Nikiforovna at once came to her womanly peasant reason and dried her wild face—she cried without tears, just with wrinkles. “Says who? Look what he says—some trick to feed him! He's that way now, but let him grow a little! As soon as he starts to cram it in and split his britches, you'll never be done!”

Another woman, Mavra Fetisovna Dvanova, took the boy. She had

seven children. The child gave her his hand and the woman wiped his face with her skirt, blew his nose, and led the orphan home to her hut.

The boy remembered the fishing pole his father had made for him, which he had then thrown in the lake and forgotten. Now probably it had caught a fish for him and he could eat it, so that other people wouldn't scold him about their food.

"It caught a fish for me in the water," said Sasha. "Let me go get it and I'll eat that, so that you won't have to feed me."

Mavra Fetisovna unconsciously screwed up her face, wiped her nose in the end of her scarf, and didn't let go of the boy's hand.

Zakhar Pavlovich grew thoughtful. He wanted to go away and become a wanderer, but he stayed in place. He was touched deeply by grief and orphanage—some unknown guilt which appeared in his chest made him want to walk about the earth without rest, to meet grief in all the villages and to sob over other people's graves. He was stopped, though, by a series of things—the elder gave him a wall clock to clean and the priest a piano to tune. From the time of his birth Zakhar Pavlovich hadn't heard any sort of music. Once in the region he had seen a gramophone, but the muzhiks had tormented it to death and it didn't play. The gramophone stood in a tavern—the box had broken sides, so the trick, whoever was singing in there, could be seen, and the membrane had a darning needle stuck through it. He spent a month tuning the piano, testing the doleful sounds and looking over the mechanism which produced such tenderness. Zakhar Pavlovich would pound on the keys, and a sad singing would rise up and fly away. Zakhar would look up and wait for it to return—it was too good to lose itself with no trace. The priest got tired of waiting for the piano to be turned and said, "Old boy, don't resound the tone for nothing. Try to make the business come toward an end, and don't go poking into the sense of things you don't require."

Zakhar Pavlovich was offended to the roots of his skill and made a secret into the mechanism, which could be removed in one second but which could not be found without special knowledge. Afterwards the priest called for Zakhar Pavlovich every week.

"Come on, friend, come on. Again the mystery-making strength of the music has disappeared."

Zakhar Pavlovich didn't make the secret for the priest or so that he could come often and enjoy the music—he was moved by the opposite, by how the thing was made, that it agitated hearts, that it made men good. For that he fitted on his secret, which could interfere with the euphony and cover it in howls. After the tenth repair, when Zakhar Pavlovich understood the secret of mixing of sounds and the structure of the trembling main board, he fished the secret out of the piano and lost interest in sounds forever. . . .

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Now Zakhar Pavlovich remembered his past life as he walked, and wasn't sorry about it. He had personally grasped many structures and works

abandoned village  
bast shoe

in the passing years, and could repeat them in his own devices if there were suitable materials and tools. He went through the village to meet with the unknown machines and items which were ringing beyond the line where the mighty sky joined the immobile village comforts. He walked then with the same heart as those peasants who walk to Kiev after their faith has run dry and their life has turned into simply living it out.

It smelled of smoke on the village streets. This was from the ash lying on the streets, unburied by the chickens, because they had been eaten. The huts stood full of childless silence. The burdocks, run wild and taller than normal, waited for their proprietors by the gates, on the roads, and on all those lived-in, trampled-down places where earlier no kind of grass whatever had grown. They rocked, like future trees. The wattle fences had also blossomed because of desertion. They were wound through with hops and bindweeds, and some stakes and switches had taken, promising to become groves if the people didn't return. The wells had dried up and lizards crawled into them freely across the wooden frames, there to rest from the heat and reproduce. Zakhar Pavlovich was also greatly amazed by the senseless event, that the grain in the fields had long since died, while rye, oats, and flax slowly greened on the thatch roofs of the huts, where the goose-foot whispered. They had sprouted from seeds in the thatch. Yellow-green field birds had also moved into the village, living directly in the cleaner parts of the huts, while the sparrows fell from the eaves in clouds, speaking with the wind of their wings their domestic, business-like songs.

As he passed through the village, Zakhar Pavlovich saw a bast shoe which had also revived without people and found its own fate. It had put out a shoot of red willow, while the rest of its body rotted in the dust and preserved the shade over the rootlets of the future shrub. There was probably a little moister dirt under the shoe, because a number of pale grass blades were struggling to crawl through it. Of all the village things, Zakhar Pavlovich particularly loved bast shoes and horseshoes, and of structures, wells. A swallow sat on the chimney of the last hut; when it saw Zakhar Pavlovich it crawled inside the pipe and there in the darkness embraced its descendants with its wings.

On the right the church remained, and beyond it, the famous clean fields, flat like a bone-idle wind. The little bell, the second voice, began to toll midday, ringing twelve times. Bindweed had ensnared the temple, contriving to reach even to the cross on top. After tolling the hours, the watchman still stood at the parvis, admiring the progress of summer. His alarm clock had lost itself in its long counting of time so that in his old age the watchman had begun to feel time as sharply and accurately as grief and happiness. No matter what he did, even when he slept (although in old age life is stronger than sleep—it is vigilant and minutely), as soon as an hour flowed past the watchman felt some sort of alarm or desire, and then he would ring the hour and again calm down.

Watchman  
ant-reason

"You're still alive, old man?" Zakhar Pavlovich said to the watchman. "What are you counting the days for?"

The watchman wanted not to answer—after seventy years of life he had convinced himself that half of all things he did for naught, and three quarters of all words were said to no end. Neither his wife nor his children had survived, for all his pains, and words were forgotten like a passing noise. "If I say a word to this man," the watchman considered to himself, "the man will go on another mile and will not leave me in his eternal memory. Who am I to him? Not parent, not helper!"

"You're working for nothing," Zakhar Pavlovich accused him.

The watchman answered this stupidity, "How so for nothing? In my memory our village has left ten times and then come back to settle. And they'll come back soon. It can't go on long without a man."

"But who are you ringing for?"

The watchman knew Zakhar Pavlovich as a man who gave freedom to his hands for any kind of work, but who didn't know the value of time.

"There you go . . . ringing for who? I shorten the time with the bell and sing songs. . . ."

"So sing, sing," said Zakhar Pavlovich, and left the village. At a distance shriveled a yardless hut. It was clear that someone had married hastily, argued with his father, and resettled. The hut also stood empty, and was terrible inside. One thing only pleased Zakhar Pavlovich at parting—a sunflower had grown out of the chimney from within. It had already matured, and bent over the sunrise its ripening head.

The road was overgrown with dry, dust-decrepit grass. Whenever Zakhar Pavlovich sat to smoke, he saw pleasant forests on the ground, where the grass was trees. It was a complete little living world, with its own roads, its own warmth, and complete supplies for the everyday needs of the petty, pre-occupied creatures. Zakhar Pavlovich kept the ants in his head for about three miles of his way after watching them, and finally thought, "If only we were given ant or mosquito reason, then life could be smoothed over right away, without problems. Those minor things are great masters of the harmonious life. A man's a long way from that nimble fellow, the ant."

Zakhar Pavlovich appeared on the fringe of the town and took a storage room for himself from a widower with many children, a carpenter, then went outside and thought. What could he do?

The carpenter-owner arrived from work and sat next to Zakhar Pavlovich.

"How much do you want for the accommodation?" asked Zakhar Pavlovich.

The carpenter didn't burst out laughing, though he wanted to. He somehow coughed in his throat. In his voice could be heard hopelessness and that special enduring despair which happens in a man who is completely and forever grieved.

labors of consciences  
trains

"And what do you do? Nothing? Well, live that way then, until my kids tear your head off for you. . . ."

This he said truly, for on the very first night the carpenter's sons, lads from ten to twenty years old, poured their urine over Zakhar Pavlovich as he slept, then locked the door of the storage room with oven tongs. However, it was hard to anger Zakhar Pavlovich, who was never interested in people. He knew that there are machines and complicated powerful devices, and it was by them that he assessed the nobility of man, and not by chance loutishness. And, in fact, in the morning Zakhar Pavlovich saw how the carpenter's oldest son ably and seriously made an axehandle. That meant the important thing in him was not urine, but manual dexterity.

After a week Zakhar Pavlovich was so ashamed of his inactivity that he began unasked to fix the carpenter's house. He resewed the worst stitches on the roof, remade the railing on the porch, and cleaned the ash from the chimney. In the evening hours Zakhar Pavlovich cut stakes.

"What are you doing?" the carpenter asked, blotting up his mustache with a bread crust. He had just eaten, potatoes and pickles.

"Maybe they'll be good for something," answered Zakhar Pavlovich.

The carpenter chewed the crust and thought.

"They'd be good for fences around graves!"

Zakhar Pavlovich's anguish was stronger than his awareness of the uselessness of labor and he continued to cut stakes until full nocturnal exhaustion. Without a craft Zakhar Pavlovich's blood flowed from his hands into his head, and he began to think so deeply about everything at once that only gibberish resulted, while in his heart arose a saddened fright. Wandering around the sunny yard in the day, he couldn't overcome his thought that man is descended from the worms. After all, the worm is simply a terrifying pipe which has nothing inside, just empty blackness. Observing the village houses, Zakhar Pavlovich discovered that they closely resembled closed coffins, and he was afraid to sleep in the carpenter's house. An animal, work-capable force, finding no place, was eating Zakhar Pavlovich's soul. He did not control himself and was tortured by various kinds of feelings which never appeared when he worked. He began to have dreams that his father, a miner, was dying, and his mother was pouring him milk from her breasts so that he would live, but the father would say to her angrily, "At least let me be tormented freely, you old shit." They he would lie and drag death on and the mother would stand over him and ask, "Are you going soon?" The father would spit with the bitterness of a martyr, lie on his face and remind her, "Bury me in the old pants . . . give these to Zakharka!"

The only thing that cheered Zakhar Pavlovich was to sit on the roof and look into the distance, where, within two miles of the village, occasionally passed the rabid trains. Zakhar Pavlovich's body itched happily from the turning of the train's wheels and its rapid breathing, while his eyes grew damp with light tears of sympathy for the engine.

The carpenter watched and watched his lodger, and then began to feed him from his table for free. The first time, the carpenter's sons threw snot into Zakhar Pavlovich's cup, but the father stood up and, without a word, with all his might beat out a lump on the skull of the oldest son.

"Me, I'm an ordinary man," the carpenter said peacefully after sitting back in his place, "but understand, I gave birth to that kind of swine . . . as soon as you blink they'll finish me off. Look at Fedka! The devil's own strength, and where he managed to stuff his snout I don't know myself. Ever since they was little they've had cheap vittles. . . ."

The first autumn rains had begun, prematurely, uselessly—the peasants had long ago disappeared in strange lands, while many had died on the roads, not making it all the way to the mines and the southern grain. Zakhar Pavlovich went to the train station with the carpenter to hire on—the carpenter knew an engineer there.

They found the engineer in the duty room where the engine crews slept. The engineer said that there were many people and no work. The entire remnants of the nearby villages lived at the station and would do whatever came up for a pittance. The carpenter went out and brought back a bottle of vodka and a ring of sausage. After drinking some vodka, the engineer told Zakhar Pavlovich and the carpenter about steam engines and the Westinghouse brake.

"Do you know what kind of inertia you get on slopes with sixty axles on the train?" said the engineer, worked up by the ignorance of his audience, and tensely showed with his hands the might of inertia. "Oho! You open the brake tap and you get blue flame under the tender, out of the brake shoes. The cars in the rear jam forward, the train blows and huffs from the closed-off steam—just from running it boils up the pipe. Motherlove! Pour me some more! Shame you didn't buy any pickles . . . sausage just stuffs up your stomach!"

Zakhar Pavlovich sat silently. He had already believed that he wouldn't enroll in steam-engine work. How was he to cope with it, after wooden frying pans!

Because of the engineer's stories his interest in mechanical devices became hidden and sad, like spurned love.

"And why the hell are you fussing like a brood hen?" remarked the engineer on Zakhar Pavlovich's shame. "Come to the depot tomorrow. I'll talk to the station master . . . maybe they'll take you on as a wipe-down boy. Don't be shy, you son of a bitch, if you want to eat. . . ."

The engineer stopped without finishing some word.

"But damn it all, your sausage is jammed in reverse! You must have paid a kopek a peck, you beggar . . . I'd be better off eating ground-off butts. . . . But," said the engineer, turning again to Zakhar Pavlovich, "make my engine shine like a mirror, so I could pinch any part with my spring gloves on! Engines hate *a-l-l* kinds of dust. An engine, my friend, is like a princess, plain

woman won't do. A machine won't go with any extra holes. . . ."

The engineer carried some abstract words about some sort of women farther off into the distance. Zakhar Pavlovich listened and listened and understood nothing. He didn't know that woman can be loved particularly and from a distance. He knew that a man like that should marry. One can talk with interest about the creation of the world and unknown objects, but to talk about women, the same as to talk about men, is incomprehensible and boring. Even Zakhar Pavlovich had at one time had a wife. She had loved him and he hadn't offended her, but he hadn't seen any great happiness from her.

Man is divided into so many properties that if you think passionately about them you can bray from rapture. From birth Zakhar Pavlovich had not valued such conversations.

After an hour the engineer remembered about his duties. Zakhar Pavlovich and the carpenter accompanied him to the steam engine which had just come from repair. The engineer yelled to his helper from afar, in his official bass, "How's the steam?"

"Seven atmospheres," announced the helper, unsmiling, leaning out of the window.

"Water?"

"Normal level."

"Fire box?"

"Up to the syphon."

"Excellent."

The next day Zakhar Pavlovich arrived at the depot. The engine foreman, an old man who doubted in living people, looked him over for a long time. He so achingly and jealously loved steam engines that he watched with horror as they were run. If it had been his choice, he would have left all locomotives in eternal peace, so that they wouldn't get maimed by the coarse hands of the ignorant. He figured that there are many people and few machines. People are alive and stand up for themselves, while a machine is a tender defenseless breakable being. In order to ride on them properly, one must first abandon one's wife, push all cares from one's head, and dip one's bread in machine oil—only then can you let a man near a machine, and that after ten years of waiting!

The foreman studied Zakhar Pavlovich and tormented himself.

"A lackey, no doubt. Where you've got to just push with your finger, he's going to have at it with a sledgehammer, the animal. When you've got to just barely wipe the glass on the manometer, he'll push it so hard the entire device, right down to the tube, will rip clean off. Really, can one let a plowman get near a device? God, my God," the master craftsman fumed angrily but silently, "where are you, you old-time mechanics, helpers, stokers, wipe-down men? It used to be that people would tremble near a steam engine, and now everyone thinks he's smarter than machines. Scum! Apostates! Villains! Lackeys of the devil! By rights we ought to stop movement right now! What

kind of mechanics are there today! This is chaos, and not people! These bums, horsemen, and dandies—they shouldn't even have a bolt put into their hands, and now they're even supplied regulators! It used to be that with me, as soon as something knocked a little too much as the train ran or something started to sing in the lead device, I'd feel it to the end of my fingernails. Without getting down from my place I'd shake with pain, and at the very first stop I'd find the defect with my lips, lick it up, suck it out, and oil it with my own blood! But I never went out in the dark . . . and this one wants to come onto an engine directly out of the rye!"

"Go home and wash your puss first, then come back to the engine," the foreman said to Zakhar Pavlovich.

The next day Zakhar Pavlovich appeared again, washed. The foreman lay under a steam engine, carefully touching the springs, lightly tapping them with a little hammer and putting his ear to the ringing metal.

"Motya!" the foreman called to a welder. "Tighten this nut half a thread!"

Motya turned the nut a half turn with a crescent wrench. The foreman suddenly became so offended that Zakhar Pavlovich was sorry for him.

"Motyushka!" said the foreman with quiet, tortured sadness, grinding his teeth. "What do you do, you goddamn swine!? I said the nut! Which nut? The *main* nut!! And you went and turned the counter nut on me and threw off my count. And you go and pester the counter nut on me! And again you touch the counter nut! What am I going to do with you goddamned animals! Get out of here, swine!"

"Mister mechanic, let me do it. I'll give the counter nut a half turn back and squeeze the main one on a half thread," requested Zakhar Pavlovich.

After evaluating this third party's sympathy for his correctness, the foreman called out in a touched, peaceable voice, "Ah, you noticed, did you? Him, he's a . . . a . . . a woodchopper, not a welder. He doesn't even know the nuts, the *nuts*, by name! Ah? Well, what are you going to do? He treats this engine like a broad, like some kind of two-bit whore! God, my God! Well, come on . . . come here and do the nut my way for me!"

Zakhar Pavlovich crawled under the engine and did everything exactly and as it should be done. After that the foreman occupied himself until evening with the engines and fights with the engineers. When they turned on the light, Zakhar Pavlovich reminded the foreman that he was there. He once again stopped before Zakhar Pavlovich and thought his thoughts.

*Foreman*  
*ky* | "The lever is the father of the machine and the inclined plane is its mother," the foreman said affectionately, recalling something intimate which gave him peace at night. "Tomorrow you can try cleaning the fire-boxes. Be on time. Now, I don't know anything and I don't promise anything. We'll try it and see. . . . This is too serious a business! The fire-box, understand! Not just something, but the fire-box! . . . Well, go on, go away."

Zakhar Pavlovich slept yet another night in the carpenter's shed, then at dawn, three hours before starting time, went to the depot. Worn-out rails lay about. Freight cars stood around with inscriptions from far-off lands, the Trans-Caspian, Trans-Caucasian, and Ussurian railroads. Strange and special people walked along the paths, intelligent and concentrated. These were switchmen, engineers, inspectors, and more. All around were buildings, machines, objects, and structures.

A new and expert world arose before Zakhar Pavlovich, a world so long beloved it was as though he had always known it, and he decided to cling to it forever.

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A year before the crop failure Mavra Fetisovna got pregnant for the seventeenth time. Prokhor Abramovich Dvanov, her muzhik, rejoiced less than might have been expected. Every day, contemplating the fields, the stars, and the enormous flowing air, he said to himself, "There's enough for everyone!" And he lived peacefully in his hut, which teemed with lesser people, his posterity. Although his wife had given birth sixteen times, only seven remained intact. The eighth was a foundling, the son of a fisherman who had drowned of his own desire. When his wife had led the orphan up by the hand Prokhor Abramovich didn't say anything against it.

"Well, what the hell . . . the thicker the kids are, the surer it'll be for the old folks to die. . . . Feed him, Mavrushka!"

The orphan ate a little bread with milk and started to swing his legs, then moved away and squinted from all the strangers.

Mavra Fetisovna glanced at him and sighed.

"So God has sent a new grief. . . . He'll die a little one, no doubt. You can tell by his eyes he's not a survivor, that he'll just eat bread for nothing."

However, the little boy didn't die in two years, or even get sick once. He ate little, and Mavra Fetisovna resigned herself to the orphan.

"Eat child, eat," she'd say. "You aren't taking anything from us, and you couldn't take it away from others."

Prokhor Abramovich had long ago grown timid from poverty and children, and he didn't pay profound attention to anything, whether the children were sick or new ones being born, whether the harvest was bad or bearable, and thus he seemed to everyone a good man. Only the nearly annual pregnancy of his wife gave him a little joy. Children were his only sense of the durability of his own life—with soft little hands they forced him to plow, to do domestic chores, and to take care in every way. He worked, lived, and walked like a somnambulist, without having extra energy for internal happiness and without knowing anything absolutely and definitely. Prokhor Abramovich prayed to God, but felt no inclination of his heart toward Him. The

passions of youth, such as love for women and the desire for good food had not continued in him, because his wife was not beautiful and the food was un nourishing and the same from year to year. Multiplication of children lessened Prokhor Abramovich's interest in himself—it made it somehow colder and easier for him. The longer Prokhor Abramovich lived, the more patiently and unaccountably he regarded village events. If all of Prokhor Abramovich's children were to die in one day, the next day he would have collected himself exactly that many foundlings, and if the foundlings were to die, Prokhor Abramovich would that moment chuck his farmer's lot, turn his wife loose, and set off barefoot, where to unknown—towards there where all people are drawn, where, perhaps, it is just as sad for the heart, but where at least the feet are happy.

His wife's seventeenth pregnancy distressed Prokhor Abramovich for domestic reasons. That fall fewer children had been born in the village than in the previous one and, most importantly, Marya hadn't given birth. She had given birth every year for twenty years, except in those years which came before a drought. The entire village had noticed this, and if Marya walked around empty, the muzhiks would say, "Well, Marya's walking around now like a virgin . . . there'll be a famine this summer."

This year also Marya walked about thin and free.

"Cooking anything, Marya Matveevna?" the passing muzhiks asked her with respect.

"Well, you know . . ." said Marya, and from unfamiliarity was abashed by her bachelor position.

"Well, no matter," they reassured her. "You wait and see, soon you'll start a son again . . . you're good at it."

"And why live for nothing?" said Marya, growing bolder. "If only at least there were bread. . . ."

"That's true, at least . . ." agreed the muzhiks. "It's not hard for a woman to give birth, but the grain won't ripen for her. . . . Yes sir, you're a witch, you are . . . you know your time."

Prokhor Abramovich told his wife that she had burdened him at the wrong time.

"Ohhh, Prosha," answered Mavra Fetisovna, "I give birth and I'll go out with a sack for them, don't you worry!"

Prokhor Abramovich quieted down for a long time.

It turned December, but there was no snow and the winter wheat froze. Mavra Fetisovna gave birth to twins.

"You've brought us down now," said Prokhor Abramovich at her bed. "Praise God, what are we going to do now? It looks like they're going to be survivors—they've got wrinkles on their foreheads and their hands are little fists. . . ."

The foundling stood there too, looking at the incomprehensible with a twisted, aged face. A gnawing flush of shame for the adults was rising within

him. He immediately lost his love for them and felt his isolation—he wanted to run away and hide in the ravine. Mavra Fetisovna herself felt nothing in her weakness. It was stuffy for her under the multicolored rag blanket. She uncovered a full leg, wrinkled with age and maternal fat. The yellow spots of some dead suffering were visible on her leg, as were the blue veins fat with stiffened blood, growing tightly under the skin, ready to rip it in order to come out. In one vein which looked like a tree one could sense how her heart beat somewhere, driving blood with pressure and work through the narrow collapsed ravines of her body.

“Well, Sash, seen enough?” Prokhor Abramovich asked the weakened foundling. “You’ve got two brothers. Cut yourself some bread and go play outside—it’s a little warmer today. . . .”

Sasha went out without taking the bread. Mavra Fetisovna opened her white liquid eyes and called her husband.

“Prosha! With the orphan we have ten, and you’re the twelfth. . . .”

Prokhor Abramovich also knew the count himself.

“Let ’em live. There’s always extra bread for an extra mouth.”

“People are saying there’ll be a famine. God forbid such a thing! What are we going to do with the sucklings and the little ones!”

“There won’t be a famine,” Prokhor Abramovich decided for reassurance. “If the winter wheat doesn’t succeed, we’ll live on the spring.”

The winter wheat in truth did not succeed. It had frozen back in the fall and in the spring it finally died completely under the ice on the fields. The spring wheat now frightened them, now heartened them, but it ripened somehow and yielded thrice as much as had been sown. Prokhor Abramovich’s oldest son was eleven, and the foundling was almost that. One of them had to go beg in order to bring the family the aid of dried bread crusts. Prokhor Abramovich was silent. He was sorry to send his own son, and to send the orphan was shameful.

“Why are you sitting and not saying anything?” said Mavra Fetisovna angrily. “Aganka sent off his seven-year-old, Mishka Duvakin rigged out his little girl, and all you do is sit, you worthless idol. There’s not enough buckwheat to last until Christmas and we won’t see any grain from the Savior!”

All evening Prokhor Abramovich sewed a good voluminous sack out of old threadbare cloth. A couple of times he called Sashka over to measure it against his shoulders.

“It’s all right? It doesn’t pull here?”

“It’s all right.”

Seven-year-old Proshka sat beside his father, sticking the unbleached thread into the needle when it fell out, since the father saw unclearly.

“Papa, are you chasing Sasha out to beg tomorrow?” asked Proshka.

“What are you sitting there chattering for?” said the father angrily. “When you grow up you’ll go begging too!”

“I won’t go,” Proshka refused. “I’m going to steal. Remember, you

said they led off Grishka's stallion? They led it away and things are good for them, and Grishka bought a gelding again. And when I grow up I'll steal the gelding."

That night Mavra Fetisovna fed Sasha better than her own blood children. After everyone else she gave him kasha with butter and as much milk as he could drink. Prokhor Abramovich brought a pole from the threshing barn and when everyone was asleep he made a staff for the road from it. Sasha wasn't sleeping, and he listened to Prokhor Abramovich whittling at the stick with a breadknife. Proshka snorted and shivered from the cockroach wandering around on his neck. Sasha took the cockroach off but was afraid to kill it, so he threw it from the stove onto the floor.

"You aren't asleep, Sasha?" asked Prokhor Abramovich. "Go to sleep. What's the matter?"

The children woke up early and began to scuffle with each other in the darkness, while the cocks still dozed. The old folks awoke only in the second hour and scratched their bedsores. Not a single bolt scraped in the village yet, and nothing chirped in the fields. In that kind of hour Prokhor Abramovich led the foundling beyond the outskirts of the town. The boy walked sleepily, holding Prokhor Abramovich's hand tight. It was damp and cool. The church watchman sounded the hours and the boy began to get upset from the mournful ringing of the bell. Prokhor Abramovich bent towards the boy.

"Sasha, look over there. You see where the road goes out of the village onto the hill? You just keep walking along it. Then you'll see a huge village and a watchtower on a mound. Don't be afraid . . . just keep walking straight, because that's the city meeting you, and there's a lot of bread there at the collection points. As soon as you save up a whole sack you come home and rest. Well, farewell, my little son!"

Sasha held Prokhor Abramovich's hand and looked at the gray morning poverty of a field autumn.

"Were there rains there?" Sasha asked of the faraway town.

"Hard ones!" confirmed Prokhor Abramovich.

Then the boy let go of the hand and, not looking at Prokhor Abramovich, quietly moved off alone with his sack and stick, watching the road up onto the hill so as not to lose direction. The boy was hidden by the church and graveyard, and was not visible for a long time. Prokhor Abramovich stood in one place and waited until the boy showed up on the other side of the hollow. Solitary sparrows were out very early, rooting about on the road and, apparently, freezing. "Orphans too." Prokhor Abramovich thought about them. "Who's ever going to throw them anything?"

Sasha went into the graveyard, not recognizing what he wanted to do. For the first time he thought now about himself and touched his chest. Here I am—and all around everything was foreign, unlike himself. The house in which he had lived, had loved Prokhor Abramovich, Mavra Fetisovna and

Proshka, turned out not to be his house. He had been led out of it onto the cold road in the morning. In his half-childish saddened soul, undiluted by the comforting water of consciousness, was clenched a full, crushing insult, which he felt up into his throat.

The graveyard was covered with dead leaves—in their calm any feet immediately grew quiet, walking peacefully. Peasant crosses stood about everywhere, many of them without name and without memory of the dead. Sasha became interested in those crosses which were most rickety and which were also getting ready to fall and die in the earth. The graves without crosses were even better—in their depths lay people who were forever orphaned, their mothers also dead, while the fathers of some had drowned in rivers or streams. Sasha's father's grave mound was almost completely trampled down. A path lay across it, along which were carried new coffins into the depths of the graveyard.

His father lay close and patiently, not complaining that he had been so shabbily and awfully left all alone for the winter. What is there there? There it's bad, there it's quiet and close, from there a boy with a stick and a beggar's sack is not visible.

"Papa, they chased me out to beg. Now I'll die soon and come to you. It looks like its boring for you there alone, and I'm bored."

The boy lay his staff on the grave and covered it with leaves, so that it would be preserved and wait for him.

Sasha decided to come back from the city quickly, just as soon as he had collected a full sack of bread crusts. Then he would dig himself a shelter next to his father's grave and live there, since he had no home.

Prokhor Abramovich had already waited too long for the foundling and wanted to leave. However, Sasha crossed the channels of the gully streams and began to climb along the clay hill. He walked slowly, already tired, but he was happy that he soon would have his own house and father. No matter if his father lay dead and didn't say anything; he would always lie near, wearing a shirt warm with sweat, and he had hands that had embraced Sasha in their double dreams on the shores of the lake. No matter if the father was dead. He was whole, alone, and the same.

"Where did his staff get to?" wondered Prokhor Abramovich.

The morning grew damper and the boy conquered the slippery rise, falling onto his hands. The sack flapped about wide and flat, like someone else's clothing.

"You idiot, you sewed it wrong, not like a beggar's, but out of greed," Prokhor Abramovich scolded himself, too late. "With bread in it he'll never carry it home . . . well, it's all the same now . . . let him try . . . somehow . . ."

The boy stopped at the top of the divide of the road into that unseen side of the field. He stood over an apparently profound trough, on the shore of a heavenly lake, on the edge of the village horizon, in the dawn of the future day. Sasha looked in fear into the emptiness of the steppe. The heights,

the distance, the dead earth were wet and large, so that everything seemed foreign and terrifying. But it was important to Sasha to remain whole and to return to the village hollow, to the graveyard. There was his father, there it was close and small and sad and covered from the wind by earth and trees. For that reason he walked to the city for bread crusts.

Prokhor Abramovich grew sorry for the orphan, who was now hidden beyond the slope of the road. "The boy will grow weak from the wind, lie down in a ditch, and die. The big world isn't the family hut."

Prokhor Abramovich suddenly wanted to catch the orphan and bring him back, so that all of them could die in a heap and in peace, if they had to die, but his own children were at home, as was his woman and the last remnants of the spring grain.

"All of us are bastards and good-for-nothings!" Prokhor Abramovich defined himself correctly, and from this correctness it grew a little easier for him. He moped around the hut entire days, occupied with an unnecessary matter, woodcarving. In hard times he always distracted himself by cutting out fir groves or nonexistent forests in wood. His art developed no further, as the knife was dull. Mavra Fetisovna cried, with intervals, over the departed foundling. She had had eight people, her children, die, and for each of them she had cried three days by the stove, with intervals. This was the same thing for her as woodcarving was for Prokhor Abramovich. Prokhor Abramovich already knew in advance how much time was left for Mavra Fetisovna to cry and for him to carve the uneven wood—a day and a half.

Proshka looked and looked at his parents, and then grew jealous.

"What are you crying for? Sasha'll come back by himself. You'd be better off making felt boots for me, father. Sasha's not your son, he's an orphan. And all you do is sit and dull the knife, old man."

"My God," Mavra Fetisovna stopped crying in amazement. "He blithers away like a grown-up . . . he's only a nit and already he's turning on his father!"

But Proshka was right. The orphan returned in two weeks. He brought so many bread crusts and dry rolls that it seemed he hadn't eaten anything himself. He was also unable to try any of that which he had brought, because towards evening Sasha lay on the stove and could not warm himself. The winds of the highroad had blown all of his warmth out of him. In his oblivion he mumbled something about the staff in the leaves and about his father, saying his father should take care of the staff and wait for him by the lake in the dugout, where the crosses grow and fall.

After three weeks, when the foundling had recovered, Prokhor Abramovich took his knout and walked to town, to stand on the squares and rent himself out for work.

Twice Proshka followed Sasha to the graveyard. He saw that the orphan was digging a grave with his own hands, and couldn't dig very deep. He brought the orphan his father's shovel, and said that it was easier to dig with

a shovel—all the muzhiks dig with them.

“All the same they’re going to chase you out of the house,” Proshka informed him of the future. “Father didn’t sow anything in the fall, and in the summer mama will lie down, and maybe there’ll be three this time! I’m telling you the truth.”

Sasha took the shovel, but it was the wrong size for him and he quickly grew weak from the work.

Proshka stood, growing cold from occasional drops of late caustic rain, and advised, “Don’t dig it wide—you don’t have anything to buy a coffin with . . . you’ll lie down just like that. Get it figured out as quick as you can, or else mama will have a baby and you’ll be an extra mouth.”

“I’m digging myself a house and I’ll live here,” said Sasha.

“Without our vittles?” inquired Proshka.

“Sure, without anything. In the summertime I’ll crop angelica and eat it myself.”

“So live then,” Proshka calmed down. “But don’t come begging to us—we don’t have anything to give.”

Prokhor Abramovich earned two hundred pounds of flour in town. He arrived in someone else’s coat and lay down on the stove. By the time they had eaten half of the flour, Proshka had already figured out what would happen further.

“You’re bone idle,” he said once to his father, who was looking from the stove at the twins, who were crying identically. “We’ll polish off the flour, and then we’ll die of hunger! You gave birth to us, now feed us!”

“You devil’s leaving!” Prokhor Abramovich cursed from up above. “Better you be the father and not me, you sopping wee bit of muck!”

Proshka sat down with great pleasure on his face, thinking how he had to become the father. He already knew that children come out of mama’s belly—her entire belly was all scars and wrinkles—but where did the orphan come from? Proshka had twice seen in the night when he awoke how his father crushed his mother’s belly, and then how the belly swells and children are born. More mouths. He also reminded his father about this.

“And don’t you lie on mother! Lie alongside and sleep. Parashka, she doesn’t have a single little one . . . Fedot doesn’t crush *her* belly. . . .”

Prokhor Abramovich got down from the stove, put on his felt boots, and looked for something. There was nothing extra in the hut, so Prokhor Abramovich took the bath-house switches and whipped Proshka’s face. Proshka didn’t cry; he just lay face down on the bench. Prokhor Abramovich began to flog him silently, trying to accumulate the anger within him.

“It doesn’t hurt, it doesn’t hurt, all the same it doesn’t hurt!” Proshka said, not showing his face.

After the beating Proshka got up and said, “Then chase Sasha out, so there won’t be an extra mouth.”

Prokhor Abramovich was more tormented than Proshka and sat, head

bowed, by the cradle with the silent twins. He had flogged Proshka because he was right; Mavra Fetisovna had again grown heavy, while of the winter wheat there was nothing to sow. Prokhor Abramovich lived in this world like the grass at the bottom of a hollow. In the spring, run-off pours down upon it, in the summer it's cloudbursts, wind, sand, and dust, in the winter snow crushes, chokes, and smothers it. It lives always and forever beneath blows and mounds of weight, so that the grass in hollows grows hunchback, ready to bend, to let all trouble pass over it. So children poured in upon Prokhor Abramovich, harder than being born oneself, and more often than the harvest. If the fields were to bear like his wife and his wife were not to hurry with her fertility, Prokhor Abramovich long ago would have been a full and satisfied man. But his entire life children had flowed in and, as silt does a hollow, had buried Prokhor Abramovich's soul in the clay alluvion of care. Because of this Prokhor Abramovich hardly felt his life and personal interests. Free, childless people called Prokhor Abramovich's distracted condition laziness.

"Prosh, hey Prosh!" Prokhor Abramovich called.

"What do you want?" Proshka said crossly. "You beat on me, then you holler for me. . . ."

"Prosh, run over to Marya's and have a look, see if her belly is puffed up, or if it's thin. Somehow I haven't seen her for a long time, or maybe she's crippled up."

Proshka wasn't touchy, and was business-like for his family's sake.

"I should be the father and you be Proshka!" Proshka shamed his father. "What's the good of looking at her stomach? You didn't sow any winter wheat . . . all the same you've got hunger to look forward to."

Proshka put on his mother's quilted undershirt and continued to mumble in a domestic way, "The muzhiks lie. Marya was empty all last year, and there was rain. See, she missed. She should have had another little mouth, but she didn't"

"The winter wheat froze. She sensed it," the father said softly.

"Babies suck their mothers and don't eat any bread at all," Proshka objected. "And the mother can eat spring wheat . . . I'm not going to Marya's . . . if she has a belly then you won't get off the stove. You'll say that there'll be grass and a good spring crop. But we don't feel like starving, and you and mother had us. . . ."

Prokhor Abramovich was silent. Sasha too did not speak unless spoken to. Even Prokhor Abramovich, himself like an orphan in his own house next to Proshka, even he didn't know what would become of Sasha, whether he'd become good or not. He could go out to beg from fear, but what he thought himself he wouldn't say. Sasha, however, thought little, because he considered all children and adults smarter than himself, and for this reason he feared them. He was more afraid of Proshka than of Prokhor Abramovich, because Proshka counted each crumb, and loved no one beyond his own door.

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Pushing out his rear, scraping the grass with long destructive arms, a hunchbacked man, Petr Fedorovich Kondaev, walked about the village. For ages he had had no pains in his back, so no change in the weather was to be expected.

That year the sun ripened in the heavens early; by the end of April it already warmed like in deep July. The muzhiks fell silent, testing the dry soil with their feet, while with the rest of their bodies they sensed the deeply calm expanse of deathly heat. The little boys watched the horizons so as to notice the appearance of rain clouds in time. However, columnar dustdevils rose up on the field roads and carts from other villages drove through them. Kondaev walked through the street towards that side of the village where his soul's preoccupation lived, the half-girl Nastya, age fifteen. He loved her with that place which often ached and was sensitive, like the heart in upright people, with his waist or the apex of his hump. Kondaev saw pleasure in drought and hoped for the best. His hands were always green and yellow; he destroyed plants as he walked, rubbing them between his fingers. He was glad of the hunger which would chase all the handsome muzhiks far away to look for wages, and many of them would die, freeing women for Kondaev. Kondaev smiled beneath the pressing sun, which forced the soil to burn and smoke with dust. Every morning he washed in the pond, caressing his hump with grasping faithful hands, capable of untiring embracings of the future wife.

"No problem," Kondaev gloated by himself. "The muzhiks will move on and the women will stay here. Whoever's bitten me, he won't soon forget it . . . I'm a rangy bull, I am. . . ."

Kondaev made his long thoroughbred arms rumble and pretended that he was holding Nastya. He was even amazed why Nastya, in a body of such weakness, why she had living there some secret powerful charm. From nothing but thinking of her he blew himself up with blood and became hard. To spare himself the attraction and concreteness of his imagination he swam about the pond, sucking into himself so much water that it seemed he had a cavern within his body, then he sprayed the water back, together with the saliva of love's sweetness.

Returning home, Kondaev advised each muzhik he encountered to go look for work.

"The city's like a fort," Kondaev would say. "There everything is completely adequate, but here we have that sun standing there, and it's going to stand there insistently. What kind of harvest are you going to have then, eh? Wake up, man!"

"And how about you, Petr Fedorovich?" the muzhik would inquire of another's fate.

"I am a cripple," Kondaev would announce. "I can live bravely on nothing but sympathy. But look at you, killing your woman, you wart of a man! You should go away and send her back cartloads of bread. Now that would be something worthwhile!"

"Yes, I suppose so, it'll come to pass," the muzhik would sigh reluctantly, meanwhile hoping to himself that he could somehow make it through at home on cabbage or berries or mushrooms or grasses, and then he'd see.

Kondaev loved old wattle fences, the cracks in dead stumps, all antiquity, ailment, and subservient, barely living warmth. The quiet evil of his randiness found its satisfaction in these solitary places. He would have liked to torment the entire village to a tired silent state, so as to embrace without opposition the powerless living beings. Kondaev lay in the quiet of the morning shadows and foresaw half-ruined villages, overgrown streets, and thin blackened Nastya, wandering in hunger about the brittle desiccated stubble. From the mere appearance of life, whether in a blade of grass or in a girl, Kondaev would pass into a calm jealous savagery. If it was a grass he would crush it in his merciless loving hands, feeling any living thing as cruelly and greedily as a woman's virginity. If, however, it was a woman or a girl, Kondaev would for the future and for always hate her father, husband, brothers, and future groom, wishing them destruction or the need to seek work. Thus the second hungry year greatly encouraged Kondaev. He figured that soon he alone would remain in the village, and then he could rage over the women as he wished.

Not only the plants, but even the huts and the fenceposts entered into old age quickly from the heat. Sasha had noticed this even in the preceding summer. In the mornings he looked at the limpid peaceful dawns and remembered his father and early childhood on the shore of Lake Mutevo. The sun would rise with the bells of early Mass, rapidly transforming the village and entire earth into old age, into baked, dried human malice.

Proshka would climb up on the roof, screw up his preoccupied face, and investigate the sky. In the mornings he would ask his father the same question, had his back begun to hurt yet, so that the weather would change, and when would the moon take its bath.

Kondaev loved to walk about the streets at midday, enjoying the frenzy of the nagging insects. Once he noticed Proshka, who had galloped barebottomed into the street because he thought something was dripping from the sky.

The houses all but sang from the frightful incandescent silence, while the thatch blackened, wafting a rotting, guttering smell.

"Hey Proshka!" the hunchback hollered. "What are you tending the sky for? Is it hot enough for you, huh?"

Proshka discovered that nothing was dripping, that it had only seemed so.

"Go feel other people's chickens, you bashed-in cripple!" Proshka

became slowly offended as he was disillusioned by the drip. "People are at the bottom of the barrel, and he's happy. Go feel your father's rooster!"

Proshka hit home unknowingly and accurately. In answer Kondaev screamed in sharp pain and leapt earthward, seeking a stone. There were no stones, so he threw a handful of dry dust at Proshka. Proshka, however, knew everything in advance and was already at home. The hunchback ran into their yard, dragging his hands along the ground. He found Sasha in his path. Kondaev smashed him with the bony fingers of his thin hand, and the bones in Sasha's head began to ring. Sasha fell, the skin under his hair split, already wet with clean, cool blood.

Sasha came to, but then saw his dream without oblivion. Without losing the memory that it was hot in the yard, that it was a long hungry day, and that he had been hit by the hunchback, Sasha saw his father on the lake, in a moist fog. His father hid in the fog in a boat, from where he threw the mother's olive-wood ring onto the shore. Sasha picked up the ring in the wet grass, but then the hunchback began to beat him on the head with it beneath a sundering sky, from whose cracks suddenly poured forth a black rain. Immediately it fell silent. The tolling of the white sun died away in the flooded meadows beyond the hill. The hunchback stood on the meadows and pissed on the little sun, which was already going out of its own accord. Alongside the dream, however, Sasha saw the continuing day and heard Proshka's conversation with Prokhor Abramovich.

Kondaev was already chasing someone else's chickens about the threshing floors, taking advantage of the desertion and other woes of his fellow villagers. He didn't catch the chicken. In its fear it flew up into a tree on the street. Kondaev wanted to shake the tree, but he noticed someone driving by and went softly home with the gait of an uninvolved man.

If it was a good harvest year, there was a lot of strength left in the people in the fall, and the adults and the children would pester the hunchback by calling, "Petr Fedorovich, for the love of God, come feel our rooster!"

Kondaev couldn't bear the baiting and would chase his tormentors until he caught some gawky lad and caused him a slight mutilation.

Sasha again saw only the aged day. He had long ago seen the heat as an old man, and night and coolness as little boys and girls.

The window in the hut was open and Mavra Fetisovna was dashing about near the stove, never stopping. Despite all her experience at giving birth, something was pestering her from within.

"I'm going to be sick! Things are bad, Prokhor Abramovich . . . run get the woman. . . ."

Sasha didn't get up out of the grass until the tolling for vespers, until the shadows were long and sad. The windows of the hut were locked and curtained. Proshka had not come out for ages, although he was home. The other children were chasing about somewhere in the neighboring yards. Sasha was

afraid to get up and go into the hut at the wrong time. The shadows of the grass blades closed ranks and the light south wind which had blown all day stopped. The woman came out of the house, her head scarved, prayed towards the murky east, and went away. A calm night approached. A cricket in the shorings tried his voice, then sang for an age, enveloping the yard, the grass, and the far fence with his song, making of it one childish homeland, the best place in the world to live. Sasha watched the buildings, changed by the dusk but all the more familiar for that, the wattle fences, the shafts of the overgrown sled, and felt sorry for them, because they were exactly like him, but they were silent, didn't move about, and must one day die for good.

Sasha thought that if he were to go away it would become even heavier for the yard to have to live in one place, and Sasha was happy that he was necessary there.

A new child was sobbing in the hut, drowning out the continued song of the cricket with his voice, which resembled no word. The cricket too then fell silent, also listening no doubt to the frightful cry. Proshka came out with Sasha's sack, the one with which they had sent him to beg in the fall, and with Prokhor Abramovich's cap.

"Sasha!" Proshka screamed into the stifling evening air. "Come here on the double, you scavenger!"

Sasha was nearby.

"What?"

"Here, catch. Father's giving you his cap. And here's your sack. Go walk and don't take it off . . . whatever you beg, eat it yourself, don't bring it to us. . ."

Sasha took the cap and sack.

"And you're going to stay here alone to live?" Sasha asked, not believing that they had ceased to love him here.

"And what else? Of course alone!" Proshka said. "We've had another mouth born . . . if it wasn't for him, you could live here for nothing. But now there's no way we need you . . . you're nothing but a burden. After all, mama didn't have you, you just had yourself. . ."

Sasha went beyond the gate into the garden. Proshka stood alone awhile, then went outside the gates, as a reminder that orphan shouldn't come back any more. The orphan hadn't gone anywhere yet. He was watching the small flame on the windmill.

"Sasha!" Proshka ordered. "Don't you come see us anymore. We put bread in your sack and gave you a cap. You go take a walk now. If you want you can sleep in the threshing barn, but only for the night. But don't show up under our window anymore, or else father will come to. . ."

Sasha walked toward the graveyard. Proshka locked the gates, looked over the garden, and picked up a masterless pole.

"So, so, no rain at all," Proshka said in an aged voice, and spit through the front gap in his mouth. "None, none . . . even if you were to lie down

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object / thing

right here and beat yourself to death against the ground, the devil piss on it!"

Sasha crept up to his father's grave and lay down on his unfinished crypt. He was afraid to walk among the crosses, but near his father he slept as sweetly as he had before, in the hut on the shore of the lake.

Later, two muzhiks came to the cemetery and quietly began to break off crosses for firewood, but Sasha, carried off in his dreams, heard nothing.

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Zakhar Pavlovich lived, needing no one. He could sit for hours before the little door of the firebox, where the flame burned.

This replaced for him the enormous pleasure of friendship and conversation with people. As he watched the living flame, Zakhar Pavlovich lived himself—within him his head thought, his heart felt, and his entire body quietly enjoyed. Zakhar Pavlovich respected coal, angle iron, all slumbering raw materials and rough-formed pieces, but he really loved and felt for only the finished item, that into which a thing had been made by human labor and as which it would continue to live its independent life. During lunch breaks Zakhar Pavlovich would not take his eyes from the engine, silently suffering within himself his love for it. He carried back to his quarters bolts, old valves, faucets, and other mechanical items. He arranged them in a row on the table and surrendered himself to staring at them, never growing dull from solitude. In fact Zakhar Pavlovich was not solitary—machines were his people, constantly arousing within him feelings, thoughts, and desires. The forward slope of the engine, which they called the spool, forced Zakhar Pavlovich to worry about the infinity of space. He went out specially at night to look at the stars, to see if the world is spacious, to see if there is enough space for the wheels to live and turn eternally. The stars shone passionately, but each in solitude. Zakhar Pavlovich thought, "What does the sky resemble?" Then he remembered the switching yard where he had been sent for some banding. One could see from the station platform a sea of solitary signals; there were the switches, signals, crossings, warning lights, the watch houses, the shining searchlights, the moving trains. The sky was the same, only farther away, and somehow the hitches barring smooth work had been better worked out. Then Zakhar Pavlovich began to do an eye-count of the number of miles to a blue flickering star. He divided his hands into a scale, and wisely applied this scale to the space. The star turned at the height of two hundred miles. This disturbed him, though he had read that the world is endless. He wanted the world really to be endless, so that wheels would always be necessary, ever preparing the way for general happiness, but Zakhar Pavlovich simply could not feel infinity.

object  
thing

"The number of miles is unknown, because it's farther!" Zakhar Pavlovich said. "But somewhere there's a dead end and the last mile stops . . . if

there really was infinity, then it would have spread out by itself in the great space, and there'd be no hardness . . . so how can there be infinity? There's got to be a dead end!"

The thought that in the end the wheel would not have enough work plagued Zakhar Pavlovich two days, but then he figured out how to stretch the world, when all roads had led to the dead end. Space, after all, can also be heated and stretched, like steel banding—and this calmed him.

The engineer foreman saw Zakhar Pavlovich's loving work, that he cleaned the fire-boxes to glittering purity without in any way threatening the metal, but he never said a kind word to him. The foreman knew well that machines live and move more from their own desire than from the mind and knowledge of people. People here were beside the point. Quite the opposite in fact, for the goodness of nature, energy, and metal spoils people. Any lackey can light a fire in the fire-box, but the train goes by itself, while people will corrode from their doubtful successes, until they will have to be crushed by efficient engines, giving the machines their freedom. The foreman, though, did curse Zakhar Pavlovich less than he did the others; Zakhar Pavlovich always hammered with regret, not with coarse strength, didn't spit just anywhere while he was on the engines, and didn't scratch mercilessly with his tools at the body of the machines.

"Mr. Foreman!" Zakhar Pavlovich once turned to him, emboldened by his love for the task. "Allow me to ask, please, how it is that man is as he is, not bad, not good, but all machines are remarkable and the same?"

The foreman listened angrily. He was jealous of outsiders and his locomotives, figuring that his feelings towards them were a personal privilege.

"The dappled devil," the foreman said to himself, "now he needs mechanisms, Lord God above!"

The locomotive which they were warming up for the night express stood opposite the two people. The foreman looked long at the engine, drinking up his usual joyous sympathy. The locomotive stood magnanimous, enormous, and warm in the harmonious swales of its high majestic body. The foreman concentrated, sensing the ringing involuntary awe within him. The depot doors opened into the evening expanse of summer, into the roiled future, into that life which could be repeated in the wind, in the elemental speeds of the rails, in the oblivion of night, risk, and the slight thrum of a well-tuned engine.

The engineer-foreman clenched his fists against the flood of some savage power of his inner life, akin to youth and the presentiment of a resounding future. He forgot about Zakhar Pavlovich's low qualifications and answered him like an equal friend.

"You've worked some and smartened up, huh? But man, man is stuff and nonsense! He fiddles about the house and is worth nothing . . . but take the birds now. . . ."

The locomotive siphoned off and drowned the words of the conversation.

labor / nature (aesthetics);  
boredom & play in workplace

The foreman and Zakhar Pavlovich went out into the pure-toned evening air and walked through the line of stone-cold engines.

"Take the birds . . . now there's a wonder, but after they're gone, there's nothing left. Because they don't work, see! Have you ever seen birds work? Of course you haven't! Okay, so they fuss around about food, about shelter, but where's their calibrated tools? Where's their angle of pursuit on life, huh? They haven't got one, and never will!"

"And man's got what?" Zakhar Pavlovich didn't understand.

"And man's got machines! Got it? Man's the beginning of all your devices, and the birds, they're an end all by themselves. . . ."

Zakhar Pavlovich thought the same as the foreman, lagging behind only in the choice of necessary words, which naggingly braked his ruminations. For both, that is, for the foreman and for Zakhar Pavlovich, nature which hands had not touched was unattractive and dead, be it animal or vegetable. The beast and the tree aroused in them no sympathy of life, because no man had taken part in their formation. They had neither the stroke nor the fit of mastery. They lived on their own score, evading Zakhar Pavlovich's wandering eye. All devices though, especially metal ones, were more interesting in their construction and strength than man, and more mysterious. Zakhar Pavlovich greatly luxuriated in just the thought of how man's vascular circulatory power would suddenly appear in the disturbed machines, greater in size and sense than the skilled workers.

And it would turn out just as the engineer-foreman said—in labor each man would elevate himself, would make his instruments better and more lasting than his own common significance. And further, Zakhar Pavlovich had observed the same burning, aroused power in the locomotives as that which lies silent, with no outlet, in the working man. Usually a welder converses well when drinking, but on a locomotive a man always feels large and terrible.

Once Zakhar Pavlovich spent a long time looking for a bolt he needed to thread a stripped nut, but he couldn't find it. He walked around the depot asking if anyone had a three-eighths bolt for threading. They told him there was no such bolt, though everyone had them. The reason was that the welders got bored at work, so they played by complicating each other's working problems. Zakhar Pavlovich still didn't know about that sly hidden gaiety which may be found in any shop. This quiet teasing allowed the other workers to overcome the length of the work day and the dullness of repetitious labor. Zakhar Pavlovich did a great deal of work for nothing, for the amusement of his neighbors. He would go to the warehouse for rags when they lay in mountains in the office. He would make wooden step-stools and oil cans, of which there was a surplus in the depot. He even wanted to follow someone's instructions and change the soft plugs in the boiler of a locomotive by himself, but he was warned in time by a chance stoker. Otherwise he would have been fired without so much as a word.

This time, not finding a suitable bolt, he began to adapt a lynchpin for

tapping the nut, and would have adapted it too, because he never lost his patience, but they said to him, "Hey, Three-Eighths Thread Stock! Come get your bolt!"

From that day on they called Zakhar Pavlovich "Three-Eighths Thread Stock," but they did begin to deceive him less when he needed tools quickly.

Afterwards no one found out that Zakhar Pavlovich liked the name Three-Eighths Thread Stock better than his given name; it resembled the responsible part of any machine and somehow incorporated Zakhar Pavlovich bodily into that true world where inches of iron defeat miles of earth.

\* \* \* \* \*

When Zakhar Pavlovich was young, he thought that when he grew up he would get smarter. Life, however, passed without any result and without halt, as simple pleasure. Not once had Zakhar Pavlovich sensed time as an encountered, firm thing; for him it existed only as a riddle in the mechanism of the alarm clock. But when Zakhar Pavlovich discovered the secret of the ratchet wheel, he saw then that there is no time. There is only the even tension of the mainspring. However, there was something quiet and sad in nature, some sort of forces acting without return. Zakhar Pavlovich observed the rivers, how in them neither the speed nor the water level fluctuated, and from this continuity grew a bitter sadness. There were of course flood waters, suffocating cloudbursts fell, winds that took away one's breath, but mostly just quiet indifferent life was at work—the river's currents, the grasses' growth, the seasons' change. Zakhar Pavlovich supposed that these even forces bound the entire earth, and they in return proved to Zakhar Pavlovich's mind that nothing changes for the better—as were the villages and people, so too would they remain. Because of the conservation of differential energy in nature men's troubles always repeat themselves. There had been a crop failure four years before and the muzhiks had left the village, while the children had lain down in early graves, but that fate had not passed forever, returning now for the precision of the march of general life.

No matter how much Zakhar Pavlovich lived, he saw with amazement that he didn't change and didn't get smarter, but stayed exactly as he had been at ten or fifteen. It was true that some of his former presentiments had now become common thoughts, but this changed nothing for the better. He had earlier pictured his future life as a deep sky-blue space so far away that it almost didn't exist. Zakhar Pavlovich knew in advance that the farther he lived, the less would grow the expanse of un-lived life, while behind him would stretch the dead trodden path. He had been fooled, though. Life grew and accumulated, while the future before also grew and expanded, deeper and more mysterious than in youth, just as though Zakhar Pavlovich was walking away from the end of his life, or else had increased his hope and faith in life.

Seeing his face in the glass of the railroad lanterns, Zakhar Pavlovich would say to himself, "Amazing. I'm going to die soon, but everything's the same."

Towards autumn the holidays came more often in the calendars. Once there were three holidays in a row. Zakhar Pavlovich grew bored on such days and walked far out along the tracks to watch the trains running at full speed. While on the road he felt a desire to visit the settlement above the mineshaft, the town where his mother was buried. He remembered precisely the gravesite and the stranger's iron cross next to the nameless, unanswerable grave of his mother. That cross preserved a rusty, nearly obliterated eternal inscription about the death of Kseniya Fedorovna Iroshnikovaya in 1813, from the sickness of cholera at eighteen years and three months from birth. There were also impressed the words "Sleep with peace, beloved daughter, until children and parents shall meet."

Zakhar Pavlovich badly wanted to dig up the grave and look at his mother, at her bones, hair, and all the final disappearing remnants of his childish motherland. Even now he wouldn't be against having a living mother, since he didn't feel within himself any particular difference from childhood. Even then, in that blue fog of early age, he had loved the nails in the fence, the smoke of roadside smithies, and the wheels on the carts, because they turned.

No matter where little Zachar Pavlovich went away from his home, he knew that there was a mother who would always wait for him, and he feared nothing.

The tracks were protected on both sides by a hedge. Sometimes poor people sat in the shade of the hedge, either eating or fixing their shoes. They saw how the triumphant locomotives led the trains with great speeds. However, not a single poor person knew why the engine itself went. Even the most simple concept—for what happiness they were living—even that didn't enter into the poor folks' heads. Not a single alms-giver knew what faith, hope, or love gave strength to their legs on the sandy roads. Zakhar Pavlovich occasionally dropped two kopeks into an outstretched hand, not reasoning why he was settling up for that of which the poor were deprived and with which he was rewarded—an understanding of machines.

A shaggy boy sat on the bank and sorted his take. He set the moldy things apart and put the fresher things into his sack. The boy was thin, but looked hearty and busy.

Zakhar Pavlovich stopped, smoking in the fresh air of early fall.

"Quality control?"

The boy didn't understand the technical words. "Give me a kopek mister," he said, "or leave me the butt to smoke."

Zakhar Pavlovich fished out a five-kopek piece.

"No doubt you're a thief and a scoundrel," he said without malice, destroying his kind gift with coarse words, so that he wouldn't be ashamed.

“Nope, I’m no thief, I’m a beggar,” the boy answered, packing down the crusts in the sack. “I have a mother and father, but they’re hiding from hunger.”

“So why’d you load up a bushel of grub?”

“Going home to visit. Suppose mother comes back with the little ones, what would they have to eat?”

“And whose are you?”

“My father’s. I’m no orphan. Those there, they’re all thieves, but my father spanked me.”

“And your father, whose is he?”

“My mother also gave birth to my father, from her stomach. They press their stomachs together and then little mouths get born, like out of a pit. And you just try and beg for all of them!”

The boy got heated from his displeasure with his father. He had long ago hidden the coin in the sack hanging from his neck. There were already a healthy number of copper coins in that sack.

“Worn out, huh?” asked Zakhar Pavlovich.

“Of course I’m worn out,” the boy agreed. “You really think you can beg enough from you devils right off? You yelp and bark until you want to eat. You gave me a fiver, but I bet you’re sorry. I wouldn’t have given it for anything.”

The boy tore a moldy bit from a chunk of spoiled bread. It was plain that he was taking the best bread to the village for his parents and that the bad bread he ate himself. Zakhar Pavlovich was instantly pleased by this.

“Your father loves you, of course?”

“He doesn’t love anything . . . he’s a lazy bones. I love my mother more, her blood pours out of her innards. Once I washed her shirt for her when she was crippled up.”

“And your father’s who?”

“Proshka . . . see, I’m not from hereabouts. . . .”

A sunflower growing from the chimney of an abandoned hut and groves of weeds on a village street unexpectedly appeared in Zakhar Pavlovich’s memory.

“So you’re Proshka Dvanov, you son of a bitch!”

The boy pushed some incompletely chewed grain stalks out of his mouth, but didn’t throw them away. He put them on the sack so he could finish chewing them later.

“And you wouldn’t be Zakharka, would you?”

“The same!”

Zakhar Pavlovich sat down. Now he felt time as Proshka’s journey away from his mother into strange towns. He saw that time is the movement of woe, and as tangible a thing as any substance, though not fitting to be

worked.

Some small fellow, resembling a monastic novice deprived of his calling, didn't pass by on his way, but sat down and studied the two conversationalists. His lips were red, preserving the puffy beauty of adolescence, but his eyes were submissive, though without a sharp mind. Simple people, used to outfoxing their uninterrupted troubles, never have such faces.

Proshka was upset by the passerby, particularly by his lips.

"What'd you pucker up for? You want to kiss my hand, huh?"

The novice got up and went off in his own direction, about which even he didn't know where it lay.

Proshka sensed this immediately and said after the novice, "He's off, but where he's off to, he doesn't know himself. Turn him around and he'll walk back. That's the kind of devil's boarders I mean!"

Zakhar Pavlovich was somewhat abashed at Proshka's early wisdom. He himself had found his stride among people quite late and long had considered them smarter than himself.

"Hey Prosh," asked Zakhar Pavlovich, "but where did that little boy get to, the fisherman's orphan? Your mother took him."

"Sasha, you mean?" Proshka guessed. "He ran away from the village before everyone. Lord, what a devil's fool he was. No profit to him! He stole our last loaf of bread and hid in the night. I chased him and chased him, but then I figured let him be, and came back to the house. . . ."

Zakhar Pavlovich believed Proshka and grew thoughtful.

"And where's your father?"

"Father went off looking for work. He made me feed the whole family. I collected bread from various people and then when I arrived back in the village there was no mother and no kids. And instead of people there's thistles growing in the huts. . . ."

Zakhar Pavlovich gave Proshka a half-ruble piece and asked him to visit again when he next came town.

"You might at least have given me your cap!" Proshka said. "All the same you don't have anything to worry about. But me, the rains wash my head . . . I might catch cold!"

Zakhar Pavlovich gave him his service cap, first taking his railroad badge from it, for that was dearer to him than any headgear.

The long-distance train went past and Proshka got up to leave as quickly as he could, so that Zakhar Pavlovich would not change his mind and want the money and cap back. The cap fit Proshka's shaggy head, but he simply tried it on, then took it off and tied it into the sack with the bread.

"Well, go with God, and goodbye," Zakhar Pavlovich said.

"Fine for you to talk, you've always got bread," Proshka scolded him. "And we haven't even got that."

PAULOVICH didn't, machines  
after meeting Proshka

Zakhar Pavlovich did not know what to say, for he had no more money.

"I met Sasha in town the other day," Proshka said. "The son of a bitch, he's going to go belly up pretty soon. Nobody gives him anything and he's not brave enough to beg. I gave him a share and I didn't eat any myself. You dumped him with my mother, didn't you, so you better give me some money for Sasha now!" Proshka ended in a serious voice.

"You get Sasha to me somehow," answered Zakhar Pavlovich.

"What's in it for me?" Proshka asked in advance.

"There'll be some pay. I'll give you a ruble."

"All right," Proshka said. "I'll get him for you. Only don't try to teach him anything, or he'll get a horse collar around your neck!"

Proshka went off, but not in the direction of the road to his village. Probably he had his own considerations and farsighted plans for getting bread.

Zakhar Pavlovich followed him with his eyes and began for some reason to doubt the value of machines and devices as being higher than a man.

Proshka walked ever farther, and his insignificant body became ever more pitiful in the surroundings of the enormous, collapsed natural world. Proshka walked on foot along the railroad. Others rode along it. Which neither concerned nor helped Proshka. He regarded bridges, rails, and locomotives with the same neutrality with which he looked at roadside trees, the wind, and sand. All artificial equipment was for Proshka only a form of nature on the land allotments of other people. Proshka existed intensively, using his live, reasoning mind and as he could. It was not possible that he sensed his mind completely, as could be seen in the way he sometimes spoke unexpectedly, almost unconsciously, and then was himself amazed at his words, the wisdom of which was beyond his childhood.

Proshka fell at the bend of the tracks. He was alone, small, and utterly defenseless. Zakhar Pavlovich wanted to bring him back to himself forever, but it was too far to catch up with him.

In the morning Zakhar Pavlovich did not want to go to work as much as usual. In the evening he grew sad and lay down to sleep immediately. The bolts, valves, and old manometers which he always kept on the table could not dispel his melancholy. He glanced at them and did not feel himself to be among their company.

Something was boring at him from within, exactly as though he had begun to grind his heart in unaccustomed reverse. Zakhar Pavlovich could in no way forget Proshka's small thin body wandering along the tracks into the distance, a distance so crammed with enormous nature it seemed it had collapsed. Zakhar Pavlovich thought without clear ideas, without the complication of words, using just the heat of his own impressionable feelings, which was sufficient to torment him. He saw the pitifulness of Proshka, who did not know himself that things were not well for him. He saw the railroad, which worked apart from Proshka and his sly life, and he could not understand

labor & wages  
end of the world (for man)

what came from where. He simply lamented his misery without a name.

The next day, the third after meeting Proshka, Zakhar Pavlovich did not go all the way to the depot. He took down his tag in the entrance booth, but then hung it back up. He spent the day in the ravine beneath the sun and cobwebs of Indian summer. He listened to the locomotive whistles and the noise of their speed, but he did not crawl out to look for he no longer felt respect for locomotives.

The fisherman had drowned in Lake Mutevo, the hermit had died in the woods, the empty village had overgrown with a jungle of grass, and yet for all that the church watchman's clock still worked, the trains ran on schedule, and now Zakhar Pavlovich felt anguished and ashamed at the accuracy of the actions of trains and clocks.

"What would Proshka have done, with my age and intelligence?" Zakhar Pavlovich wondered, considering his position. "He would have broken something, the son of a bitch! . . . But then Sasha would go begging even if Proshka was Tsar."

The warm fog of love for machines in which Zakhar Pavlovich had lived so peacefully and hopefully was now blown away by a clean wind, and before Zakhar Pavlovich opened the defenseless, solitary life of the people who live naked, with no self-deceiving faith in the aid of machines.

By degrees the engineer foreman stopped valuing Zakhar Pavlovich. He would say, "I seriously figured that by nature you were one of the old-time workers, but you're just yourself, a heavy-labor force, some kind of clinker that fell out of a woman!"

In fact, because of the confusion in his soul, Zakhar Pavlovich lost his zealous mastery. When it was simply for the wages, it proved difficult even to hit the head of the nail correctly. The foreman knew this better than anyone. He believed that when a worker's attraction to machines disappeared, when labor changed from uncalculating, unremunerated naturalness into simple monetary need, then the end of the world would come. Or even worse than the end of the world, for after the death of the last skilled artisan, the last master, then the ultimate scoundrels would come to life, to devour the plants of the sun and to spoil the devices which the skilled masters had made.

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The son of the curious fisherman was so submissive that he thought everything in life takes place correctly and truly. Whenever he was refused alms he believed that other people were no richer than he. He saved himself from death because the wife of a certain young welder fell ill, and the welder had no one with whom he might leave his wife while he went off to work, and his wife was afraid to stay in the room alone and she grew excessively bored.

Some charm in the fatigue-blackened boy who begged without attention to the alms he received pleased the welder, and he set the boy down to be on duty near the sick woman, who had not ceased to be the dearest of all to him.

Sasha sat entire days on a stool at the sick woman's feet, and the woman seemed as beautiful to him as his mother had in the reminiscences of his father. For that reason he lived and helped the woman with the self-denial of late childhood, which no one before had received of him. The woman loved him and called him Alexander, because she was not used to being called Mrs. Soon, however, she got well and her husband said to Sasha, "Here you go, boy, here's twenty kopeks. Go somewhere."

Sasha took the unaccustomed money, went outside, and cried. Proshka was sitting on the rubbish heap near the outhouse, digging beneath himself with his hands. Now he collected bones, rags, and scraps of sheet metal, smoked, and had grown older in his face, because of the dust of many rubbish heaps.

"Crying again, you snivelling devil?" asked Proshka, not interrupting his labors. "Come dig for me, while I run and drink some tea. I ate something salty today."

Proshka, however, did not go to a teahouse but to Zakhar Pavlovich, who, because of his meager literacy, was reading a book aloud.

"Count Victor placed his hand upon his brave and dedicated heart and said, 'I love you, my dearest one.'"

At first Proshka listened, thinking that this was a fairytale, but then he got disenchanted and said immediately, "Zakhar Palych, give me my ruble and I'll bring you Sasha the orphan right now."

"What?!" Zakhar Pavlovich started. He turned his old and saddened face, which even now could have loved his wife, had she been alive, and looked at Proshka.

Proshka again named the price for Sasha, and Zakhar Pavlovich gave him the ruble, because he was glad even to see Sasha. The carpenter had left the house to work in a factory that creosoted railway ties, and Zakhar Pavlovich had gained the emptiness of two rooms. Of late, although it was unsettling, it had been amusing to live with the carpenter's sons. They were firming up so well that they did not know the place for their own strength and several times they had deliberately set fire to their house, but they always smothered the fire alive, not allowing it to warm itself completely. Their father raged at them but they always said, "What's the matter, dad? Afraid of a little fire? What burns won't rot. We ought to burn you, old man, so you won't rot in your grave. So you won't ever stink!"

Before they left, the sons pulled down the outhouse and cut off the watchdog's tail.

Proshka did not set out for Sashka immediately. First he bought a packet of "Zemlyachok" cigarettes and chatted a bit with the woman in the shop. Then Proshka returned to the trash heap.

*machines/megars  
sasha Dvanov's optimism - books*

"Let's go, Sashka," he said. "I'm taking you away so you won't pester me anymore."

\* \* \* \* \*

In the following years Zakhar Pavlovich went ever more into decline. In order that he would not die alone, he brought in a glum companion, his wife Darya Stepanovna. It was easier for him when he did not completely feel himself. At the depot work interfered with him and at home his wife droned ever on. In essence this double shift of subsolar vanity was Zakhar Pavlovich's misfortune, but had it disappeared he would have had to immediately join the number of the barefoot wanderers. Machines and devices had already ceased to have much interest for him. In the first place, no matter how much he worked, all the same people lived poorly and pitifully, and in the second place the world was clouding over with some kind of indifferent reverie. Probably he was tiring himself too greatly and was actually having presentiments of his own quiet death. So it is with many skilled workers in the slope towards old age, for the hard substances with which they do business for entire decades secretly teach them the immutability of all mortal fate. Before their eyes locomotives are taken from the line, rot for years under the sun, and then are hauled away for scrap. On Sundays Zakhar Pavlovich went down to the river to fish and think out his last thoughts.

His comfort at home was Sasha, but the continual dissatisfaction of his wife prevented him from concentrating even on this, and perhaps it was for the best. If Zakhar Pavlovich had been able to concentrate fully upon the things which attracted him, he would no doubt have burst into tears.

Entire years passed in this distracted life. Sometimes as he lay in his cot and watched Sasha reading Zakhar Pavlovich asked, "Sasha, doesn't anything disturb you?"

"No," Sasha answered, accustomed to the habits of his foster father.

"What do you think?" Zakhar Pavlovich continued his doubts. "Is it absolutely necessary for everybody to live or not?"

"For everybody," Sasha answered, somewhat understanding the anguish of his father.

"But you haven't read anywhere how come or for what, have you?"  
Sasha put down his book.

"I have read that the farther we go, the better it will be to live."

"Aha!" Zakhar Pavlovich said trustingly. "It's printed like that?"

"It's printed like that."

Zakhar Pavlovich sighed.

"Everything's possible. It's not for everybody to know."

Sasha had already been working at the depot a year, an apprentice welder. He was attracted to machines and skillful mastery, but not as Zakhar

Pavlovich was. His attraction was not curiosity, which ends with the discovery of the secrets of the machine. Sasha was interested in machines as he was in other moving and living things. He wanted more to feel them, to live their life with them, than to find them out. For this reason Sasha imagined himself to be a locomotive while he was returning from work, making all the noises that an engine does as it runs. While falling asleep he would think that the chickens of the village had long ago gone to sleep, and this consciousness of community with the chickens or the locomotive gave him satisfaction. Sasha could not enter into anything separately. At first he sought out some similarity to his action and only then did he act, not from his own necessity, but from sympathy toward something or someone.

"I am like him," Sasha often said to himself. When he looked at the ancient fence he often thought in an intimate voice, "It stands for itself," then he too went to stand someplace without the slightest need. In the fall when the shutters creaked dismally and Sasha was bored with sitting home in the evenings, he listened to the shutters and realized that they too were bored, and then he stopped feeling bored.

When Sasha got fed up with going to work, he consoled himself with the wind, which had to blow day and night.

"I am like it," Sasha thought when he saw the wind. "I only work in the day and it has to work in the night too. The wind has things even worse."

The trains began to run very frequently. That was the war beginning. The skilled workers remained indifferent to the war. They weren't called up and it was as foreign to them as the locomotives which they repaired and adjusted but which carried only leisured strangers.

Sasha sensed monotonously how the sun moved, the seasons passed, and the trains ran around the clock. He was already forgetting his fisherman father, the village, and Proshka, moving with his age towards the events and things he had yet to experience as they passed within his body. Sasha was not conscious of himself as a firm independent object. He always imagined something with his senses and this crowded from him any conception of himself. His life ran deep and disjointed, like the warm closeness of maternal sleep. He was governed by outward appearances, as fresh countries govern the traveler. He did not have his own goals, though he was past sixteen, so that he had no internal opposition to sympathizing with any life, the weakness of the straggling grass in the yard, and the chance passerby in the night who coughed in his discomfort so that he would be heard and pitied. Sasha heard him and felt pity. He was filled with that dark inspired agitation which adults have in their true love for one woman. He looked out the window after the passerby and imagined him as he might. The passerby hid in the depths of the shadows, rustling the gravel as he walked, gravel even more nameless than himself. Distant dogs bayed resoundingly and terribly, while occasionally exhausted stars fell from the sky. Perhaps then, in the very thick of the night, wanderers walked somewhere through the cool, even fields and within them, just as

anarchy / Tsars

within Sasha, the silence and the dying stars were becoming the cast of a personal life.

Zakhar Pavlovich did not interfere with Sasha in anything. He loved him with all the dedication of old age and with all the emotion of some inexplicable, unclear hopes. Often he asked Sasha to read to him about the war, since he could not make out the letters by lamplight.

Sasha read about the battles, burning towns, and terrifying waste of metal, people, and property. Zakhar Pavlovich listened and in the end said, "I keep on living and thinking, can it really be that man is so dangerous to man that there has to be a government to stand between them? It's this government that gives us war . . . me, I walk around figuring that governments make wars up on purpose, because a normal man wouldn't do it. . . ."

Sasha asked how things ought then to be.

"Well," Zakhar Pavlovich answered, growing excited. "Just different, somehow. If they had sent me to the Germans just as soon as the quarrel got started, I'd have come to an agreement with them straight off, and the war would have come out a lot cheaper. But instead they send the brainiest ones!"

Zakhar Pavlovich could not imagine a man with whom he would not be able to sit and chat in a neighborly way. Yet it could hardly be that up there on top the Tsar and all his servants were all fools. Which meant that war is not a serious affair, but a deliberate one. And here Zakhar Pavlovich reached a blind alley, wondering whether it is possible to chat in a neighborly way with someone who deliberately kills people, or must one first take away his dangerous weapons, wealth, and worth?

The first time Sasha saw a man killed, it was at his own depot. It was the last hour of work, just before the whistle. Sasha was stuffing wadding into cylinders when two engineers carried in the pale foreman, his head thickly welling up blood, which dropped onto the oil-soaked ground. They carried the foreman into the office and began to telephone the receiving room. Sasha was astounded that the blood was so young and red, while the foreman engineer was so old and gray, as though inside he were still a baby.

"You devils!" the foreman said clearly. "Grease my head with machine oil, so at least the blood will stop!"

A stoker quickly brought a bucket of oil, threw some rags into it, and then used the rags to wipe the foreman's head, now greasy with oil. His head grew blacker and a steam rose from it, visible to all.

"That's the way, that's the way," the foreman said, urging them on. "That helped. And you thought I was going to die, huh? It's early yet for rejoicing, you bastards!"

The foreman went unconscious and weak by degrees. Sasha examined the holes in the man's head, into which the crushed, long-dead hair had been beaten deeply. No one remembered their grievances against the foreman, despite the fact that even now a bolt was dearer and more of a comfort to him

foreman killed by machine (human error)

than was any man.

Zakhar Pavlovich was standing right there, forcibly holding open his eyes, so that no tears would drop from them, to be heard by all. He noticed again that no matter how evil, intelligent, and brave the man, all the same he became pitiful and sad, dying from the weakness of his powers.

The foreman suddenly opened his eyes and looked sharply into the faces of his subordinates and comrades. Vivid life still glittered in his gaze, but already he labored in a foggy intensity and his pale eyelids began slowly to set over his occipital sockets.

"Why are you crying?" the foreman asked with the last remnants of his usual irritation. No one was crying. Only the wide-open eyes of Zakhar Pavlovich dropped a dirty and involuntary moisture along his cheeks.

"Why are you crying, when there hasn't been any whistle?"

The foreman engineer closed his eyes and held them in the tender darkness. He felt no death, for his former body warmth was with him. Rather it was simply that he had never felt that warmth before, and now it was as though he was swimming in the naked burning juices of his own innards. This all had happened to him before, but very long ago, and he could not remember where. When the foreman opened his eyes again the people looked as though they were in a lake. One person stood low above him, as if legless, and covered his mournful face with a dirty, work-ruined hand.

The foreman got angry with him and hurried to speak, for darkness already glowered over him.

"He's crying, and Garashka the cow, he went and burned up the boiler again . . . so what's there to cry about? Pick a new man and go finish. . . ."

Then the foreman remembered where he last had seen this quiet burning blackness. It was simply the closeness within his mother, and now once again he was pushing between her parted bones. But he could not crawl free, because of his aged and too-large size. . . .

"Pick a new man and go finish . . . you don't know . . . how to do the nuts . . . you're a cow, but a man now. . . ."

Here the foreman drew a breath and for some reason began to suck at his lip. It was obvious that he was suffocating in some small and narrow place. He was pushing at something with his shoulders and straining constantly to make room for himself.

"Push me farther down the tube," he whispered with childish and swollen lips. "Ivan Sergeich, call Three-Eighths Thread Stock for me . . . have him . . . my little angel, have him tighten the counter nut for me. . . ."

They arrived with the stretcher too late. There no longer was any point in carrying the engineer foreman into the receiving room.

"Take the man home," the workers said to the doctor.

"Impossible," the doctor answered. "We have to have him to do the death certificate."

In the death certificate it was written that the senior engineer foreman

books  
machines - not free agents

had received a fatal contusion while moving a cold engine with a hot thirty-foot steel chain. While crossing a switch, the chain had hit a lamp post, which fell, injuring the head of the foreman with one of its support irons while the foreman was watching the attached machine from the tender of the towing locomotive. The incident occurred through the engineer's own carelessness and failure to observe applicable rules of movement and usage.

Zakhar Pavlovich took Sasha by the hand and left the depot for home. At dinner his wife said they weren't selling much bread and there was no meat anywhere.

"So we'll die, it seems. Nothing but troubles," Zakhar Pavlovich answered without sympathy. All of life's routine had lost any important meaning for him.

At that time of his early life, each day had for Sasha its own nameless charm, not to be repeated in the future, and for him the image of the engineer foreman went far away into the submarine depths of his memories. Zakhar Pavlovich, however, no longer had this self-evolving life force. He was old, and this age is tender and naked before destruction, just as is childhood.

In the following years nothing touched Zakhar Pavlovich. Only in the evenings, when he glanced at Sasha reading, would pity for the orphan rise up. Zakhar Pavlovich would have liked to tell Sasha not to torment himself with books, because if there had been anything serious in them, people long ago would have embraced one another. But Zakhar Pavlovich didn't say anything, although something simple, like joy, moved constantly within him—his mind, though, interfered with its expression. He longed for some abstract, calm life by the shores of still lakes, where friendship would replace all words and all the wisdom of life's sense.

Zakhar Pavlovich was lost in his own hunches. All his life he had been distracted by chance interests like machines and devices, and he had come to only now. His mother should have whispered something in his ear as he nursed at her breast, something as vitally necessary as her milk, the taste of which was forgotten forever, but his mother had whispered nothing, and he could not envision the entire world by himself. And thus Zakhar Pavlovich began to live peacefully, no longer hoping for a general radical improvement—no matter how many machines were made, neither Proshka, nor Sashka, nor he himself would ever ride on them. Locomotives work either for outsiders or for soldiers, but these last are carried against their will. The machine itself is not a free agent, but only an unanswering substance. Now Zakhar Pavlovich more pitied than loved the machine, and even spoke eye to eye with the locomotive at the depot.

"So you're going! Well, go then! My Lord, how your drive shafts have worked. These passenger bastards must be heavy."

Though the locomotive was silent, Zakhar Pavlovich heard its answer.

"The grate-bars swell, the coal is bad," the locomotive said sadly. "The inclines are hard to take. Also, many women are going to their husbands at

writing  
Pavlovich talks to locomotive

the front, and each one has a hundred-weight of sweet buns. Now they're hitching on two mail cars again, where they used to do just one. . . . People are living apart and write letters to each other. . . ."

"Aha!" Zakhar Pavlovich conversed thoughtfully, not knowing how he could help the locomotive, when people were burdening it beyond bearing with the weight of their separation. "Don't make a particular effort then, just take it slow."

"Impossible," the locomotive answered, with the meekness of wise strength. "From the height of the embankment I can see many villages, and there people are crying—they're waiting for letters and wounded relatives. Look at my wadding box, will you? They tightened it too tight and the piston pins heat up when I move."

Zakhar Pavlovich went and loosened the bolts on the wadding box.

"They really did tighten them too much, the bastards. Really, can you do it that way?"

"What are you fooling around there for?" asked the on-duty mechanic, coming out of the office. "Did anyone ask you to go messing about there? Speak up, yes or no?!"

"No," said Zakhar Pavlovich shortly. "It seemed to me that it had been tightened too tight. . . ."

The mechanic wasn't angry. "Well, don't touch anything, if it just seemed it. No matter how you tighten them, all the same it smokes when it runs."

Afterwards the locomotive rumbled quietly to Zakhar Pavlovich, "It's not the tightening—a piston rod in the middle is worn out, and that makes the wadding burn. Think I *want* to do this?"

"Yes, I saw it," Zakhar Pavlovich sighed. "But hell, I'm only the polisher, and you know yourself that they don't believe me."

"That's right!" sympathized the locomotive in a thick voice, then sank into the dusk of its own cooling forces.

"That's what I say," Zakhar Pavlovich nodded in agreement.

When Sasha enrolled in night school, Zakhar Pavlovich rejoiced to himself. He had lived his entire life through on his own strengths, with no help, without anyone to prompt him before he had sensed something to himself, and now books were speaking to Sasha with other people's minds.

"I tortured myself and he's reading. That's how it is!" Zakhar Pavlovich was envious.

After reading some, Sasha began to write. Zakhar Pavlovich's wife couldn't go to sleep with the lamp on.

"Writing, writing, all the time writing," she said. "But what's he writing for?"

"You go to sleep," Zakhar Pavlovich advised her. "Take your hide there and cover your eyes with it and go to sleep!"

The wife closed her eyes, but even through her eyelids she could see

*The nameless life  
reading/wind*

how kerosene was being burnt for nothing. She was not mistaken—the lamp in fact burnt for naught in Alexander Dvanov's youth, illuminating the soul-shaking book pages, which all the same he didn't follow later. No matter how much he read and thought, some kind of hollow place remained ever within him, an emptiness through which an undescribed and untold world passed like a startled wind. At seventeen Dvanov still had no armor over his heart, neither belief in God nor any other intellectual comfort. He did not give a stranger's name to the nameless life which opened before him. However, he did not want that world to remain untitled; he only waited to hear its own proper name, instead of a purposely conceived appellation.

Once at night he sat in his accustomed anguish. His heart, not sheathed in belief, tormented itself within him and longed for consolation. Dvanov dropped his head and imagined the emptiness within his body—the emptiness into which life entered daily, ceaselessly, and then left, not lingering, not growing stronger, as smooth as the distant rumble in which it is impossible to make out the words of the song.

Sasha felt a coldness within, as if from a real wind, blowing into the spacious murk behind him, while in front, from where the wind was born, lay something translucent, light, and enormous—mountains of living air which had turned into his own breath and pulse. His chest caught in advance from this presentiment, and the emptiness within him unfurled still wider, ready to seize that future life.

“There it is—I!” Alexander said loudly.

“What are you?” asked the unsleeping Zakhar Pavlovich.

Sasha immediately fell silent, clutched by a sudden shame, which carried off the full joy of his discovery. He had thought he was sitting alone, but Zakhar Pavlovich had heard him.

Zakhar Pavlovich noticed this and destroyed his question with his own indifferent answer. “You're a reader, and nothing more. . . . You'd better be off to bed. . . . It's late already. . . .”

Zakhar Pavlovich yawned and said peacefully, “Don't plague yourself, Sash, . . . you're too weak. . . . This one will drown out of curiosity too,” Zakhar Pavlovich whispered for his own benefit under the blanket, “and I'll kick off on my pillow. One and the same, it is.”

Night continued quietly. On the porch one could hear the couplers coughing at the station. February had moved on, and already the lips of the ditches bared last year's grasses. Sasha looked then literally at the earth's creation. He sympathized with the appearance of the dead grass and examined it with diligent attention, which he did not have in respect to himself.

He could feel a stranger's distant life to the point of hot flashes, but imagined himself only with difficulty. About himself he could only think, while he could sense a bystander with the impressionability of his personal life, and he could not see how this could be any different in others.

Once Zakhar Pavlovich talked with Sasha as an equal.

"Yesterday the boiler on one of the 'Shche' series locomotives blew up," said Zakhar Pavlovich.

Sasha already knew this.

2P (1) "That's science for you!" Zakhar Pavlovich grew angry at this and at something else. "The locomotive's just come from the factory, and the rivets blew themselves straight to hell! . . . Nobody knows anything serious . . . the living stuff goes smashing against the mind. . . ."

Sasha didn't understand the difference between mind and body, and was silent. It emerged from Zakhar Pavlovich's words that the mind is a weak-veined force, while machines were invented by man's heartfelt hunch, apart from the mind.

The sound of the special trains occasionally carried from the station. Teapots rattled and people spoke in strange voices, like foreign tribes.

"They're migrating!" Zakhar Pavlovich listened. "They'll migrate to somewhere, I suppose."

Disillusioned by old age and the lost wanderings of his entire life, he was not at all surprised by the revolution.

9 (1) "Revolution is easier than war," he explained to Sasha. "People won't do for a difficult business, something's not quite right. . . ."

Now it was impossible to deceive Zakhar Pavlovich, and for the sake of being unmistakable, he rejected the revolution.

He told all the workers that the smartest people were again on duty in the government so no good could come of it.

He made fun of it right up until October, feeling for the first time the satisfaction of being an intelligent man. However, one October night he heard shooting in the city and spent the entire night outside, only coming into the hut to light his cigarettes. All night long he was slamming doors, not letting his wife sleep.

"Settle down already, you mad dog!" the old woman tossed about in solitude. "A pedestrian, a true pedestrian! And what'll come now? No bread, no clothes! How is it their hands don't wither from shooting? It's clear they grew up without mothers!"

Zakhar Pavlovich stood in the yard with a smoldering cigarette, nodding at the distant shooting.

"Can it really be so?" Zakhar Pavlovich would ask himself and then go into the hut to light a new cigarette.

"Lie down, demon!" his wife advised him.

"Sasha, you asleep?" Zakhar Pavlovich was excited. "The idiots there are taking the power, but maybe life will get smarter."

In the morning Sasha and Zakhar Pavlovich set off for town. Zakhar Pavlovich was looking for the most serious party, in order to join it immediately. All of the parties were quartered in the big government building, and each considered itself the best of all. Zakhar Pavlovich tested each party against his reason, searching for that one in which the program was not

members, etc, etc  
Bolsheviks

incomprehensible, but in which everything was clear and true in its words. Nowhere did they tell him precisely on which day earthly bliss would arrive. Some parties said that happiness is a complicated article, and not in it is man's goal, but rather in historical laws. Others said, though, that happiness is all-out war, which would continue for some time.

"So that's how it is!" Zakhar Pavlovich was amazed, in a reasonable way. "That means working without a salary. That's not a party, that's exploitation. Let's go, Sasha. The triumph of orthodoxy, just like in religion. . . ."

The next party said that man is so splendid and avaricious a being that it is even strange to think about the satiation of his happiness, which would have been the end of the world.

"We need that too!" said Zakhar Pavlovich.

The very last party, which had the very longest name, was behind the last door in the corridor. There sat only one somber man, while the rest had been excommunicated.

"What do you want!" he asked Zakhar Pavlovich.

"We want to join up together. How soon will the end of everything come?"

"Socialism, you mean?" The man didn't understand. "In a year. Today we're only occupying the establishment."

"Then write us down," Zakhar Pavlovich rejoiced.

The man gave each of them a packet of pamphlets and a sheet of paper half filled up with printing.

"Program, rules, resolutions, questionnaires," he said. "Fill them in and give two references for each of you."

Zakhar Pavlovich chilled at the presentiment of deception.

"It can't be done orally?"

"No. I can't sign you up in my memory, or the party will forget you."

"But we'll show up."

"Impossible. What'll I use to write out the membership cards? It's a clear business from the questionnaire, if the assembly confirms you."

Zakhar Pavlovich noticed that the man spoke clearly, sharply, and correctly, without the slightest trust. Probably this would be the smartest power, which would within the year either completely build the world, or else raise up such a fuss that even a child's heart would grow tired.

"You sign up to give it a try, Sash," said Zakhar Pavlovich, "and I'm going to wait a year."

"We don't sign people up for trial periods," the man refused. "Either ours completely and forever, or else go knock on someone else's door."

"All right, for real then," Zakhar Pavlovich agreed.

"Well, that's a different matter then," the man did not refuse.

Sasha sat down to fill out the questionnaire. Zakhar Pavlovich began to question the party man about the revolution. He answered as he worked,

*movement / party  
Pav. questions need for party*

preoccupied by something more serious.

"The workers at the munitions factory went on strike yesterday, and there was a mutiny in the barracks. You understand? And in Moscow the workers and poorest peasants are already in power two weeks."

"So?"

The party man was distracted by the telephone.

"No, I can't," he said into the receiver. "Representatives of the masses are coming in here, and somebody's got to take care of information! . . . What so?" he remembered. "The party sent representatives to shape up the moment, and at night we seized the life centers of the city!"

Zakhar Pavlovich understood nothing.

*2 //* "But after all it was the soldiers and the workers who rose up, and what have you got to do with it? Should let them go further under their own steam!"

Zakhar Pavlovich even got mad.

"Well, comrade worker," the party member said calmly, "if you're going to figure it that way, then the bourgeoisie would have already stood up with its rifle in its hands, and there wouldn't be any Soviet power today."

"And maybe there'd be something better!" Zakhar Pavlovich thought, but what, he couldn't prove to himself.

"There are no poor peasants in Moscow," Zakhar Pavlovich was doubtful.

The somber party man frowned even more. He was imagining to himself the entire enormous ignorance of the masses and how much mucking about with this ignorance the party would have to do in the future. He felt exhausted in advance and didn't answer Zakhar Pavlovich anything. But Zakhar Pavlovich harried him with straight questions. He was interested in who was the main governor in the town now and whether the workers knew him well.

The somber man even came to life and grew gayer from such steep, direct investigation. He called someone on the telephone. Zakhar Pavlovich looked the phone over with a forgotten attraction. "I overlooked that thing," he remembered his wooden devices. "Never made such a thing in my life."

"Give me Comrade Perekorov," the party man said through the wire. "Perekorov? Listen, we've got to get the newspaper business straightened out as quickly as possible. Ought to put out some more popular literature too . . . I'm listening. And who are you? A Red Guardsman? Well, hang up then . . . you don't understand anything. . . ."

Zakhar Pavlovich got mad again.

"I am asking you because my heart is aching, and you try to calm me down with newspapers! No, my friend, any government is a kingdom, just like the synod and the monarchy. . . . I've thought about this a lot. . . ."

"So what should be done then?" His partner in conversation was perplexed.

"Property must be degraded," Zakhar Pavlovich revealed, "and people

anarchy  
Bolsheviks - 'measuring' them

should be left without someone watching over them—and it'll all turn out for the best, I swear to God, it's the truth!"

"That's anarchy!"

"What anarchy? That's just life you make for yourself!"

The party man shook his curly and sleepless head.

"That's the petty individualist in you talking. Let six months go by and you'll see yourself that you are fundamentally confused."

"We'll wait," said Zakhar Pavlovich. "And if you don't get it worked out, we'll give you an extension."

Sasha finished the questionnaire.

"Can it really be so?" Zakhar Pavlovich said on the way back. "Can this really be a precise affair? It's looking like it is."

Zakhar Pavlovich had become bitter in his old age. It had become dear to him that the revolver be in the proper hands. He thought about which calipers could be used to test the Bolsheviks. Only in the last year had he come to value that which he had lost in his life. He had lost everything, and the wide, open sky above him had in no way changed from his many years of activity. He had conquered nothing to justify his weakened body, in which beat some sort of important, shining strength, and that in vain. He had brought himself up to eternal separation with life without having mastered the most necessary things in life. And thus he looked now with regret at the wattle fences, the trees, and at all other people, to whom in fifty years he had brought no joy and no defense, and from whom he would have to part.

"Sash," he said, "you're an orphan, you got your life cheap. Don't be stingy with it, live the main life."

Alexander was silent, admiring the hidden suffering of his foster father.

"Remember Fedka Bespalov?" Zakhar Pavlovich continued. "He was this welder there at the shop. Dead now. Used to be they'd send him somewhere to measure something, and he'd go, measure it with his hands, and then come back holding the measure in the space between his palms. As he walked the feet turned into yards. 'What the hell, you son of a bitch!' they'd yell at him, and all he'd say is, 'I need this real bad. All the same they won't fire me for it!'"

Only the next day did Alexander understand what his father wanted to say.

"So they're Bolsheviks and high martyrs to their idea," Zakhar Pavlovich was making a hash of everything, "but you look it over real careful. Remember—your father drowned, Lord knows who your mother was, millions of people are living without souls . . . that's a great cause . . . a Bolshevik has to have an empty heart, so he can make room in it for everything. . . ."

Zakhar Pavlovich caught fire from his own words and he ascended ever higher, towards a bitterness of some sort.

"Or else . . . you know what'll happen? Into the stove, and smoke in the wind it'll be! Cinders it'll be, and you hit cinders with a poker, and down

the trackbed it goes! Do you understand me or not?"

From excitement Zakhar Pavlovich passed on to tears, and went into the kitchen in agitation to smoke. Then he returned and timidly embraced his foster son.

"Sasha, don't be offended by me. I'm also a total orphan and you and me, we've got no one to complain to."

Alexander wasn't offended. He felt Zakhar Pavlovich's sincere need, but he believed that the revolution was the end of the world. In the future world, though, Zakhar Pavlovich's alarm would be instantaneously destroyed and his fisherman father would find that for the sake of which he had voluntarily drowned himself. In his own clear feeling Alexander already had that new world, but he could only make it, not recount it.

Six months later, Alexander started classes at the newly-opened railroad school, and then he transferred to the polytechnicum.

In the evenings he read technical textbooks to Zakhar Pavlovich, who just enjoyed the incomprehensible sounds of science and the fact that his Sasha understood them.

Soon, however, Alexander's studies ended, and for a long time. The party was assigning him to the front of the civil war, in the steppe town of Novokhopersk.

Zakhar Pavlovich sat entire days with Sasha at the station, waiting for a troop train going that way, and he smoked up three pounds of shag, so as not to get upset. They had already discussed everything, except love, on the subject of which Zakhar Pavlovich spoke a few words of warning in a shy voice.

"After all, Sash, you're already a grown boy . . . you know everything yourself . . . the main thing is that you shouldn't ought to take this business up on purpose . . . it's the trickiest thing . . . it's like there's nothing, but all the same something sort of like pulls you somewhere . . . you want something or other . . . every man has an entire imperialism down there, in the lower place. . . ."

Z P f | Alexander could not feel the imperialism within his own body, even though he deliberately imagined himself naked.

After they brought up the mixed echelon and Alexander climbed into the car, Zakhar Pavlovich spoke to him from the platform. "Write me a letter sometime, say that you are alive and healthy . . . just that. . . ."

"Yes, I'll write, and more than that," Sasha answered, only at that moment realizing what an old and lonely man Zakhar Pavlovich was.

The station bell had already rung about five times, ringing threes at that, but the echelon could not get away. Sasha was torn from the doors of the car by persons unknown and he did not appear outside again.

Zakhar Pavlovich was totally drained, so he went home. He walked homeward for ages, forgetting the entire way to light his cigarette and feeling tormented by this minor irritation. At home he sat at the little corner table

where Sasha always sat and began to read algebra, syllable by syllable and understanding nothing, but finding for himself a gradual comfort.

\* \* \* \* \*

While Dvanov was traveling to Urochev, the town was seized by Cossacks, but a detachment led by the teacher Nekhvoraiko was able to squeeze them out of town. It was dry everywhere around Urochev, but one approach, the one from the river, was occupied by swamp. There the Cossacks had sent only slight vigilance, relying upon the impassibility. However, the teacher Nekhvoraiko shod his horses in wicker so that they wouldn't sink, and one deserted night he took the town, chucking the Cossacks out into the swampy bottom land, where they stayed for ages, since their horses were barefoot.

Dvanov went round to the Revolutionary Committee and talked with the people there; they complained a bit about the absence of cloth for Red Army underwear, because of which people were teeming with lice, but they were determined to fight down to the bare earth.

The president of the Revolutionary Committee, an engineer from the depot, said to Dvanov, "Revolution is a risk. If it doesn't work out for us, we'll turn the ground upside down and just leave clay. Let some other son of a bitch feed himself, once the working man didn't have the luck!"

Dvanov wasn't given any special task; they just told him to live there a bit with them, so it would be better for everybody, and then they'd have a look at what upset him the most.

The lads of Dvanov's age sat in the club on the market square and earnestly read revolutionary writings. Red slogans hung about the readers, but the dangerous expanse of the fields could be seen through the windows. The readers and slogans were defenseless; the head of a young communist as it bent over a book could be reached by a bullet directly from the steppe.

As Dvanov grew used to the battling revolution of the steppe and after he had already begun to love the local comrades, a letter arrived from the province with orders to return. Alexander left the village silently and on foot. The train station was less than three miles away, but Dvanov didn't know how to get to the province. People were saying that Cossacks had taken the line. Some musicians were walking from the station through the fields, playing sad music; it turned out they were carrying the cold body of the dead Nekhvoraiko, who had been destroyed along with his detachment in the huge village of Peskakh. Dvanov began to feel sorry for Nekhvoraiko, because he was cried over not by his mother and father, but only by music, while the people behind walked without feeling on their faces, ready themselves to die without fail during the course of the revolution.

Behind Dvanov and his back-cast eyes the town descended into its valley, and Alexander was sorry for that solitary Urochev, as though without

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him it became even more defenseless.

At the train station Dvanov felt the alarm of overgrown, forgotten space. As every person, he was attracted by the far reaches of the earth, as if all distant and unseen things missed him and called for him.

Ten or more nameless people sat on the floor and hoped for a train which would take them to a better place. Without complaint they suffered the torments of revolution and patiently wandered the steppes of Russia in search of bread and salvation. Dvanov went outside, spotted some sort of military train on the fifth set of tracks, and went towards it. The train consisted of eight flatcars loaded with vehicles and field pieces and two passenger cars. Two more flatcars of coal were coupled on behind the engine.

The commander of the detachment let Dvanov into a passenger car after examining his documents.

"Only we're going to the Razgulai siding, Comrade," the commander announced, "and after that we don't need the train. We take up positions there."

Dvanov agreed to go to Razgulai too, and there he'd be closer to home.

Almost all the Red Army gunners were asleep. They had fought for two weeks near Balashov and were badly spent. Two of them had slept themselves out and were sitting by the window, humming song out of boredom with the war. The commander was lying down and reading *The Adventures of an Anchorite, A Lover of the Beautiful, Published by Tik*, and the political officer was lost somewhere in the telegraph office. Doubtless the car had carried many Red soldiers, homesick on their long paths; in their solitude they had covered the walls and seats with inscriptions written in the same indelible pencil in which letters home from the front are written. Dvanov read these pronouncements in cordial despondence; even at home he used to read the new calendar for the coming year as soon as it came.

"Our hope stands on an anchor at the sea's bottom," an unknown military wanderer had written, then had also signed the place where this meditation had occurred: Dzhanskoy, 18 September, 1918.

It grew dark, and the train pushed off without a parting whistle. Dvanov grew drowsy in the steamy car, and woke up when it was already dark. He was awakened by the squealing of brake shoes and some other constant noise. The window flashed with light for an instant and the air lower down grew warm from a shell. It blew up not far away, lighting up the stubble and the peaceful nocturnal fields. Dvanov came to his senses and stood up.

Faint-heartedly the train stopped moving. The commissar went outside, Dvanov with him. Clearly the rail line was under fire from the Cossacks; their batteries flashed somewhere nearby, but they kept shooting over.

Cold and mournful it was that night, and long the two humans walked to the engine. The machine whispered faintly in its boiler, and a tiny flame burned above the manometer like an ikon lamp.

"What's come up?" the commissar asked.

*The first engine  
driven by steam*

"I'm afraid about the road, Comrade Political Commissar. They're shelling us and we're running without lights . . . we'll run right into a wreck!" the engineer answered softly from above.

"Nonsense! You can see they keep shooting over!" the commissar said. "Just give her more steam, and no noise."

"Well, all right," the engineer agreed, "but my helper can't do it all himself . . . give me a soldier to stoke!"

Dvanov caught on and crawled up onto the engine to help. Shrapnel exploded in front of the engine and lit up the whole train. The pale engineer took the handle of the throttle and yelled to Dvanov and the assistant, "Keep the steam up!"

Alexander zealously began to stick wood into the fire box. The engine was moving so fast it knocked--A dead blackness lay before, and perhaps within it were torn-out tracks. The engine was tossed about so much at bends that Dvanov started thinking about derailing. The engine vented steam sharply and often, and a booming rush of air could be heard from the friction of the train's madly dashing body. Small bridges occasionally rattled beneath the engine, while the clouds above flashed with a myserious light, as if reflecting the flame streaming from the open fire box. Soon Dvanov was soaked in sweat and amazed that the engineer was driving the train so hard, now that the Cossack battery was long past. But the frightened engineer demanded steam endlessly, even helping to stoke himself, and he didn't once ease the throttle back from its last notch.

Alexander glanced out of the engine. Silence had long ago come to the steppe, violated only by the passage of the train. Foggy lights dashed towards them. It was probably a station.

"What's he driving like this for?" Dvanov asked the assistant about the engineer.

"I don't know," he answered gloomily.

"Keep this up and we'll crash for sure," Dvanov pronounced, although he didn't know himself what he should do.

The engine trembled from the pressure, waving its entire body, seeking an opportunity to throw itself down some bank, away from the force which was choking it and the speed it couldn't expend. Sometimes it seemed to Dvanov that the engine had already jumped the tracks, and just the cars hadn't yet had time, and that he would die in the quiet dust of the soft soil, and then Alexander would clutch his chest, so as to keep his heart from terror.

When the train galloped over the switches and crossovers of some station, Dvanov saw the wheels smash out flames on the junction frogs.

Then the engine once again sank into the murky thickets of its future path, into the frenzy of a machine at full throttle. The curves spilled the engine crew from its feet, while the cars behind couldn't keep up on the rail joints, and leapt over them, wheels howling.

The assistant was obviously fed up with work and said to the engineer,

adjacent, unknown people

“Ivan Palych! Shkarino’s coming up . . . let’s stop there and take on water!”

The engineer heard but stayed silent. Dvanov guessed that in his exhaustion he had forgotten how to think, and so he carefully opened the lower cock of the tender. He wanted that way to let out the last of the water and force the engineer to stop the unnecessary flight. However, the engineer throttled back by himself and left the window. His face was calm, and he climbed up for his tobacco. Dvanov too had calmed down, and he closed the cock on the tender. The engineer smiled and said to him, “Why did you do that? We had a White armored train after us all the way from the Marino siding, only I got away!”

Dvanov didn’t understand. “And what’s with it now? How come you didn’t slow down after the battery, when we still hadn’t come to the Marino siding? . . .”

“The armored train fell behind, so we can go slower,” the engineer answered. “Climb up on the wood, take a look behind!”

Alexander climbed up on the little mound of wood. Their speed was still great and the wind chilled Dvanov’s body. It was absolutely dark behind, and only the hastily following cars were shrieking there.

“But why did you hurry to Marino so much?” Dvanov tried to find out again.

“The battery had us! It could have changed its aim, so we had to get as far away as we could!” the engineer explained, but Dvanov supposed that he had been scared.

The train stopped in Shkarino. The commissar came up and boggled at the engineer’s story. The station-house at Shkarino was empty, and the last water dribbled slowly from the water tower into the engine. Some sort of local person came up and announced hollowly, against the wind, that there were Cossack cavalry patrols in Povorino, so that the echelon would not get through.

“We’ve only got to get to Razgulai,” the commissar answered.

“Oh well, then . . .” the man said and went into the dark station.

Alexander followed him into the establishment. It was empty and dull in the waiting hall. Desertion, oblivion, and lengthy mourning met him in this dangerous building of the civil war. The unknown solitary man who had talked with the commissar lay down in the corner on the remaining bench and began to cover himself with pitiful clothing. Alexander was strongly and sincerely interested in who he was and how he had wound up there. How often had he met, both before and since, these adjacent, unknown people, who lived by their solitary laws, and yet never had his soul dictated that he go ask about one, or that he cleave to them and together with them disappear from the structure of life. Perhaps it would have been better for Dvanov to have gone up to that man then, in the Shkarino train station, and to have lain down next to him, and then in the morning to rise and disappear into the air of the steppe.

"The engineer is a coward. There wasn't any armored train," Dvanov told the commissar later.

"Hell with him! He'll get us there somehow," the commissar answered calmly and tiredly, then turned away and walked to his car, saying sadly to himself as he went, "Dunya, oh my Dunya, what are you using to feed my children with now? . . ."

Alexander also got into the wagon, still not understanding why people so torment themselves; one lies in an empty station, another grieves for his wife.

Inside the car Dvanov lay down and slept, but he woke up before dawn, sensing the chill of danger.

The train stood in the damp steppe, while the Red soldiers snored and scratched their bodies in sleep—one could hear the sweet scrape of nail on obdurate skin. The commissar also slept, his face wrinkled; probably before sleep he had tormented himself with memories of his abandoned family and had thus fallen asleep with grief on his face. An unfailing wind bent the late grass blades in the steppe and the rain of the day before turned the sod into sucking mud. The commander lay opposite the commissar and also slept. His book was open to a description of Raphael. Dvanov looked at the page. There Raphael was called a living god of that early, happy humanity which had arisen on the warm shores of the Mediterranean Sea. Dvanov, however, couldn't picture those times. After all, the wind blew there and the muzhiks plowed the earth at dawn, and mothers died beside their tiny children.

The commissar opened his eyes.

"What's up? We standing still?"

"Still as can be!"

"What in hell?! We make sixty miles a day!" the commissar got angry, and again Dvanov went with him to the engine.

The engine stood abandoned. Neither the engineer nor the assistant were there. About thirty feet in front of the engine lay amateurishly torn-up rails.

The commissar grew serious. "Did they leave themselves, or did they get killed? Who the hell knows? How are we going to go now?"

"Of course they left by themselves!" Alexander said.

The engine was standing still warm, and Dvanov decided to take the train on himself, slowly. The commissar agreed, gave Dvanov two Red soldiers to help, and ordered the rest to clear the way.

The echelon moved off after about three hours. Dvanov looked everything over personally, the fuel and the water and the track, and still something bothered him. The big machine worked submissively, but Dvanov wasn't pushing it particularly. He grew bolder by degrees and went faster, braking sternly on the slopes and curves, however. He told his two Red soldier helpers what they were about, and they kept the steam pretty well up to the necessary pressure.

Some abandoned siding by the name of "Zavalishny" came up. An old man sat by the siding tracks eating bread, not raising his eyes to the train. Dvanov crossed the siding slowly, looking the switches over, and then went further. The sun made its way through the fog and slowly warmed the chilled damp earth. Occasionally birds shot up in the wastelands, falling immediately upon their food of scattered, forgotten kernels.

A long straight incline began. Dvanov shut off the steam and went on, the speed increasing through inertia.

A clear track was visible for a long way, right up to the point where the incline became a rise, in the hollow of the steppe. Dvanov grew less tense and got down from his seat so as to watch how his helpers were working and to have a chat with them. About five minutes later he returned to the window and looked out. Far away a semaphore was visible; that was probably Razgulai. He noticed the smoke of a locomotive beyond the semaphore, but he wasn't confused; Razgulai was in Soviet hands; that had been clear back in Urochev. Some sort of headquarters was there and it kept correct communications with the big switching yard at Liski.

The locomotive smoke at Razgulai turned into a cloud, and Dvanov glimpsed the engine's stack and forward parts. "Probably coming from Liski," Dvanov thought. However, the locomotive was coming at the semaphore, towards the Urochev echelon. "He's going to stop now, and go behind the switch," Dvanov thought, watching the train. However, a quick blast of steam from the stack showed the engine's labor; the locomotive was coming directly toward them, at a healthy clip. Dvanov leaned completely out of the window and peered closely. The locomotive passed the semaphore. It was pulling a heavy load of freight or soldiers along a single set of tracks, dead on towards the brow of Dvanov's machine. At that moment Dvanov was going downhill, the other locomotive was going downhill, and they had to meet in the hollow, right where the profile of the tracks broke. Alexander had a hunch that it was a bad business, and he pulled on the handle of the twin whistles. The Red soldiers noticed the oncoming train and began to get excited from fear.

"I'll slow down now, and then you jump!" Dvanov said to them. Anyway, they were useless. The Westinghouse brake wasn't working; Dvanov knew that from yesterday and the old engineer. There was only one way—full steam reverse. The oncoming train had also discovered the Urochev echelon and was blasting incessant alarms on its whistle. Dvanov fastened the ring of his whistle-chain to a valve, so as not to interrupt the alarm signal, and began to move the reversing couplings backwards.

His hands grew chill, and he could barely budge the stiff worm shaft. Then Dvanov opened up full steam and leaned against the boiler in wilting fatigue. He didn't see when the Red soldiers had jumped but he was glad they were gone.

The echelon crawled slowly backwards, the locomotive taking hold with spinning wheels, splashing water up the stack.

Dvanov wanted to leave the engine, but then he remembered that he had blown the covers on the cylinders from opening up the reverse steam too sharply.

The cylinders steamed, the wadding was smashed through, but the covers remained whole. The oncoming train was approaching smartly; gray-blue smoke fanned out from the brake shoes under its wheels, but the weight of the train was too great for one locomotive to overcome its speed. The engineer was giving hurried sharp blasts in groups of three, asking the brigade to use the manual brakes. Dvanov understood and observed everything as though he were a bystander. His slow thought helped him in that hour; he was afraid to leave his engine because the political commissar might shoot him or they might expel him from the Party. Besides, Zakhar Pavlovich, to say nothing of Dvanov's father, would never have left an entire ardent locomotive to die without its engineer, and Alexander also remembered this.

Dvanov clutched at the window ledge so as to withstand the blow and looked out at his opponent for the last time. People were tumbling wildly from the train, crippling and saving themselves. A man also crashed down from the engine, either the engineer or his helper. Dvanov looked back at his own train, but no one showed himself. Probably they were all asleep.

Alexander squeezed his eyes closed and dreaded the roar of the crash. Then, instantaneously, on legs suddenly lively, he flew down from the cabin so as to jump, and grabbed the railing of the ladder down. Only there did Dvanov feel his helping consciousness; the boiler would explode for sure, and he would be crushed as an enemy of the machine. The strong durable earth spread close beneath him, the earth which had waited for his life and which would in an instant be orphaned by him. The earth was unattainable, and departed like a live woman. Dvanov remembered a sight and feeling from childhood—his mother was leaving for the bazaar, while he chased after her on dangerous, unaccustomed legs, believing that mother had left forever and for good, crying his tears as he ran.

The warm silence of blackness shielded Dvanov's sight.

"Just a word, please! . . ." Dvanov said, and fell within the closeness which had gathered about him.

He woke up far away and alone. Old dry grass tickled his neck, and nature seemed very noisy to him. Both steam engines shrieked their sirens and their safety valves; the concussion had broken their springs. Dvanov's engine stood properly on the tracks, just with a bent frame that had turned blue from the instantaneous pressure and heating. The Razgulai engine had warped and dug its wheels into the track bed. The next two cars had run into the front car of the Urochev train, turning its walls into kindling. The bodies of two cars in the Razgulai train had been knocked out and thrown into the grass, while their axle carts lay on top of the tender.

The commissar came over to Dvanov.

"You alive?"

“No problem. But why did this happen?”

“The Devil alone knows! Their engineer says that his brakes failed and that he overran Razgulai. We arrested him, poor bastard. And what are you looking at?”

Dvanov got frightened. “I went into full reverse. Call up a commission, let them look at how the controls are set. . . .”

“What do we need a commission for?! Between us and them we’ve got some forty men stretched out . . . you could take an entire White town with those kinds of losses! And they say the Cossacks are hanging about these parts thick as apples in a barrel . . . things look bad for us!”

A relief train soon arrived from Razgulai with workers and tools. Everyone forgot about Dvanov, and he set off on foot for Liski.

However, a man who had been tossed lay in his path. He was swelling up so fast that the movement of his growing body was visible, and his face was gradually darkening, as though the man were being plunged into blackness. Dvanov even turned his attention to the daylight, to see if it was working, if a man could become so dark.

Soon the man had grown to the point that Dvanov became afraid he might pop and spray the liquids of his life about, so he stepped back from him. The man, however, began to abate and turn lighter in color. Probably he had been long dead, and it was only the dead substances which were upset within him.

A Red soldier squatted on his haunches and looked at his groin, where blood flowed forth like dark thick wine. The Red soldier grew pale in the face, leaned onto his arm so as to get up, and told the blood in words which grew ever slower, “Stop, you stinking dog, can’t you see I’m getting weaker?”

However, the blood thickened until its taste could be sensed, ran black for a bit, then stopped altogether. The Red soldier tumbled over backwards and spoke softly, with the sincerity that people have when they expect no answer, “Oh, how boring it all is. . . . I’ve got nobody with me!”

Dvanov came close to the Red soldier, who asked him consciously, “Close my sight for me!” and glanced at him with drying, unblinking eyeballs, without the slightest tremor of his lids.

“How come?” Dvanov asked, growing upset with shame.

“It cuts . . .” the Red soldier explained, and clenched his teeth so as to shut his eyes. The eyes however, would not close; rather they burned and bloomed, turning into globular mineral. The reflection of the cloudy sky came vividly into his dead eyes, as though nature returned into a person as the life which had opposed it head-on left, and the Red soldier, in order not to torment himself, accustomed himself to it with death.

Dvanov went around Razgulai station so that he wouldn’t be stopped there for a document check, and he disappeared into the desolate wastes, where people live without help.

Railroad shacks always drew Dvanov with their thoughtful inhabitants.

He thought that the track watchmen were calm and wise in their solitude. Dvanov dropped into trackside houses to drink water, and he watched the pale children, who played not with toys but with their imagination alone, and he would have been able to stay with them forever, to share their lot in life.

Dvanov also spent the night in a watchman's shack, but in the entrance, not in the room, because a woman was in labor in there, and she suffered loudly all night. Her husband wandered sleepless, stepping over Dvanov and saying to himself in amazement, "In times like these . . . in times like these. . ."

He feared that his child now being born would perish quickly in the calamity of revolution. The four-year-old boy woke up from his mother's loud alarm, drank some water, went out to pee, and looked at everything as though he were a passerby, understanding, but not giving justifications. Dvanov finally dropped off unexpectedly, and woke up in the dull light of morning, a long dreary rain softly rustling along the roof.

The satisfied host came out of the room and said straight out, "It's a boy!"

"That's excellent," Alexander told him, and got up off his bedding. "He'll become a man!"

The father of the newborn was offended. "Uh-huh, and he'll herd cows . . . there's a lot of us people, you know!"

Dvanov went out into the rain, so as to go farther. The four-year-old boy sat in the window and smeared the glass with his fingers, imagining something unlike his own life. Alexander waved goodbye to him twice, but the boy got scared and climbed down from the window. Thus Dvanov never saw him again, and he never will.

"Goodbye!" Dvanov said to the house, the place of his night's lodging, and set off for Liski.

After a mile or so he met a hearty old woman with a bundle.

"She's already had it!" Dvanov told her, so that she wouldn't hurry.

"Had it!?" The old woman grew amazed quickly. "Seems it was in a hurry then, sonny. There's a scare for you! What did God send?"

"A boy," Alexander announced, contented, as though he had taken some part in the occurrence.

"A boy! He won't respect his parents then," the old woman decided. "Oh, what a burden it is to be in labor, sonny. If just one muzhik in the world was ever to give birth, then he'd bow down at the feet of his wife and mother-in-law. . . ."

The old woman passed immediately on to a long conversation, which Dvanov didn't need, so he cut her off.

"Well, Granny, goodbye! You and me aren't relatives, so we've got nothing to fight about."

"Goodbye, honey! Remember your mother! Respect her now!"

Dvanov promised to honor his parents, and he cheered the old woman with respect.

Long was Dvanov's homeward path. He walked among the gray sorrow of the cloudy day, and looked into the fall earth. The sun bared itself occasionally in the heavens, applying its light to the grass, the sand, the dead clay, exchanging sensations with them, without the slightest consciousness. Dvanov liked this silent friendship of the sun, and the way it encouraged the earth with its light.

In Liski he climbed into a train of sailors and Chinese going to Tsaritsyn. The sailors were holding up the train in order to have time to thoroughly thrash the commander of the nourishment point for his lentil soup, but then the echelon set off calmly. The Chinese had eaten an entire fish soup which the Russian sailors had refused, and then they had gathered up all the nourishing moisture from the sides of the soup bucket with bread. They answered the sailors' questions about death by saying, "We love death! We love it very much!" Then the Chinese lay down to sleep, replete. However, during the night the sailor Kontsov could not sleep from thinking, so he stuck the barrel of his rifle out the air hole and began to shoot at the lights of railroad houses and signals along the way. Kontsov was afraid of defending people and dying for them for nothing, so he assumed in advance a feeling of obligation to fight for those who had suffered at his hand. After shooting a bit, Kontsov fell immediately into a contented sleep, and stayed asleep for three hundred miles, long after Dvanov had left the car, on the morning of the second day.

Dvanov tore the gate from his fence and rejoiced at the old tree which grew up by the entrance. The tree was crippled, chopped up, because they used to stick the axe in it while resting from chopping wood, but it was alive, preserving the green passion of its leaves upon ailing branches.

"You've come, Sash?" Zakhar Pavlovich asked. "It's good that you've come, or else I'd have been alone here. I didn't feel like sleeping at night without you . . . just lay there and listen, isn't that maybe you coming! I even didn't lock the door for you, so you could come straight in. . . ."

The first days home Alexander froze, and he lay on the stove to get warm, while Zakhar Pavlovich sat below and, sitting, dozed.

"Sash, maybe you want something?" Zakhar Pavlovich asked from time to time.

"No, I don't want anything," Alexander answered.

"And here I thought maybe you'd eat something."

Soon Dvanov could no longer catch Zakhar Pavlovich's questions, and he didn't see how the old man cried at night, his face stuck into the oven, where Alexander's socks were warming. Dvanov had typhus, which repeated itself, not leaving the patient's body for eight months, when the typhus became inflammation of the lungs. Alexander lay oblivious of his life, and

only occasionally on winter nights did he hear the locomotive whistles and remember them. Sometimes the boom of faraway artillery carried to the sick man's indifferent ears, and then it would again become hot and noisy for him in the murk of his body. In minutes of consciousness Dvanov lay empty and dessicated; he could feel only his own skin, so he pressed himself to the bed, because it seemed to him he might fly off, like the light dry corpses of dead spiders.

Just before Easter Zakhar Pavlovich made a coffin for his foster son, a strong, beautiful coffin, with flanges and bolts, the last gift of a master craftsman-father to his son. Zakhar Pavlovich wanted to keep Alexander in a coffin like that, if not alive, then at least whole, for love and memory. Zakhar Pavlovich intended to dig up his son from the grave every ten years, so as to see him and feel himself together with him.

Dvanov went outside with the new summer. The air felt heavy like water, the sun's burning flame seemed noisy, and the entire world was fresh, biting, intoxicating for his weakness. Life again glistened before Dvanov. He tensed his body, and his thought rose up in fantasy.

A familiar girl, Sonya Mandrova, looked across the fence at Alexander. She didn't understand why Sasha hadn't died, once a coffin had been made.

"You didn't die?" she asked.

"No," Alexander told her. "And you're still alive?"

"I'm alive too. We'll live together, you and me. You all right now?"

"All right. And you?"

"I'm all right too. But why are you so skinny? That was death that was in you, but you didn't let it?"

"What did you want? Me to die?" Alexander asked.

"I don't know," Sonya answered. "I saw that there are a lot of people. They don't die off, but just stay around."

Dvanov called her into the yard. Barefoot Sonya crawled over the fence and touched Alexander. She had forgotten him over the winter. Dvanov told her what he had seen in dream during his illness, and how boring it had been in the murk of sleep. There hadn't been any people anywhere, and he saw now that there were not many of them in the world. When he had walked among the fields near the war, then too he had rarely come upon houses.

"I didn't mean it when I told you I didn't know," Sonya said. "If you had died, I would have cried for a long time. Even if you had gone far away, I would have still thought that you were living in one piece. . . ."

Alexander looked at her with astonishment. Sonya had already grown up over the year, although she had not had much to eat. Her hair had darkened, her body had acquired caution, and it was embarrassing to be around her.

"You still don't know, Sash . . . I'm studying down at the school!"

"And what are they teaching you there?"

Everything we don't know. One teacher there says that we are a stinking

'stinking dough'  
Shumilin

dough, and that he will make a sweet pastry of us. Let him say it, since he's going to teach us politics, isn't that right?"

"Are you really a stinking dough?"

"Uh-huh. But I won't be afterwards, and other people won't be either, because I'm going to be a teacher of children, and they'll start getting wise from the time they're little. Then people won't be able to insult them with stinking dough."

Dvanov touched one of her hands, so as to get used to her again, but Sonya gave him the second hand as well.

"This way you'll get healthy faster," she said. "You're cold and I'm hot. You feel it?"

"Sonya, you come over in the evening," Alexander said, "because I'm fed up with being alone."

Sonya came in the evening and Sasha drew for her, and she showed him how she could draw better. Zakhar Pavlovich carried the coffin outside on the sly and broke it up for kindling. "Now I'll have to make a child's rocking chair," he thought. "But where can I get some softer spring steel? . . . we got none of it, we've only got for locomotives. Maybe Sasha will have kids for Sonya, and I'll take care of them. Sonya'll soon grow up . . . and let her live. She's an orphan too."

After Sonya left Dvanov went immediately to bed until morning, in fear, so as to see the new day and not remember the night. He lay however and watched the night with open eyes, because the strengthening, stirring life within him did not wish to slumber. Dvanov imagined the darkness above the tundra, where people from the warm places of the earth came to live. Those people made a little railroad to bring in wood for the construction of dwellings, to replace their lost summery climate. Dvanov imagined himself as an engineer on that timber-hauling line that carried logs to build new towns, and he made believe he was doing all the work of an engineer—he passed the desolate stages between stations, took on water, blew the whistle in the blizzards, braked, talked with his assistant and, finally, fell asleep at his destination, the shore of the Arctic Ocean. In his sleep he saw large trees growing from the pale soil, and there was an airy, barely shimmering space around them, and an empty road departed patiently into the distance. Dvanov envied all of this. He wanted to gather up the trees, air, and road, and fit them to himself, so as to have no time to die beneath their defense. Dvanov wanted also to remember something else, but this effort was greater than memory, and his thought disappeared as his consciousness turned in sleep, as a bird flies from a wheel as it begins to move.

The wind came up during the night and chilled the entire town. The cold began in many homes and children saved themselves from it by basking next to the feverish bodies of mothers sick with typhus. The wife of the president of the Provincial Executive Committee, Shumilin, also had typhus, and her two children pressed close to her from either side, so as to sleep in

warmth. Shumilin himself lit a primus stove on the table for light, because there was no lantern and the electricity had been doused. He sketched a wind engine which would winch in a plough on a rope and thus plow up the ground for grain.

The horselessness had struck the province, and there was no time to wait while the horses' young were born and raised to draught strength, so it looked as though a scientific out had to be found.

After finishing the sketch, Shumilin lay down on the couch and huddled up beneath his overcoat, so as to correspond with the general poverty of the Soviet land, which lacked necessary things, and he fell peacefully asleep. In the morning Shumilin had a hunch that the masses in the province had probably even thought something up, and perhaps even socialism had popped up somewhere unawares, because people had nowhere else to go once they banded together in fear of poverty and the effort of want. The wife looked at her husband with white eyes burnt out by typhus, and Shumilin again hid under his overcoat.

"Oh, Nadya," he whispered to himself for consolation, "we've got to get socialism started quick, or you're going to die."

The children also woke up, but they didn't rise from the warmth of the bed, trying to fall asleep again, so as not to want to eat.

After getting ready quietly, Shumilin went to his office. He promised his wife to be home as early as possible, but he promised this every day, and he always turned up in the late night hours.

There were some people walking past the Provincial Action Committee offices with their clothes covered in clay, as though they lived in villages down in hollows, and they moved now into the distance without having cleaned themselves up.

"Where are you going?" Shumilin asked these wandering people.

"Us?" said one man, who had begun to diminish in height from the hopelessness of his life. "We're going where our feet point, where they'll call us back from. Turn us around and we'll be going the other way."

"In that case, best go forwards," Shumilin told them. He remembered reading one scientific book in his office, about how speed makes the force of gravity, the weight of a body and of life grow less, which was probably why in bad times people try to move. For the same reason Russian wanderers and pilgrims trekked continually, dissipating the weight of the people's grieving soul with their motion. The barefoot unsown fields could be seen from the windows of the Provincial Executive Committee. Occasionally a lone man would appear there, stare at the city for a long time, his chin leaned on his walking staff, and then he would go away into the gulley somewhere, where he lived in the murk of his shack and hoped for something.

Shumilin told the secretary of the Executive Committee about his unease by telephone, about how people walk about the fields and town, thinking about something, wanting something, while Shumilin suggested, it might

be time to send an ethical scientific fellow out into the province. To let him have a look around and see if maybe there aren't socialist elements of life out there. After all, the masses also want to get their own, and perhaps they were already living on in some kind of homemade way, especially since they still hadn't gotten use to help. Shumilin said that they had to find the dead center of poverty and strike at it immediately, because, after all, they were in a hurry.

"Well, what the hell . . . let's give it a try!" the secretary agreed. "I'll look up that kind of fellow for you, and you rig him out with orders."

"Give me him today," Shumilin requested. "Dispatch him to me at home."

The secretary sent orders downward through his organization and forgot about it further. The clerk of the Organization Division though wasn't able to let the secretary's order sink any further into the Executive Committee bureaucracy, and he began to muse himself about who could be sent to look over the province. There wasn't anybody. All the communists were already acting, and they only had some Dvanov in their lists, a fellow called from Urochev to fix the city water main, but his dossier had some document about illness attached to it. "I'll send him, if he ain't dead," the clerk decided and went to inform the secretary of the Executive Committee about Dvanov.

"Oh, all right," the secretary affirmed him. "Let the boys get on with the job, and they'll grow up to it."

In the evening Dvanov received a form: "Present yourself to the President of the Executive Committee immediately to discuss emerging spontaneous generation of socialism among the masses." Dvanov got up and walked about on unaccustomed legs. Sonya returned from her courses with a notebook and a burdock. She had picked the burdock because it had a white underside and because at night the wind scratched it and the moon illuminated it. Sonya looked from her window at this burdock when she couldn't sleep because of youth, but now she had gone in among the weeds and picked it. She already had a lot of plants at home, and the greater part of them were immortelles which had grown on the grave of soldiers.

"Sasha," Sonya said, "soon they're going to take us into the villages to teach literacy to the children, but I want to serve in a flower store."

Alexander answered her, "Practically everybody loves flowers as it is, but it's a rare person that loves other people's children. Usually it's just their own parents."

Sonya couldn't see it. She was still full of the sensations of life, which prevented her from thinking correctly, and she went away from Alexander offended.

Dvanov didn't know exactly where Shumilin lived. At first he went into the yard of approximately the house where Shumilin ought to live. A hut stood in the yard and within it was a janitor. It was already dark and the janitor

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out of the wind and the government?

had lain down on the shelf above the stove with his wife to sleep. Bread had been left on a clean tablecloth for the chance guest. Dvanov walked into the hut as if into the countryside; inside it smelled of straw and milk, of that well-run, comfortably full warmth in which the entire rural population of Russia had been conceived, and the janitor-host no doubt was whispering to his wife of his janitorial troubles.

The janitor was then listed as the health orderly, so as to not belittle his worth. When Dvanov requested he point out where Shumilin was, the orderly put on his felt boots and threw on an overcoat over his underwear.

"I'll go freeze a bit for my sins, and you don't go to sleep for awhile."

Shumilin at that time was feeding his sick wife with mashed potatoes from a saucer. His wife chewed the food weakly and comforted the three-year-old son seeking shelter by her body with one arm.

Dvanov said what he needed.

"Just a second, I'll finish feeding the wife," Shumilin requested, then finished and explained. "You see how it is yourself, comrade Dvanov, what we need. I work all day and at night I spoon feed the wife. We just absolutely got to learn some other way to live."

"It's not so bad the way it is now," Dvanov answered. "When I was sick and Zakhar Pavlovich fed me with a spoon, I liked that."

"What did you like?" Shumilin hadn't understood.

"When people are fed directly from hands right into their mouths."

"Well, so like it," said Shumilin, not feeling what Dvanov had said; then he wanted Dvanov to go around the province on foot to look over how people were living out there. Probably poverty had already bunched together on its own accord and set itself up according to socialism. "We're serving here while the masses are living. I'm afraid, comrade Dvanov, that communism is more likely to turn up there . . . they don't have any protection, except for comradeship. Now if you were to go take a look out there. . ."

Dvanov remembered various people who wandered among the fields and slept in the empty buildings at the front; maybe those people in fact had already bunched up in a gulley somewhere, out of the wind and the government, and there they lived, content with their friendship. Dvanov agreed to look for communism in the initiative of the populace.

"Sonya," he said in the morning of the next day, "I'm going away. Goodbye."

The girl climbed up on the fence. She had been washing in the yard.

"But I'm going away too, Sash. Klusha is after me again. Better I should live in the country myself."

Dvanov knew that Sonya lived with an acquaintance, Aunt Klusha, and that she didn't have any parents. But why should she go into the countryside alone? It turned out that Sonya and her girlfriends had been dismissed from their courses ahead of schedule, because there were gangs of illiterate people out in the country, schoolteachers were being sent there in strengths equal

to those of the Red Army detachments.

"Now we'll see each other after the revolution," Dvanov said.

"We'll see each other," Sonya confirmed. "You kiss me on the cheek, and I'll kiss you on the forehead. I watched, and that's how people always say good-bye, and I've got nobody to say good-bye with."

Dvanov touched her cheek with his lips and felt in turn the dry wreath of Sonya's lips upon his brow. Sonya turned away and stroked the fence with a tormented, unsure hand.

Dvanov suddenly wanted to help Sonya, but he only bent over her and felt the scent of wilted grasses which wafted from her hair. Here the girl turned back and once again became lively.

Zakhar Pavlovich stood on the stoop with an unfinished iron suitcase and didn't squint, so that no tears would collect.

\* \* \* \* \*

Dvanov walked around the province on the county and township roads. He stuck mostly to settled places, so that he had to walk through the valleys of streams and through gulleys. When he came out onto the watersheds, Dvanov no longer saw a single village, nowhere was there smoke from a stove-pipe, and rarely was wheat being grown on these steppe uplands. Here grew extraneous grasses and the weeds gave shelter and food to the birds and insects.

From the watersheds Russian looked uninhabited to Dvanov, while the depths of coulees and the banks of tiny dribbling springs had villages living everywhere. It could be seen how people settled in the tracks of water. They existed as slaves to the reservoirs. At first Dvanov glimpsed nothing in the province; it seemed as uniform to him as the visions of a petty imagination. One evening however he had no shelter for the night, and found lodging only in the warm weeds on top of a watershed.

Dvanov lay down and dug at the soil beneath him with his fingers. The dirt was completely fertile but no one plowed it, and Alexander thought that this was because of the horse shortage, and fell asleep. He awoke at dawn from the weight of another body, and he pulled out his revolver.

"Don't get scared," said the man that had turned up. "I got cold in my sleep and saw that you were lying here. Let's put our arms around each other for warmth, and we'll go to sleep."

Dvanov put his arms around him and they both warmed up. In the morning Dvanov asked the man in a whisper, not letting go of him, "Why don't they plow here? Look, the dirt's black here! No horses, or what?"

"Wait a bit," the basking foot traveller answered in the hoarse voice of a heavy smoker. "I'd tell you, but I've got a brain what won't turn over without bread. There used to be people, but now there's nothing but mouths . . .

write  
patience

understand my meaning?"

"No. But so what?" Dvanov felt lost. "All night you kept warm next to me, and now you're offended?!"

Dvanov had a little bit of bread pulp mixed in with his pocket trash.

"Eat this," he handed over the bread. "Let your mind turn over into your stomach, and I'll find out what I want without you."

At noon of the same day Dvanov found a distant village in an active ravine, and he told the people in the village soviet that they were going to re-settle some Muscovites onto their steppe land.

"Let them settle them there," agreed the president of the soviet. "All the same it'll be their end there . . . there's nothing to drink out there, and it's a long ways off. Even us, we haven't hardly touched that land since we was born. Now if there was water out there, we'd have let them suck it out of us and keep that fallow out there going, and be glad about it, too. . . ."

Now Dvanov walked still farther into the depths of the province and did not know where to stop. He thought of the time when water would begin to glisten in the dry uplands. That would be socialism.

Soon the narrow valley of some ancient, long ago dried up river opened before him. The valley was occupied by the post town of Petropavlovka, an enormous herd of greedy houses bunched up around a tiny watering hole.

Dvanov saw boulders on the streets of Petropavlovka which had once been brought there by glaciers. Now the glacial boulders lay by the huts and served as seats for old men.

Dvanov later remembered these stones when he was sitting in the Petro-pavlovka village soviet. He had dropped in there so that they would give him lodgings for the approaching night and so he could write Shumilin a letter. Dvanov did not know how letters begin, and informed Shumilin that nature had no particular gifts for creations, that it succeeds through patience. Boulders had crawled from Finland across the plains and the sorrowful expanse of time into Petropavlovka on the tongue of a glacier. Water had to be brought from the rare steppe washes and the deeper layers out onto the high steppe, so as to establish socialism in the steppe. That's nearer than dragging boulders from Finland.

While Dvanov was writing a peasant with a capricious face and a psychotic, hand-hewn beard stood by his table and waited for something.

"Trying all the time, huh?" the man said, convinced of the general confusion.

"We try," Dvanov understood him. "Just have to lead all of you to clean waters out in the steppe."

The peasant scratched his beard voluptuously.

"You are a one, aren't you? Seems like the smartest folks of all are turning up now! If it wasn't for you, we'd never figure out how to get our guts stuffed proper!"

"No, I'm afraid you never would have figured it out," Dvanov sighed

indifferently.

"Hey, you, what are you doing here?! Get out of here!" the president of the soviet yelled from another desk. "You're God, after all, so what are you hanging around with the likes of us for, huh?"

It turned out that this man considered himself God and knew everything. Following his conviction, he quit plowing and fed himself directly with soil. He always said that since grain comes from the soil, then soil must have its own independent repletion, and all it takes is getting your belly used to it. People thought he would die, but he lived on, picking the clay from between his teeth before everybody's eyes. For this he was somewhat esteemed.

When the secretary of the soviet led Dvanov to his billet, God was standing on the stoop, freezing.

"God," the secretary said, "take the comrade over to Kuza Pogankin's, tell him it's from the soviet. It's their turn."

Dvanov went with God.

They met a muzhik, not old, who said to God, "Hello there, Nikanorych! Maybe it's getting on time you was Lenin, since you're God already!"

God had patience and gave no answer to this greeting. Only when they had gotten a bit farther did God sigh. "Well, that's power for you!"

"What," Dvanov asked, "they don't keep God?"

"No," God confessed simply. "They see with their eyes, they touch with their hands, but they don't believe. The sun they acknowledge, even though they've never reached it personally. So, let them grieve down to their roots while they've still got bark on them."

God left Dvanov by the Pogankin hut and turned back without a farewell.

Dvanov didn't let him go. "Wait a second, what are you thinking of doing now?"

God peered gloomily into the rural expanses, where he was the sole person.

"Soon I'll announce that I'm taking the earth away one night, and then they'll start believing out of fright."

God concentrated spiritually and was silent for a moment.

"And then I'll give it back some other night. And all the Bolsheviks' glory will be mine, by rank."

Dvanov followed God with his eyes, not judging him. God left, not able to pick out the road, hatless, barefoot, in just a jacket. His food was clay and his hope a dream.

Pogankin greeted Dvanov gruffly. He was miserable with poverty. His children had aged after a year of hunger and, like adults, they thought only of how to get bread. The two girls already resembled grown women. They wore their mother's long skirts and dresses, had pins in their hair, and gossiped. It was strange to see these small, intelligent, preoccupied women

who acted absolutely directly and purposefully, but who still had no sense of reproduction. In Dvanov's eyes this lack turned the girls into some sort of burdensome shameful creatures.

When it grew dark, twelve-year-old Varya neatly boiled up a soup from potato skins and one spoonful of flour.

"Papa, climb down and have supper!" Varya called him. "Mama, yell for the boys in the yard! What are they freezing out there for anyway, the blue devils!"

Dvanov was abashed. What would become of this Varya later?

"And you turn away," Varya addressed Dvanov. "You'd never make enough if you was to make for all of your likes, and we've got a mess of our own here!"

Varya pushed up her hair and straightened her blouse and skirt as though there were something nasty beneath them.

The two boys came in, noses running, bellies used to hunger, and all the same happy in their childhood. They didn't know that a revolution was going on, and considered potato skins man's eternal food.

"How many times did I tell you to come in!" Varya began screaming at her brothers. "Oooh, you little demons! Go take your clothes off right now! Where do you think we're going to get more, huh?!"

They boys shucked their old sheepskin coats. They had neither shirts nor pants beneath the skins. Then they climbed naked onto the bench by the table and squatted on their haunches. Probably they had been taught such conservation of their clothes by their sister. Varya gathered the sheepskin rags into one place and began to distribute spoons.

"You two go right after Papa, don't go in more often," Varya ordered her brothers about taking turns with the food, while she herself sat in the corner and cupped a cheek in her palm. After all, housewives eat afterwards.

The boys watched their father minutely; as soon as he took his spoon from the pot they immediately dipped in and swallowed the sip in a twinkling. Then they again stood watch with their empty spoons, waiting for their father.

"Varka, Father's only taking from the bottom and you don't give him any orders!" said one boy, taught by his sister to expect stern justice.

Pogankin himself was a little afraid of Varya, and began to pull out more liquid spoonfuls.

Beyond the window in the sky so unlike the earth attractive stars began to ripen. Dvanov found the Pole Star and thought about how much time it had to bear.

"For sure bandits will come galloping in tomorrow," Pogankin said as he chewed, then whacked one of the boys on the head with a spoon for having dug out an entire piece of potato all at once.

"How come bandits?" Dvanov wanted to find out.

"The stars have come out outside. Means the road's going to firm up

harvest,  
requisitions

land, but no food

some. Hereabouts, when there's mud, we've got peace, and soon as the road dries up, then the war begins."

Pogankin put down his spoon and tried to burp, but nothing came.

"Now you can have it," he gave the children permission. They climbed up to seize the remains in the pot.

"With these kinds of pleasures, it's been a year since I've even hiccupped!" Pogankin informed Dvanov seriously. "But remember, it used to be that you'd eat lunch and your parents wouldn't forget about you until vespers from the burping. There was a taste!"

Dvanov lay down so as to sleep and gain the following day more quickly. The next day he would go to the railroad to return home.

"Must be it's boring for you, living here," Dvanov asked, already growing calm for sleep.

Pogankin agreed. "Nothing much. It's got its moments. It's always boring in the country. That's why the people are so particular good at offspring, because they're bored. Things are like they ought to be. Otherwise would the men torture their women with that, if there was anything else to do?"

"But you could move up onto the fat uplands," Dvanov took a stab. "Up there you could live in plenty, with everything, and it would even be more fun."

Pogankin fell to thinking. "Why up there? Can you really make out with that black muck? . . . boys, you go outside and pee, then go to bed. . . ."

"And so what?" Dvanov tried. "Otherwise, they're going to take that land back."

"How can they do that? Or has the allotments come out?"

"It's come out," Dvanov said. "Why should the best land go begging? The whole revolution came on because of land. They gave land to you people, and now there's almost nothing coming up on it. So now they're going to start giving it to new settlers that get sent here, and that'll break that land to harness . . . they'll dig wells, set up villages down in the coulees, and then the ground will start producing. But you only go out into the steppe to visit."

Pogankin got worked up. Dvanov had located his fear.

"That ground out there is already damn good!" Pogankin grew jealous of his property. "Whatever you want to put on it'll come up! No kidding, Soviet power judges things like this by effort?"

"Of course," Dvanov smiled in the dark. "After all, the new settlers that are coming will be peasants like you. But since they control the lands better, they'll be given them. Soviet power loves harvests."

"That's true enough, at least," Pogankin began to mourn, "because it's easier for them to cover their requisition quotas."

"They're going to outlaw the requisitions soon," Dvanov made up. "As soon as the war burns down a little lower, then there won't be any more requisitioning."

"The muzhiks are saying the same thing," Pogankin agreed. But who

can bear such an unbearable torture! There's not one other country where it's done! . . . Is it true that it's more useful to go out into the steppe?"

"Go on out there, of course," Dvanov pressed on. "Get about ten other owners together and have at it . . ."

Afterwards Pogankin talked with Varya and his ailing wife about re-settling. Dvanov had given them an entire spiritual vision.

In the morning Dvanov ate kasha in the village soviet and saw God again. God refused an offer of kasha.

"What do I need it for?" he said. "Even if I eat it, all the same I won't be able to get so full of it that I'll never have to eat again."

The soviet refused to give Dvanov a cart, so God showed him the road to Kaverino, from which it was fourteen miles to the railroad.

"Remember me," God said, and his face grew melancholy. "Here we are parting forever, and no one even understands how sad that is. Out of two people, there's just one apiece left. But remember that one man grows from another's friendship, while I grow just from the clay of my own soul."

"That's the reason why you're God?" asked Dvanov.

God looked sadly at Dvanov, as at one who doubted the fact.

Dvanov concluded that this God was intelligent; he simply lived backwards. The Russian though is a two-way man, able to live both this way and return, and in both instances he will remain whole.

After that a long rain came on and Dvanov got out onto the high road only toward evening. The murky valley of a quiet steppe stream lay beneath him. The stream though was clearly dying; it was being smothered in the sediment tallus from the gulches, so that it didn't flow lengthwise as much as spread out laterally in swamps. Evening gloom already stood there above these swamps. The fish descended to the bottoms, the birds flew off into the thickets of their nests, the insects died down the chinks of the dead sedge. All the living creatures loved the warmth and provocative light of the sun, and now their gala ringing hunched down in low burrows and slowed to a whisper.

Dvanov though could still hear disjointed passages of the day's songs in the air, and he wanted to put words back into them. He knew the agitation which was now repeated, amplified, on the surrounding sympathy of life. The passages of the song however were scattered and shredded by a weak wind in space, which mixed with the twilight forces of nature, and became as soundless as the clay. He heard a movement which did not resemble his own sense of consciousness.

In this guttering, bowing world, Dvanov spoke with himself. He loved to converse alone in the open spaces, but if anyone had heard him, Dvanov would have been ashamed, like a lover caught in the dark with his beloved. Only words can turn flowing feeling into thought, so the thinking man converses. Conversing with oneself, however, is an art, while conversing with other people is an entertainment.

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“That’s why man enters into society, into entertainment, like water going downhill,” Dvanov concluded.

He made a semicircle with his head, and looked over half the visible world. Then he began to speak again, so that he could think.

“All the same, nature is a businesslike thing. These much-sung dales and rills are not just field poetry. You can also water the soil, the cows, and the people with them. They’ll become productive, and it’s better that way. People feed themselves from earth and water, and it’s people that I have to live with.”

Dvanov began to get tired further on, and he walked feeling the inner boredom of his entire body. The boredom of fatigue dried up his insides and the friction of his body grew tighter without the lubrication of the mind’s fantasy.

Within sight of the smokestacks of Kaverino the road went above a gully. The air in the gully was thickened into a fog. There were sopping quagmires of some sort down there and, perhaps, strange people took refuge there, people who had left the variety of life for the monotony of their own thoughtfulness.

God from Petropavlovka had men made in his living likeness in these villages of the province.

The snorting of tired horses could be heard from the depths of the gulch. Some kind of people were riding there, and their horses were getting stuck in the mud.

A brave young voice took up song before a detachment of cavalry:

*On the far shore of the deep  
Lies in that far distant land  
What we but dream in our sleep  
And our foe holds in his hand. . . .*

The horses’ pace picked up. The detachment covered the lead singer as a chorus, but each in his own way and with a different tune:

*Oh, go hide, my little apple  
Ripe gold juices a-trickle  
The soviets will reap you  
With their hammer and sickle. . . .*

The soloist continued in disharmony with the detachment:

*Here are my sword and my soul  
While my joy stays over there. . . .*

The detachment crushed the end of the couplet with the refrain:

*Oh yes, little apple!  
So unmisbegotten,  
When in rations we find you,  
For sure you are rotten.  
On your tree, we remind you,  
That the tree don't care a damn!  
When in the soviet we find you,  
You wear a number and stamp. . . .*

The people all whistled together and finished up the song hell bent for leather:

*And so my little apple,  
Your freedom go find!  
Not for soviets, not for tsars,  
But for all mankind!*

The song died away. Dvanov stopped, interested by the procession in the gulch.

"Hey, you on top!" they yelled to Dvanov from the detachment. "Climb on down to the eternal people!"

Dvanov stayed where he was.

"Step lively!" rang out one thick voice, probably that of the man who had started singing. "Otherwise count half-way to two and hold nice and still while we aim."

Dvanov thought it was unlikely that Sonya would be able to remain whole in a life like this, and he decided not to spare himself.

"You ride up here instead. It's drier. Why kill horses down there in the gulch, you kulak bandits!"

The detachment stopped below.

"Nikitok, put a vent in him," the thick voice ordered.

Nikitok aimed his rifle, but first, on account of God, he discharged his tormented spirit. "By the scrotum of Jesus Christ and the rib of the Virgin Mary, and by the entire Christian tribe—fire!"

Dvanov glimpsed a flash of compressed silent flame and tumbled from the lip of the ravine down to its bottom, as if his legs had been knocked from beneath him. He didn't lose clear consciousness, and heard a terrible noise in the settled substance of the earth, which pressed to each ear of his head in turn as he mumbled. Dvanov knew that he was wounded in the right leg; a steel bird had dug into the leg and was rustling the stinging edges of its wings.

In the ravine Dvanov grabbed the warm leg of a horse and he was no longer afraid when near this leg. The leg trembled quietly from fatigue and smelled of sweat, the grass of many roads, and the stillness of life.

"Nikitok, see if you can scare the flame of life out of him. The clothes

are yours.”

Dvanov heard this. He grabbed the horse’s leg with both hands, and the leg was transformed into the fragrant living body of that woman whom he did not yet know and would not recognize, but who became mysteriously vital to him now. Dvanov had understood the mystery of hair. His heart rose into his throat and he screamed in the oblivion of his liberation and immediately he sensed an unburdening, satisfied calm. Nature did not neglect to take from Dvanov that for which he had been born into the delirium of his mother, the seed of propagation, which would form of new people a family. Life’s last minutes flowed on and Sonya prevailed deeply upon Dvanov’s hallucinations. In those final moments, as he embraced the horse and the soil, for the first time Dvanov recognized a resonant passion for life, and was unexpectedly amazed at thought’s insignificance before this immortal bird which now hushed him with its extended, trembling wing.

Nikitok came up and felt Dvanov’s forehead to see if he was still warm. The hand was large and hot. Dvanov didn’t feel like having this hand leave him quickly, so he placed upon it his own soothing hand. Dvanov knew, however, what Nikitok was checking for, and he helped him.

“Hit me on the head, Nikita. Split open my skull and have done with it!”

Nikita didn’t resemble his hand, which Dvanov caught right away. He yelled in a mangy voice which had no correspondence to that peace of life which lay preserved within his hand.

“No joke, you’re still in one piece? I’m not going to split your head open. I’ll just rip out your stitches. Why should you have to die right off anyway? You’re a man, aren’t you? Suffer a little, lay around some . . . you’ll die more solid if you die slow.”

The feet of the leader’s horse came over. The thick voice reined Nikita in sharply.

“You keep on making fun of the man, you bastard, and I’ll stitch you right into your grave. I have spoken, now get on with it! The clothes are yours. How many times do I have to tell you that this detachment isn’t a robber band—it’s anarchy!”

“Mother of life, freedom, and order!” said the prone Dvanov. “What’s your name?”

The leader burst out laughing. “Isn’t it all the same to you now? Mrachinsky.”

Dvanov forgot about death. He had read *The Adventures of a Modern Agaspher*, by Mrachinsky. Could it be that it was this same horseman who had written that book?”

“You’re a writer! I read your book. It’s all the same to me now, but I did like your book.”

“Oh hell, let him get undressed by himself. What the hell am I going to do with a slab of meat? You can’t turn them over then,” Nikita was getting

bored with waiting. "The clothes on a stiff get all tight round the waist and when you take them off, everything rips and you can't make anything on it."

Dvanov began to undress himself, so as not to cause Nikita any loss. It is indeed impossible to undress a dead man without ruining his clothes. His right leg had stiffened and wouldn't obey at its bends, but it had stopped hurting. Nikita noticed and helped in a comradely way.

"That's the spot, huh? Where I hit you?" Nikita asked, taking careful hold of the leg.

"That's the spot," Dvanov said.

"Well, no problem . . . the bone's in one piece and the hole will scab over tight . . . you're not an old fellow. You leaving parents behind?"

"Yes," Dvanov answered.

"Well, what the hell, let them live," Nikita said. "They'll miss you a bit and then forget you. That's all parents have to do now, is miss people. You a communist or something?"

"A communist."

"It's your business . . . everybody wants his own kingdom, I guess."

The leader watched silently. The other anarchists were straightening out the horses and smoking, paying no attention to Dvanov and Nikita. The last murky light died over the ravine and the following night came on in its turn. Dvanov regretted that his vision of Sonya would not repeat itself again, but he didn't reminisce about the rest of his life.

"So you liked my book, huh?" the leader asked.

Dvanov was already without his raincoat and pants. Nikita stuffed them immediately into his sack.

"I already said so," Dvanov affirmed, and looked at the rotting wound in his leg.

"But are you sympathetic with the idea of the book? Do you remember it?" the leader pressed him. "There's a man there who lives alone, right at the very edge of the horizon."

"No," Dvanov declared. "I've forgotten the idea, but it was thought up in an interesting way. It sometimes happens like that. In the book you look at man like a monkey looking at Robinson Crusoe. You understood everything backwards, and it turned out to be good reading."

The leader rose up in attentive surprise in his saddle.

"That's curious . . . Nikitok, we're going to take the communist to Liman Khutor . . . you can have him there."

"What about the clothes?" Nikita was incensed.

Dvanov smoothed the quarrel with Nikita by agreeing to live what remained of his life bare-naked. The leader didn't object, limiting himself to an order to Nikita.

"You keep your eyes well peeled, my boy. Don't let the wind ruin him for me, understand? That's a Bolshevik intellectual, a real rare type."

The detachment set off. Dvanov clutched the stirrup of Nikita's horse

and tried to walk on just his left leg. The right leg of itself wasn't painful, but if it had weight put on it, it again felt the shot and the steel pin feathers within.

The narrow went out into the steppe, grew narrower, and rose. The night wind trudged about, but naked Dvanov hopped earnestly along on one leg and this warmed him.

Sitting in his saddle, Nikita looked over Dvanov's underwear in a business-like way.

"You peed your pants, you devil!" Nikita said without rancor. "I look at all of you and you're like little babies. I've yet to get clean stuff from even one of you. Everybody drops their load right off, even if they're put in a cutting-out pen first . . . there was just one good old muzhik, a county commissar. So kill me, you little stub of a man, he says. Farewell my Party and my children, he said. Now his underwear stayed clean, but he was some kind of muzhik."

Dvanov imagined this special Bolshevik and said to Nikita, "Soon it's you're they're going to be shooting . . . in everything, in your clothes and underwear. We won't dress ourselves from dead men's backs."

Nikita took no offense.

"You just keep hopping there, know what I mean? It's not time for you to be chattering yet. My friend, I won't mess up my drawers . . . you won't be able to siphon nothing out of me!"

"I won't even look," Dvanov assured Nikita. "And if I notice anything, then I won't think bad of you for it."

"And I don't think bad of anybody either," Nikita calmed down. "Life's like that . . . it's the goods that I love."

They got to Liman Khutor about two hours later. The anarchist detachment went to talk with the homeowners while Dvanov shivered in the wind and pressed his chest against the horse to try to warm up. Then they started to lead the horses away, forgetting about Dvanov, leaving him alone. As Nikita led away his horse he said to him, "You can stick yourself wherever you want. You can't hop far on one leg."

Dvanov thought about hiding himself, but he sat down on the ground and cried in the pitch black of the countryside because of the utter exhaustion of his body. The village fell quiet, the bandits found billets and went to bed. Dvanov crawled to a barn and scrambled into some oat straw there. All night he dreamed the kind of dreams which one suffers more deeply than life and which consequently are never remembered. He awoke in the still of a long-standing night, at that hour when, the legends say, children do their growing. Tears stood in Dvanov's eyes, because he had cried in his sleep. He remembered that today he would die, and he embraced the straw as though it were a living body.

With this consolation he again went to sleep. Nikita just barely found him in the morning and decided at first that he was dead, for Dvanov slept

with a wide, unmoving grin. It turned out however that this was because Dvanov's unsmiling eyes were closed. Nikita knew vaguely that a living body never laughs completely all over. Something always remains sad, whether it is the eyes or the mouth.

Sonya Mandrovna arrived at the village of Voloshino on a buckboard and began to live in the schoolhouse as a teacher. The villagers also called on her to midwife, sit at evening sings, and heal wounds; she did all of this as she could, offending no one. Everyone in this tiny village at the edge of a ravine had need of her, and Sonya felt herself important and happy from assuaging the grief and diseases of the populace. In the nights however she would stop and wait for a letter from Dvanov. She had given her address to Zakhar Pavlovich and to all her acquaintances so that they wouldn't forget to write Sasha where she was living. Zakhar Pavlovich promised to do so, and he gave her a photograph of Dvanov.

"It's all the same," he said. "You'll bring the picture back to me when you become his wife, and you'll live here with me."

"I'll bring it back," Sonya told him.

She glanced at the sky from the window of the school and saw stars above the stillness of the night. There was such silence there that it seemed the steppe held only void and not enough air for breathing. For this reason stars would fall down. Sonya thought about the letter, about whether people would manage to convey it safely among the fields. For her the letter turned into a nourishing point to life, and no matter what Sonya were to do, she believed that the letter would make it to her somewhere, that in some secret form it held for her alone the utter necessity of further existence and gay hope, and thus with greater economy and effort Sonya labored for the fruits of diminished unhappiness among the village people. She knew that all of this would be repaid by the letter.

Then however letters were read by outsiders. Dvanov's letter to Shumilin had been read while it was still in Petropavlovka. It was first read by the postmaster, then by all of his friends who were interested in reading—the teacher, the deacon, the storekeeper's widow, the sexton's son, and another person or so. At that time the libraries weren't working, books weren't being sold, and people were unhappy and in need of spiritual solace. Thus the postmaster's wife became a library. Particularly interesting letters never got to the addressee at all, but rather were kept for rereading and constant pleasure.

The postmaster used to immediately pass on the government parcels, since everybody knew their meaning in advance. The readers learned the most in letters that were just being shipped through Petropavlovka. Unknown people wrote sad and interesting letters.

After they had been read the postmaster would glue the letters shut with molasses and send them further along their way.

Sonya didn't know this, or else she would have walked on foot to every village post office in the land. She listened to the watchman's snorting

sleep through the coal stove. He served in the school not for a salary, but for the sake of keeping the property in one piece. He would have wished that children didn't come to the school, for they gouged up the tables and smeared the walls. The watchman foresaw that without his efforts the teacher would die and the muzhiks would tear the school to bits for their own barn-yard needs. It was easier for Sonya to sleep when she heard a living man nearby, and she carefully wiped her feet on the spread and lay down in the snowy cold of her bed. Somewhere faithful dogs pointed their muzzles into the ink of the steppe and barked.

Sonya turned over to feel her own body and warm up by it, and she began to fall asleep. Her dark hair spread mysteriously over the pillow and her mouth opened from the attention she was giving her dreams. She saw black wounds growing on her body, and when she awoke she quickly and unconsciously tested her body with a hand.

A stick knocked coarsely at the door. The watchman had already budged from his sleepy place and was fooling with the latch and bolt at the entrance. He was cursing the disturbed man outside.

"What do you come round here with your cudgel for? There's a woman asleep here, and those are but one-inch boards. What do you want, huh?"

"But what's here?" a calm voice asked from without.

"A school," the watchman answered. "What did you think it was, a way station or something?"

"That means there's just the teacher here?"

"And where should she be by rights, huh?" the watchman was amazed. "And what's she to you? You really think that I'm going to let you get near her? What a troublemaker!"

"Show her to us. . ."

"If you want to have a look, then you can just take a peek."

"Let them in! Who's there?" Sonya yelled and ran from her room into the entrance way.

Two men got off their horses. Mrachinsky and Dvanov.

Sonya stepped back from them. Before her stood Sasha, stubbly, dirty, sad—but Sasha.

Mrachinsky glanced condescendingly at Sofia Alexandrovna. Her sorry body was not worth his attention or effort.

"Is there anyone else with you?" Sonya asked, for the time being not yet feeling her happiness. "Sash, call your comrades . . . I have sugar, and you are all going to drink tea."

Dvanov shouted from the porch and came back. Nikita came in, followed by another man, who was short, thin, and had eyes which lacked attentiveness; although while still on the threshold he had seen a woman and immediately felt an attraction towards her, not to possess, but to defend her oppressed feminine weakness. He was named Stepan Kopenkin.

Kopenkin bowed to everyone, lowering his head with a tensed dignity,

"the unjustly conquered" anarchist

and then offered Sonya a little barberry candy that he had carried in his pocket for a couple of months, not knowing for whom.

"Nikita," Kopenkin said in a threatening, rarely used voice, "boil up some water in the kitchen. Carry this operation out in concert with Petrushka. You can also dig up some of your honey . . . you'd steal any sort of garbage. I'll hold your trial in the rear, you bit of muck."

"How did you know that the watchman is named Petr?" Sonya asked in shy amazement.

Kopenkin stood up in genuine respect.

"I personally arrested him, comrade, in the name of Bushinsky for opposition to the people's groups during the destruction of seized property."

Dvanov turned to Sonya, who was frightened by these people.

"Know who this is? He's the commander of the Bolsheviks in the field, and then he rescued me from being murdered by that man over there." Dvanov pointed at Mrachinsky. "That man talks about anarchy, and yet he personally feared the continuation of my life!"

Dvanov laughed, not angry at what had taken place.

"I can put up with that kind of bastard until the first battle," Kopenkin announced of Mrachinsky. "Understand, I found Sasha Dvanov naked and wounded, at a farm where this little ground owl and his detachment were stealing chickens. And it turns out they were looking to have no government! How's that, I ask, and they answer Anarchy! Oh, they should all get the plague . . . everybody will be without a government, and there they'll be with their carbines! Rubbish, pure rubbish. I had five men and they had thirty, and it was me what took them. They're common house thieves, not soldiers! I kept him and Nikita prisoners and let the rest go on their word of honor about loving hard work. I'm going to have a look at how he throws himself at bandits, if he does it like on Sasha, or softer. Then I'm going to demote him and drum him out."

Mrachinsky was cleaning his fingernails with a brush. He kept the modesty of the unjustly conquered.

"But where are the other members of Comrade Kopenkin's troops?" Sonya asked Dvanov.

"Kopenkin let them go to their wives for two days. He feels that military defeats take place because of the soldiers' loss of their wives. He wants to introduce a family army."

Nikita brought some honey in a beer bottle and the watchman brought a samovar. The honey smelled of kerosene, but it was nonetheless all eaten.

"You're a mechanic, you son of a bitch!" Kopenkin became angry with Nikita. "Honey he steals in a bottle . . . you spilled most of it! He couldn't find a jar, huh?"

Then Kopenkin suddenly changed, inspired. He raised his tea cup and said to everyone, "Comrades! In the end then let us drink, that we may gather strength for the defense of all the little ones of earth and in memory of

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the beautiful girl Rosa Luxemburg. I vow that my hand shall lay upon her grave all those who murdered and tortured her!"

"Excellent!" Mrachinsky said.

"We'll put them all six feet under!" Nikita agreed and poured his tea from the glass into the saucer. "It isn't done to wound women to death."

Sonya sat in fear.

The tea was drunk. Kopenkin turned his cup upside down and drummed on it with a finger. Here he noticed Mrachinsky and remembered that he didn't like him.

"You go out to the kitchen for the time being, my friend, and in an hour you can go water the horses . . . Petrusha!" Kopenkin yelled to the watchman. "You guard them! You go there too," he said to Nikita. "And don't swill down that hot water to the bottom, maybe you'll need it for something. You in a hot country or something?"

Nikita immediately swallowed the water and stopped being thirsty. Kopenkin fell into gloomy thought. His international face expressed no clear feeling now, except that it was impossible to imagine his origins, whether he came from sharecroppers or the professions, for the features of his face had already been ground down against the revolution. And his expression could cloud over instantly with inspiration and he could have set fire to all the immobile property of earth with conviction, so that within man would remain only reverence for one's comrade.

But then memories would once again render Kopenkin motionless. Occasionally he glanced at Sonya and loved Rosa Luxemburg even more strongly, for both were black of hair and pitiable of body. Kopenkin saw this and his love trod father along the road of memory.

His feelings about Rosa Luxemburg so upset Kopenkin that his eyes grew sad and filled with shameful tears. He tirelessly paced the room threatening the bourgeoisie, the bandits, England, and Germany for the murder of his bride.

"My love glitters now on my saber and in my carbine, but not in my poor heart!" Kopenkin announced and drew his sword. "I shall cut down enemies of the poor and women like weeds!"

Nikita came in with a jar of milk. Kopenkin waved his sword.

"We don't have a day's rations, and he's trying to slice flies," Nikita scolded quietly in a dissatisfied way. Then he reported loudly, "Comrade Kopenkin, I've brought you some liquid grub for supper. You could get whatever you want, but all the same you'd yell. The miller here killed a ram yesterday . . . let's commandeer a military portion. After all, we're supposed to get marching rations.

"Supposed to?" Kopenkin asked. "Then take a military ration for three, but weigh it on the beam! Don't take more than the proper ration!"

"That would mean counterrevolution!" Nikita affirmed, righteousness in his voice. "I know the government ration . . . I won't take any bone."

Socialism  
Re 'Proudhon's' Cocaine

"Don't wake the populace, you can take the food tomorrow," Kopenkin said.

"Tomorrow they'll hide it, Comrade Kopenkin," Nikita predicted, but didn't leave, since Kopenkin didn't like joining debates, and might act immediately.

The time was already late. Kopenkin bowed to Sonya, wished her pleasant dreams, and all four men went into the kitchen to sleep with Petr. The five men lay down in a row on the straw and soon Dvanov's face paled into sleep. He snuggled his head into Kopenkin's stomach and grew quiet again, while Kopenkin, who slept with his sword and in his complete uniform, put his arm around Dvanov to protect him.

After successfully waiting for the period of general sleep, Nikita got up and looked Kopenkin over first.

"Listen to his snort, the devil. But all the same he's a good muzhik." Then he went out to look for some chicken for the morning breakfast. Dvanov began to toss restlessly. He had frightened himself in a dream, thinking that his heart was stopping, and he sat on the floor as he woke up.

"But where then is socialism?" Dvanov remembered and peered into the murk of the room, searching for his thing. It seemed to him that he had already found it, but then had wasted it in sleep among these strangers. Dvanov went outside in fear of the punishment to come, hatless and in his socks, saw the dangerous unanswering night, and dashed off through the village into his own distance.

So he ran along the grey, lightening earth until he saw morning and the smoke of a locomotive at a station in the steppe. A train stood there prior to its scheduled departure.

Not coming to, Dvanov crawled across the platform through the crushing crowd. A zealous man who also wanted to ride the train turned up behind him. He was smashing into the crowds so that all his clothes were torn by friction, but everyone who was in front of him—and Dvanov was among them—accidentally wound up on the brake platform of a freight car. That man had had to put on the people in front of him so as to get on himself. Then he laughed at his success and read aloud the little sign which hung on the wall of the platform.

"Soviet Transport is the Way of History's Locomotive!"

The reader agreed completely with the sign. He imagined to himself a good locomotive with a star on the front, dead-hauling along the rails, God knows where. It was the worn-out engines which carried goods and other stuffs, not the locomotives of history, so the sign did not concern those riding the train then.

Dvanov closed his eyes so as to disassociate himself from any spectacles and experience the road senselessly until arriving at that which he had lost from sight or forgotten to see on his former path.

Two days later Alexander remembered why he lived and where he had

creates - "head doorman"  
experience of knowledge  
man of leader

been sent. But there is within man also a tiny spectator who takes part neither in action nor in suffering, and who is always cold-blooded and the same. It is his service to see and be a witness, but he is without franchise in the life of man and it is not known why he exists in solitude. This corner of man's consciousness is lit both day and night, like the doorman's room in a large building. This heart doorman sits entire days at the entrance into man and knows all the inhabitants of his building, but not a single resident asks the doorman's advice about his affairs. The residents come and go, while the spectator-doorman watches them with his eyes. His powerless knowledge of everything makes him sometimes seem sad, but he is always polite, distant, and he keeps an apartment in another building. In the event of fire the doorman telephones the firemen and watches further events from without.

While Dvanov walked and rode without memory, this spectator within him saw everything, but it never warned him and never helped him, not once. He lived parallel to Dvanov, but he wasn't Dvanov.

He existed somewhat like a man's dead brother; everything human seemed to be at hand, but something tiny and vital was lacking. Man never remembers him, but always trusts him, just as when a tenant leaves his house and his wife within, he is never jealous of her and the doorman.

This is the eunuch of man's soul. It was to this that he was a witness.

For the first hour Dvanov rode silently. Wherever there is a mass of people, a leader immediately appears as well. The mass insures their vain hopes with a leader, while a leader derives his essential from the mass. The brake platform of the car, where some twenty people had found a place, acknowledged as their leader that man who had squeezed them all onto the platform as he could get on himself. This leader knew nothing, but made announcements about everything. For this reason the people believed him. They each wanted to get a bushel of flour somewhere, and thus they had to know in advance that they would get it, so as to have the strength for self-torment. The leader said that without fail everybody would be able to swap for flour. He had already been where the people were going. He knew this rich village where the muzhiks ate chicken and dunplings. There was going to be a court holiday there soon and all the little people with bags would of course be guests.

"It's warm in those houses like in the baths," the leader reassured them. "You'll eat your fill of lamb fat, and then you just lay yourselves down and sleep! When I was there I used to drink a jug of kefir every morning, which is how I don't have a single worm inside of me now. And at dinner you can steam yourself in borscht, then swallow a bit of meat, and then some kasha, then blintzes . . . you can eat until you get cramps in your cheekbones. And the food stands like a column right up to your throat. So you take some lard on a spoon, smear it all over so it doesn't show on the outside, and then you feel like going straight to bed. Not bad!"

The people listened to their leader in the terror of dangerous joy.

“Oh Lord God, can it be that the old times will return someday?” a skinny old man joined in, almost in raptures, rubbing his unfilled stomach passionately, tormented, like a mother her dying child. “No, what was won’t be again! . . . Oh Lord, to drink even just a shot now! . . . I’d forgive the Tsar all of his sins!”

“Why, old man, or just because?” the leader asked.

“Don’t even say it, my friend! What haven’t I drunk? There’s lacquer and varnish, and I’ve paid big money for cologne. All for nothing too . . . they scratch your insides up, but they don’t lift your soul up at all. Ahhhh, remember how it used to be? Vodka . . . sanitary how they made it, damn it! Clear, clean . . . God’s own breath, it was. No garbage, no smell, just like a woman’s tears. A tidy little bottle, the label on it all straight and proper . . . a work of art!—You put yourself outside of a hundred grams or so, and right away it’s like there’s equality and brotherhood. That was the life!”

All his listeners sighed with sincere regret about all that departed and would not stop. The fields were lit by the morning sky and the mournful steppe vistas of nature asked entrance into the soul, but they were not admitted, and thus were squandered by the train’s motion, remaining behind unglanced upon.

People rode into that forgotten morning in complaints and dreams, and did not notice that one young man stood among them, asleep on his feet. He travelled without a sack or things; probably he knew another station far ahead or was simply hiding out. By force of habit the leader wanted to check the young man’s documents, so he asked where he was going. Dvanov wasn’t asleep, so he answered. One station.

“That’s your stop coming up now,” the leader announced. “You shouldn’t take a place for a short distance, for no reason . . . should have gone on foot.”

The station was lit by a kerosene lantern, although it was already day, and the station master’s assistant who was on duty stood beneath it. The passengers ran off with tea kettles, terrified of every rustle the locomotive made, not wanting to be left behind at this station forever. They could however have gotten straightened around without hurrying—the train stayed at that station for the day and also spent the night there.

Dvanov dozed the entire day near the railroad, but for the night went into a spacious hut near the station, where anyone who wanted it was given shelter for the night in return for a payment of some sort. The people lay on the floor of the wayhouse in tiers. The entire establishment glowed red from the open, well-stoked stove. A muzhik with a dead black beard sat by the stove and watched after the action of the fire. There was so much noise from the sighs and snoring that it was exactly as though people were working there, not sleeping. In the troubled life of those times, even sleep was work. There was another room beyond a wooden partition, smaller and darker. There was a Russian stove there, and just two naked men kept vigil on it, mending

their clothes. Dvanov rejoiced at the expanse on the stove, and crawled up there. The naked men moved a bit. However it was so hot on the stove that one could have baked potatoes.

"You'll not get to sleep up here, young fellow," one of the naked men said.

"This is just for drying up fleas."

All the same Dvanov lay down. It seemed to him that he was with someone else, that they saw at one and the same time both the lodging hut and Dvanov himself, lying on the stove. He moved over a bit to make room for his companion, embraced him, and slipped into oblivion.

The two naked men mended their clothes. One said, "It's late . . . look at the young fellow there, he's already asleep!" and then both of them crawled down onto the floor to seek out a place in the cracks between the sleeping bodies. The stove near the black-bearded muzhik died down. He got up, stretched, and said, "How tiresome is my sorrow!" Then he went outside and didn't return again.

It began to get colder in the hut. A cat came out and wandered among the horizontal people, swatting gaily at the fluffy beards.

Someone didn't understand the cat and said in his sleep, "Pass on girl, pass on . . . we didn't eat either. . . ."

Suddenly a swollen lad in the tatters of a young beard sat straight up in the middle of the floor.

"Mama, mama, give me a slice, you old crow! Give me a slice, I'm telling you . . . put the pot on him. . . ."

The cat arched its back in expectation of danger from the lad.

The old man next to him slept, but because of his age his mind worked through sleep. "Lay down, lay down, you crazy person . . ." the old man said. "What are you getting scared of the people for? Go to sleep and God bless!"

The lad slumped back unconscious.

The starry night was sucking day's last warmth from the earth and the predawn flight of air into the heights was beginning. Through the window could be seen the dewy transformed grass, like groves in lunar valleys. In the distance some sort of express train rang tirelessly—the heavy expanses were squeezing it and it ran howling along the lost valley of the cut.

The rare sound of someone's sleeping life rang out, and Dvanov came to. He remembered the case in which he had been carrying rolls for Sonya. In the case there was a mass of fat rolls. Now the case was not to be seen on the stove. Dvanov crawled carefully to the floor and went to look for the case down below. All his spiritual forces were transformed into anguish about the case. He trembled all over in fear of losing it. Dvanov got on all fours and began to frisk the sleeping people, assuming that they hid the case beneath themselves. The sleepers rolled over and only the bare floor lay beneath them. The case didn't turn up anywhere. Dvanov was horrified at his loss and burst into offended tears. He again stole among the sleeping, feeling their sacks

and even looking in the stove. He stepped on several people and scratched others in the cheek with his soles, or even dislodged the entire man. Seven men woke and sat up.

“Well, what are you looking for, you devil?” a handsome muzhik asked in a quiet rage. “What are you stirring up here, you unsleeping spore of the devil!”

“Belt him with your snow boots, Stepan, he’s closer to you!” proposed another man who had been sleeping in his hat on a brick.

“You wouldn’t have seen my suitcase, would you?” Dvanov turned to the threatening people. “It was locked. I brought it in yesterday and now it’s not here.”

A muzhik, purblind, but all the sharper for that, felt his own sack and said, “What a goose you are! Suitcase, the man says! I’ll bet you had it with you yesterday. You dead-hauled in here yesterday, chum, and I weren’t sitting all squinty-eyed then either! And now of a sudden the man wants a suitcase. . . .”

“Oh give it to him, Stepan, at least once. Your paw’s meatier than mine,” the man in the hat said. “Have some respect at least. He’s woke up every citizen in the place, the animal. Now you go sit outside and stay awake until tomorrow!”

Dvanov stood among them all, lost and waiting for help.

Someone’s thickening voice rang out from the Russian stove in the other room.

“Chuck this bum outside right now! Or else I’m going to get up and thump everybody around some. At least give a Soviet man some peace at the night time, huh?”

“Yeah, what are you talking with him for?” shouted a fellow with a bulging forehead who sat by the door. Then he jumped to his feet, grabbed Dvanov crossways like a fallen post, and dragged him outside.

“Freeze out here!” the fellow said and left into the warmth of the hut, slamming the door.

Dvanov went along the street. A formation of stars carried out their protective work above him. They slightly brightened the sky along the far side of the world, but a cool cleanliness reigned beneath.

When he got out of the settlement Dvanov wanted to run, but he fell. He had forgotten about the wound in his leg, but blood and a thick ooze wept continuously from it. His body’s strength and consciousness departed through the wound’s opening, and Dvanov wanted to doze. Understanding now his weakness, he refreshed the wound with some water from a puddle, turned the bandage on its back, and carefully went on. A new, better day approached before him. That day the light from the east resembled a startled flock of white birds who dashed along the heavens, gushing and boiling into the roiled heights.

The village cemetery lay to the right of Dvanov’s road, on an eroded

new life  
Proletarian Strength! No horses.

slumping barrow. The poor crosses stood faithfully, decrepit from the action of wind and water. They reminded the living who wandered past that the dead had lived in vain and wished to be resurrected. Dvanov raised his hand to the crosses so that they would convey his sympathy to the dead in their graves.

Nikita sat in the kitchen at the Voloshino school and ate the body of a chicken, while Kopenkin and the other military men slept on the floor. Sonya woke up before anyone else. She went up to the door and called Dvanov. Nikita informed her however that Dvanov hadn't even spent the night there and that he had probably gone on ahead into his affair of the new life, since he was a communist. Then Sonya went barefoot into Petr the watchman's quarters.

"How come you're lying there sleeping," she said, "when Sasha's gone!?"

Kopenkin opened only one eye at first. His second opened when he was already on his feet, with his cap on.

"Petrusha," he said, "boil up that water of yours for everybody and I'm setting off on a half-day's leave. . . . Why didn't you tell me in the night, comrade?" Kopenkin scolded Sonya. "He's a young man, a free thing what could get snuffed like a candle out in the fields. And he's got a wound in him. He's headed somewhere or other now, and the wind is lashing tears out of the eyes on his face. . . ."

Kopenkin went outside to his horse. The horse had the confirmation of a draft animal and was more suited to carry logs than a man. The horse was used to his master and the civil war, and he ate hurdles, thatched roofs, and was content with little. However, to get sufficiently full, the horse could eat an eighth of a young tree plantation, then wash it down with the contents of a not particularly large steppe pond. Kopenkin respected his horse and valued it third. Rosa Luxemburg, the Revolution, and then the horse.

"Greetings, Proletarian Strength!" Kopenkin hailed the horse, who snorted in its over-saturation with coarse food. "Let's ride to Rosa's grave!"

Kopenkin hoped and believed that all matters and roads of his life led inexorably to the grave of Rosa Luxemburg. This hope warmed his heart and evoked the necessity of daily revolutionary feats. Each morning Kopenkin ordered his horse to go to Rosa's grave, and the horse had become so accustomed to the word "Rosa" that it recognized it as "gee-up." After the sounds of "Rosa" the horse began to move its legs whether it was in a swamp or a thicket or a wasteland of snow drifts.

"Rosa, Rosa!" Kopenkin muttered from time to time as he rode, and the horse tensed its full body.

"Rosa!" Kopenkin sighed and grew envious of the clouds that flowed off in the direction of Germany. They would pass over Rosa's grave, over the earth which she had trampled in her clogs. For Kopenkin the directions of all roads and winds led to Germany, and even if they did not go that way,

nonetheless they would circle the earth and end up in Rosa's native land.

If the road was long and no enemy appeared, Koplenkin became even more deeply and sincerely disturbed.

A burning anxiety accumulated within him in ever greater concentration and there was no feat which could quench Koplenkin's lone body.

"Rosa!" Koplenkin shouted mournfully, frightening his horse, and then he cried countless large tears among the empty spaces, which later dried of their own accord.

Proletarian Strength usually tired not because of the road, but from the pull of his own weight. The horse had grown up in the meadows of the Vituga River valley, and sometimes he drooled savory saliva in remembering the sweet grasses of his home.

"Again you want to eat?" Koplenkin noticed from the saddle. "Next year I'll give you a month's leave in the weeds, but after that we're going to ride straight to the grave. . . ."

The horse felt gratitude and zealously crushed the grass in its path back into its earthly origins. Koplenkin didn't particularly direct the horse if the road unexpectedly parted in two. Proletarian Strength would independently develop a preference for one road over the other, and they always wound up where people required the armed hand of Koplenkin. Koplenkin himself acted without planned itineraries; rather he took action at random and according to the will of the horse. He considered the general life to be wiser than his own head.

The bandit Groshikov had been stalking Koplenkin for ages and couldn't ever meet up with him, precisely for the reason that Koplenkin himself didn't know where he was going, so Groshikov all the more so.

After riding about three miles from Voloshino Koplenkin came to a settlement of five houses. He bared his sword and knocked on all huts one after the other with the hilt.

Out of the houses galloped mad peasant women who had long ago prepared themselves to pass away and die.

"What is it, sonny? The Whites have left us and there's no Reds lurking hereabout."

"Come outside with your entire families, and right now!" Koplenkin commanded thickly.

At length seven women and two old men came out; they didn't bring out the little children and their husbands were stashed in the larders.

Koplenkin looked the people over, then ordered, "Disperse! Return to your homes and labor in peaceful toil!"

There was definitely no Dvanov in that village.

"Let's ride a little closer to Rosa, Proletarian Strength," Koplenkin again addressed his horse.

Proletarian Strength began to vanquish the sod further.

"Rosa," Koplenkin cheered up his soul and looked suspiciously at a

naked shrub, wondering if it mourned Rosa as it should. If it did not, Kopenkin steered his horse over towards it and slashed the shrub with his saber, thinking, "If you don't need Rosa, then you won't live for anything else either! There's nothing more necessary than Rosa!"

A poster with a representation of Rosa Luxemburg was sewn inside Kopenkin's cap. So beautifully she was sketched, in colors, on this poster that no woman could be compared with her. Kopenkin believed in the accuracy of the poster and was afraid to unstitch it, lest he be moved too deeply.

Towards evening Kopenkin rode through the empty places eyeing the low spots to see whether perhaps the exhausted Dvanov was sleeping there. There was however a quiet absence of people everywhere. Just before nightfall Kopenkin reached an extended village by the name of Maloye, where he began to poll the population door to door, seeking Dvanov among the village families. At the end of the village night fell and Kopenkin rode down into a ravine, where he stopped the stride of Proletarian Strength. Then the man and the horse both fell silent, at peace for the rest of the night.

In the morning Kopenkin gave Proletarian Strength time to eat its fill, and then he again set off on his horse, headed where he must. The road ran along sandy dunes, but Kopenkin didn't stop his horse for a long time.

Because of the difficulty of movement Proletarian Strength's sweat appeared as foam. This happened at midday, near the outskirts of a small village. Kopenkin rode into the village and announced a breather for the horse.

A woman in a plump overcoat and half shawl was crawling around in the burdocks.

"What are you?" Kopenkin stopped her.

"Me? I'm a midwife."

"People are actually getting born in there?"

The midwife was accustomed to being sociable and loved chatting with men.

"And why not? The muzhik's back from the war in droves and the women have got the passions. . . ."

"Listen up, woman . . . a young fellow, no hat, came galloping out this way today . . . his wife couldn't get her baby born and must be he was looking for you. So you go run to all the huts and ask if he's anywhere around here. Then come back and tell me. Hear?"

"A sort of skinny one? In a satinette shirt?" the midwife was recognizing him.

Kopenkin tried harder to remember, but just could not say. For him people had only two kinds of faces, the kind he liked and the kind that were alien. The kind he liked had blue eyes, while aliens most often had black or brown eyes. The eyes of officers and bandits. Kopenkin never looked farther than that.

"That's the one," Kopenkin agreed. "Satinette shirt, and he was wearing pants."

"I'll take you to him now . . . he's sitting over at Feklusha's . . . she's boiling him up some potatoes. . . ."

"Lead me to him, woman, and you'll get a proper proletarian thank you," Kopenkin said and stroked Proletarian Strength. The horse stood like a machine, huge, trembling, encased in knots of muscles. On horses like that people usually only turn under sod and pull up stumps.

The midwife went to Feklusha's.

Feklusha was washing out her widowly goods with her ripe and rosy bare arms.

The midwife crossed herself, then asked, "Where's your boarder at? Some fellow on a horse is asking for him."

"Asleep," Feklusha said. "He's so little and hardly alive at all . . . I'm not going to wake him up. . . ."

Dvanov was dangling his right arm off the stove, so that the depth and infrequent measure of his breath was visible.

The midwife returned to Kopenkin, and he went on foot to Feklusha's himself.

"Wake your guest up!" Kopenkin ordered, meaning one thing only.

Feklusha tugged at Dvanov's hand. He began to talk immediately in his drowsy fright, then showed his face.

"Let's go for a ride, comrade Dvanov!" Kopenkin said. "The school teacher gave orders to fetch you."

Dvanov woke up and remembered.

"No, I'm not going anywhere from here. You ride back."

"Your business," Kopenkin said. "As long as you're alive, that's excellent."

Kopenkin rode back until it was pitch black, but by a shorter road. When it was already night he noticed the mill and the illuminated school windows.

Petr the watchman and Mrachinsky were playing checkers in Sonya's room, while the school teacher herself sat at the kitchen table with her head in her hands and grieved.

"He doesn't want to come," Kopenkin reported. "He's at some hermit lady's lying on the stove."

"So let him lie," Sonya said, disavowing Dvanov. "He keeps thinking I'm just a girl, but I too feel a sadness of some sort."

Kopenkin went out to the horses. The members of his detachment had not yet returned from their wives, and Mrachinsky and Nikita were living with nothing to do, eating themselves full of the people's groceries.

"That way we'll eat up all the villages into the war," Kopenkin concluded to himself. "There won't be any sort of rear base left, and you can't get to Rosa Luxemburg that way!"

Mrachinsky and Nikita were fooling uselessly around the yard, showing Kopenkin their readiness for ardor. Mrachinsky stood on the old manure,

swords to plowshares  
civil war

trampling it down with his feet.

"You go in the house," Kopenkin said to them, thinking slowly. "And tomorrow I'm turning the both of you loose. Why should I drag crazy people around with me? What kind of enemies are you anyway? Free loaders, not enemies! Now you know that I exist, and that's enough."

At that overcast period of his life Dvanov sat in the snugness of the dwelling and watched his hostess hang linens on twine near the stove. Horse fat burned in an urn like the tongues of hell in provincial paintings. Village people walked along the street into the desolate places of the region. The civil war lay there in shards of national property, as dead horses, carts, bandits' linsey-woolsey coats, and pillows. The bandits had replaced saddles with pillows, for which reason there was among the bandit detachments a command "on your feathers."

As an answer to this the Red Army yelled from their speeding horses as they raced after the bandits, "Pillows back to the women!"

At night the village of Srednye Boltai went out into the gulches and washes to wander among the traces of past battles and search for domestic goods. Something or other fell to most. Orders of the War Committee about the return of salvaged soldiers' gear were posted for nothing. The tools of war were dismantled into their constituent parts and transformed into the mechanisms of peaceful labor. An iron pot added to a water-cooled machine gun yielded a still. Field kitchens were replastered to make village bath-houses. Certain parts of the three-inch field pieces went to the wool-beaters, and the locks of cannon were made into feed hoppers for the grinding stones in the windmills.

In one yard Dvanov saw a woman's shirt made out of an English flag. The shirt dried in the Russian wind, already ripped and bearing the traces of having been worn by a woman.

Feklusha Stepanovna, his hostess, finished her work.

"What are you thinking on so much, buddy?" she asked. "Hungry, or bored, maybe?"

"Nothing particular," Dvanov said. "It's quiet in your hut, and I'm resting."

"So rest then. There's no place you've got to get to, you're young yet . . . a bit of life ahead of you yet, there is. . . ."

Feklusha Stepanovna yawned, covering her mouth with a large working hand.

"Me now, I've lived my time. My muzhik got himself killed in the Tsar's war, there's nothing to live for, and when the sleep comes, I'll be glad of it."

Fekla Stepanovna got undressed in front of Dvanov, knowing that she was unneeded by all.

"Put out the light," said Fekla Stepanovna barefoot, "or there'll be nothing for us to get up by tomorrow."

Dvanov blew into the oil lamp and Fekla Stepanovna climbed up on

the stove.

"Now you climb up here too . . . times aren't like that now . . . you couldn't even look at my shame yourself!"

Dvanov knew that if this person had not been in the hut he would have immediately run to Sonya again, or else gone off to find socialism in the far places as quickly as possible. Fekla Stepanovna protected Dvanov by making him used to the simplicity of womanliness, exactly as though she were the sister of Dvanov's dead mother, whom he did not remember and could not love. When Fekla Stepanovna fell asleep it became difficult for Dvanov to be alone. They had hardly spoken the entire day but Dvanov had felt no loneliness, for all the same Fekla Stepanovna was thinking of him in some way or another and Dvanov sensed her continually as well, thus saving himself from his own oblivious concentration. Now he was absent from Fekla Stepanovna's consciousness and Dvanov felt the weight of his coming sleep, when he would forget everyone as well. His intellect would be pushed somewhere outside by the warmth of his body, where it would remain as an isolated and mournful observation.

The faith of old had called this weak and banished consciousness the guardian angel. Dvanov could still remember this meaning and felt sorry for the guardian angel which had to leave the stifling murk within the living man and go out into the cold.

Somewhere within his failing silence Dvanov missed Sonya and didn't know what he ought to do. He would have liked to take her in his arms and with her go on, free and fresh for other and better impressions. The light beyond the window ceased and the air of the hut pressed down without a cross breeze.

Outside people rustled against the ground as they returned from their labors at disarming the war. Occasionally they dragged heavy objects past, scarring the grass right down to the soil.

Quietly Dvanov crept up on the stove. Fekla Stepanovna scratched her armpits and turned over.

"Going to bed?" she asked in apathetic sleep. "Sleep then, sleep. . ."

Dvanov got increasingly restless from the hot bricks of the stove and was able to drop off only after the warmth had exhausted him, after he was lost in delirium. Little things like boxes, shards, felt boots, and jackets turned into huge objects of enormous size and poured down on top of Dvanov. He was obliged to let them enter into him; they fit snugly, pulling at his skin. Most of all Dvanov feared that his skin would burst. It wasn't animated, crushing objects that were terrifying, but rather that his skin might rip and that he would choke on the burning dry hairs of a felt boot stuck in the seams of his own skin.

Fekla Stepanovna put her arms on Dvanov's face. Dvanov was amazed by the smell of dry grasses. He remembered his farewell at the fence with the pitiful barefoot half-girl, and he squeezed Fekla Stepanovna's hand. As he

calmed down and found shelter from melancholy he held her arm higher up, and then leaned toward Fekla Stepanovna.

"What's the matter, honey? Restless?" she sensed. "Settle down and sleep."

Dvanov didn't answer. His heart began to thump as though it were hard, rejoicing at its own inner freedom. Dvanov's watchman of life sat in his place, neither rejoicing nor grieving, simply carrying out the essential services.

Dvanov stroked Fekla Stepanovna with experienced hands, as though he had already boned up in advance. Finally his hands froze in fright and surprise.

"What's wrong?" Fekla Stepanovna whispered in a near and noisy voice. "Everybody's got one the same."

"You're sisters," Dvanov said with the tenderness of a clear memory, with the necessity of doing good for Sonya through her sister. Dvanov himself felt neither joy nor total oblivion. The entire while he listened attentively to the precise higher wailings of his heart. Then however the heart gave up, slowed, knocked a bit, and slammed shut, but it was already empty. It had opened too wide and accidentally released its single bird. The watchman observer watched the bird as it flew away, and the watchman burst into tears. The watchman cries once in the life of a man, losing his equilibrium in sympathy but a single time.

The even paleness of night in the hut seemed murky to Dvanov, and his eyes grew clouded. Things stood small and in their proper places. Dvanov wanted nothing, and fell soundly asleep.

Dvanov did not get enough rest until the next morning. He woke up late, when Fekla Stepanovna was feeding the fire under the grill of the stove's burner, but then he fell asleep again. He felt an exhaustion so great that it seemed as though the previous evening had given him some debilitating wound.

Around midday Proletarian Strength stopped at the window. Kopenkin got down from her back a second time to find his friend.

Kopenkin knocked on the window with his scabbard.

"Lady, send your guest out here for me."

Fekla Stepanovna shook Dvanov's head.

"Wake up, little one, there's a fellow on horseback hollering for you out there."

Dvanov woke up a bit and saw a universal blue fog.

Kopenkin came into the hut in his cap and jacket.

"What's this, comrade Dvanov, you climb up there for life eternal or something? Here, the teacher sent you this . . . your body linens and goods. . ."

"I'm staying here forever," Dvanov said.

Kopenkin lowered his head, which had within it not a single thought with which to help himself.

"Then I'll go. Farewell, comrade Dvanov."

Dvanov caught a glimpse of Kopenkin through the upper half of the window as he rode off into the depths of the steppe, heading for the distance. Proletarian Strength carried the elderly warrior away towards the place where the living enemy of communism dwelt, and Kopenkin disappeared farther and farther from Dvanov, a wretched, distant, and happy man.

Dvanov jumped off the stove, remembering only when he was already on the street that he had to take care of his wounded leg, but he let it get by as it was for the time being.

"What did you run after me for?" Kopenkin asked, riding at a walk. "I'm going to die soon, I bet, and then you'll be left on the horse all alone."

Then he lifted Dvanov up from the ground and seated him on the rump of Proletarian Strength.

"Put your arms around my stomach. We'll ride together and exist."

Proletarian Strength walked on until evening, when Dvanov and Kopenkin found lodgings for the night at a forest watchman's hut on the border between the forest and steppe.

"There haven't been any of the various people here, have there?" Kopenkin asked the watchman.

Many people from the road had spent the night in his hut, so the watchman answered, "Now you couldn't say as how there's not a lot of people riding around looking for groceries, could you? And I'm going to remember them all? I'm a public man and I haven't got the stuffings what can remember every plug-ugly on the road."

"And how come it smells like burning out in your yard?" Kopenkin remembered the air.

Kopenkin and the watchman went outside.

"Can you smell it?" the watchman asked. "The grass is humming a bit, but there's no wind."

"None," Kopenkin listened closely.

"The fellows that go through here say that's the White bourgeois giving signals on the radio. Feel that? Another burning smell come by?"

"I don't smell it," Kopenkin sniffed.

"Your nose is all blocked up then. That's the air starting to burn from wireless signals."

"Wave your stick!" Kopenkin gave the command instantly. "Mix their noises all up, so they can't get anything out of it!"

Kopenkin drew his sword and began to slash at the enemy air until his experienced arm got a cramp in the shoulder joint.

"Enough!" Kopenkin withdrew his order. "Now it will be all garbled for them."

LUXEMBURG  
government  
water - DVANOV

Kopenkin grew contented after the victory. He considered the revolution to be the last remnants of Rosa Luxemburg's body and so he kept it even in the smallest things. The silent watchman gave Kopenkin and Dvanov each a hunk of good bread and sat down at a distance. Kopenkin paid no attention to the taste of the bread. He ate without zest, slept without fear of dreams, lived according to the most direct path, in no way yielding to his body.

"How come you're feeding us? Maybe we're dangerous people," Dvanov asked the watchman.

"You wouldn't have eaten then!" Kopenkin rebuked him. "Grain comes from the ground by itself. All the muzhik does is tickle it a bit with the plow, like a woman does to a cow's udder. That's incomplete labor, right, host?"

"Must be," the man who had fed them agreed. "It's your government, you see clearer."

"You're an idiot, you cousin to a kulak," Kopenkin grew angry in a flash.

"Our government isn't fear, it's the people's thoughtfulness!"

The watchman agreed that there was thoughtfulness now. Before sleep Dvanov and Kopenkin talked about the next day.

"What do you think," Dvanov asked, "will it be long before we get the villages resettled in a Soviet way?"

"What long! We'll do it . . . zap! We'll just say that otherwise the bottomland will go to the Ukes . . . or else we'll flex our arms and introduce forced hauling duties for moving the buildings. Once it's been declared that land is socialism, then that's how it's going to be!"

"First we have to bring water out into the steppe," Dvanov mused. "Around here that's all dry, our watershed is an outcropping of the deserts beyond the Caspian. . . ."

"So we'll pipe it out there," comrade Kopenkin reassured him quickly. "We'll rig up fountains and then we can soak the ground in the dry years and the women will take up geese, and then there will be stuff and feathers for all! A blossoming business!"

At this point Dvanov was already oblivious. Kopenkin lay a grassy mass under his wounded leg, and then he grew still himself until the morning.

In the morning they left the house on the forest's edge and set a course into the far reaches of the steppe.

A man came toward them along the rutted, heavily travelled road. From time to time he lay down and rolled along lying down, after which he got to his feet and walked again.

"What are you doing, jail bait?" Kopenkin stopped the traveller when little space remained between them.

"Kinsman, I'm rolling my lunch bucket along," the man explained. "My feet get all tired out, so I give 'em some rest and keep myself moving along just the same."

Kopenkin was doubtful.

"Better you walk normal and nice."

"I'm walking from Batumi, and two years I haven't seen my family. Soon's I start to rest, the darkness comes down on me . . . rolling's slow, but all the same it's getting me closer to home. . . ."

"What's that village over there?" Kopenkin asked.

"Over there?" the wanderer turned his deadened face. He did not know that in his lifetime he had walked the distance to the moon and back. "That ought to be Khansky Dvoriki, seems like . . . but who the hell knows . . . there's villages all over the steppe. . . ."

Kopenkin tried to penetrate deeper into this man.

"Must love your wife a good bit, seems like . . . ."

The man glanced up at the men on horseback with eyes dulled by the distant road.

"I respect her, of course. When she was in labor I even crawled up on the roof in sorrow . . . ."

It smelled of food in Khansky Dvoriki, but that was because they were making homebrew out of the grain. Some sort of dissolute woman was scampering down the street in connection with this hidden industry. She was galloping into each hut, then immediately dashing out again.

"The front's back," she warned the muzhiks as she viciously watched the armed might of Kopenkin and Dvanov.

The peasants poured water on their fires and fumes crawled out of the huts.

The brewing mash was hurriedly carried out to the hog troughs, where the pigs ate it and then chased each other about the village in delirium.

"Where's the village soviet? You're an honest looking fellow. . . ." Kopenkin turned to a lame citizen.

The lame citizen walked on with a slow, important gait, as though he were invested with some unknown worth.

"Honest you say? You take my leg away and then you call me honest? There's no soviet here, and I'm the plenipotentate of the country Revolutionary Committee, the avenging power of the poor. Don't look at my lameness . . . I'm the smartest one in town, and I can do everything!"

"Listen up, comrade plenipotentate," Kopenkin said, a threat in his voice. "This here is the main representative of the provincial Executive Committee come to see you." Dvanov got off the horse and offered the plenipotentate his hand. "He's working the revolution in the province in a martial rule of revolutionary conscience and compulsory haulage. What have you got here?"

The plenipotentate was not frightened of anything.

"There's lots of brains here, but no bread."

Dvanov tripped him up. "That why there's home brew all over the ground that we took from the landowners?"

Dostoevsky  
comes / deeds

The plenipotentiary was seriously offended.

"Comrade, you better not talk nonsense! I signed an official order just yesterday . . . today is a village day of prayer in honor of being spared tsarism. My own hand has given wantonness to the people for a day. Today you can do whatever you want . . . I walk around without opposition, and the revolution gets to take a rest . . . you see?"

"Who was it gave you this wantonness?" Kopenkin scowled from his horse.

"Hell, I'm just the same as Lenin here!" the lame man explained the obvious. "Today the kulaks are standing treats for the poor . . . according to my figures, and I'm checking up on the fulfillment of all this."

"Have you checked it?" Dvanov asked.

"Door to door and at random, and everything's going well. The proof is higher than before the war, and the ones without horses are satisfied."

"So why is the lady running around scared to death then?" Kopenkin saw the suspicious part.

This bothered the lame man himself.

"There's no soviet consciousness yet. Everybody's afraid to meet their comrade guests . . . they figure it's better to pour the stuff into the burdocks and pretend to have governmental property. Me, I know all their funerals, and I see the whole sense of their lives. . . ."

The lame man was called Fyodor Dostoevsky. He had reregistered himself that way in a special document, where it was stated that the plenipotentiary of the county Revolutionary Committee Ignaty Moshonkov had considered an application from citizen Ignaty Moshonkov to change his name in honor of the memory of the famous writer Fyodor Dostoevsky and had decided that the name change would become effective the next day and thenceforward and had further decided to propose to all citizens that they examine their own names to determine whether they were satisfactory, keeping in mind however the necessity of some resemblance to the new name. Fyodor Dostoevsky had thought up this campaign as a way to encourage the self-perfection of the citizenry. A man called Liebknecht had better live like Liebknecht or else the glorious name would be repossessed. Accordingly there came the renaming of two citizens in the register. Stepan Checher became Christopher Columbus and Petr Grudin became Franz Merring, but usually he was just called Mare. Fyodor Dostoevsky reported these names under protest as conditional, pending the result of the request for clarification sent to the county revolutionary committee to determine whether Columbus and Merring were people worthy of their names being taken as examples of the life to come or if they were silent for the revolution. The county Revolutionary Committee had yet to send an answer, so Stepan Checher and Petr Grudin lived almost without names.

"Since you've renamed yourselves," Dostoevsky used to say to them, "do something outstanding."

"We'll do it," they answered, "but you confirm it and give us a letter to that effect."

"You can be named that orally, but for the time being I'm going to list you the old way on the documents."

"We should be lucky even to get it orally," the supplicants said.

Kopenkin and Dvanov chanced upon Dostoevsky in the days when he was considering new refinements. Dostoevsky thought about comradesly marriage, about the Soviet sense of life, about the organization of daily happiness in labor, about the nature of the soul (a complaining heart or a brain in the head?), and about much more. Dostoevsky tormented himself and gave his family no peace at nights.

Dostoevsky's home had a library of books, but he already knew them by heart and knew that they did not comfort him, so Dostoevsky thought for himself.

After eating kasha in Dostoevsky's hut Dvanov and Kopenkin took up with him the urgent discussion of the necessity of building socialism the following summer. Dvanov said that this haste had been ordered by Lenin himself.

"Soviet Russia," Dvanov tried to convince Dostoevsky, "is like a young birch tree that the goat of capitalism is rushing towards."

He even threw in the newspaper slogan:

*Make Our Little Birch Grow  
Or We'll Get Chomped By Europe's Goat!*

Dostoevsky paled from concerted imagining of the inevitable danger of capitalism. He imagined that white goats would really forage on the young bark of Russia and the entire revolution would be stripped bare and then freeze to death.

"So who is this all for then, comrades?" Dostoevsky yelled in excitement. "Let's get started right now, and then maybe there'll be time before the New Year to make socialism! Come summer the white goats will come galloping in, but by then the bark will be old and hard on the Soviet birch!"

Dostoevsky thought of socialism as a society of good people. He knew nothing of things and buildings. Dvanov understood him immediately.

"No, comrade Dostoevsky. Socialism is like the sun and will ascend higher in the summer. It must be built on the fat lands of the high steppe. How many families do you have here in the village?"

"A lot . . . three hundred forty houses and another fifteen families what live out aways," Dostoevsky told him.

"Now that's good. You ought to break that up into five or six collectives," Dvanov suggested. "Announce work duty immediately. Have them start digging wells out in the fallow and then in the spring start making them haul the buildings out. You have well diggers here?"

1 had kind of con. no? "  
planetary transformation - water cycle

Dostoevsky was taking Dvanov's words into himself slowly and transferring them into a visible situation. He lacked the gift of inventing truth and could understand it only when he had turned thoughts into the events of his own region, but this took place within him slowly. He had within his mind to picture the empty steppe in some familiar place, move each household of his village there by name, and then look at how it had turned out.

"Well diggers we've got," Dostoevsky said. "There's Franz Merring, for example, who can sense water with his feet. He wanders around the washes a bit, estimates where the horizons are, and then says, 'Fellows, take her down twenty feet right here.' Then the water comes gushing out in droves. That means his mother treated his father for him there."

Dvanov helped Dostoevsky imagine the socialism of small collective settlements with common adjoining allotments. Dostoevsky had already taken in everything, but there was lacking some sort of general joy above the threshing floors, which would have made the imagined future love and warmth, which would have forced conscience and impatience at the temporary absence of real life socialism to burst into his body.

Kopenkin listened some while, and then grew offended.

"And what the hell kind of nit are you? They told you at the provincial executive committee to finish socialism before summer! Unsheathe the sword of communism, since we have iron discipline. What kind of Lenin are you here?! You're a Soviet night watchman and that means you're just supporting chaos, damned devil!"

Dvanov drew Dostoevsky farther on. "Because of the cultivated grains the earth will be shinier and more visible from other planets . . . and then too the water cycle will get stronger and that will make the sky bluer and more transparent!"

Dostoevsky rejoiced, for he had finally glimpsed socialism, which he saw as a blue and somewhat humid sky fed by the exhalations of fat grasses. Collectively the winds blew faint ruffles across rich lakes of economic significance and life was so joyous that all was still. There remained only the establishment of a Soviet meaning in life, for which Dostoevsky had been unanimously elected, and now he sits for forty days without sleep, in the self-oblivion of meditation, and now pure and beautiful maidens bring him tasty food, borscht and pork chops, but they have to take it away again, untouched, for Dostoevsky could not emerge from his responsibilities.

The maidens fall in love with Dostoevsky, but they are without exception all Party members and because of discipline cannot confess their love, so they silently suffer as per their consciousness.

Dostoevsky scratched the table with a fingernail as though he were dividing the epoch in two.

"I will achieve socialism! Before the rye is ripe, socialism will be done! I kept wondering why I was depressed and now I know I was depressed about not having socialism!"

"That's right," Kopenkin affirmed. "Everybody has the desire to love Rosa."

Dostoevsky turned his attention to Rosa, but he did not understand completely. He guessed that Rosa was probably just an abbreviated name for the revolution, or else a slogan he didn't know.

"Absolutely correct, comrade!" Dostoevsky said with satisfaction, for the basic happiness was already discovered. "But just the same look how skinny I'm getting from managing the revolution in my district."

"That's understandable, since you're the cork here for all current events," Kopenkin said in support of Dostoevsky's worth.

That night however Fyodor Mikhailovich could not get to sleep peacefully. He kept tossing about and muttering slowly the minute details of his reflections.

"Who are you?" Kopenkin heard Dostoevsky's noise, for he had not yet gone to sleep. "Your jawbone just bounces around because you're bored? Better you should think about the victims of the civil war and then you'll get sad."

Dostoevsky woke the sleeping men in the night. Still half asleep, Kopenkin grabbed his sword to meet any sudden enemy attack.

"I touched you on behalf of Soviet power!" Dostoevsky explained.

"Then why didn't you wake me earlier?" Kopenkin asked sternly.

"We don't have any count of the livestock," Dostoevsky immediately blurted out. In the first half of the night he had had time to think out the matter of socialism into life. "What sort of citizen are you going to have that will go out into the rich steppe without stock? So then what's the point of dragging buildings around like steamer trunks? . . . the upsets have me all worn out. . . ."

Kopenkin scratched his sharp thin Adam's apple a bit, as though trying to clean his own throat.

"Sasha," he said to Dvanov. "Don't sleep for nothing. Tell this social element that he doesn't know anything about Soviet laws."

Then Kopenkin looked darkly at Dostoevsky. "You're a White collaborator, not a regional Lenin! What are you thinking? You chase out all the livestock that's left alive tomorrow, if anybody has any left, and divide it up person by person according to the revolutionary feeling. Do it right off, wham! . . . and that's that."

Kopenkin fell asleep again immediately. He neither understood nor entertained spiritual doubts, holding them to be a betrayal of the revolution. Rosa Luxemburg had thought up everything in advance, for all, and there remained now only feats of the armed hand by which to cut down seen and unseen enemies.

The next morning Dostoevsky went around Khansky Dvoriki house to house, announcing a joint order of the regional revolutionary committee concerning the revolutionary division of livestock, without exception.

The livestock were led out onto the square in front of the church accompanied by the wailing of all the owners. However, even the poor suffered at the sight of the moaning masters and whimpering old women, and several of the non-owning peasants also wept, although their share awaited them.

The women kissed the cows while the men held their horses especially tenderly and loosely, trying to cheer them up, as though they were sons being sent off to war, while they themselves tried to decide whether it was for them to cry, or if they should let it pass.

One peasant, long and thin in height but with a tiny bare face and a girl's voice, led out his pacer not only without reproach, but even with comforting words for all his sorrowing fellow villagers.

"Uncle Mitry, what's your matter?" he said to a sad old man in his high voice. "Oh, may the good Lord maim it altogether. You getting ready or something to leave this life completely with nothing left over? How it is you aren't ashamed I just don't know . . . let them take the horse, and the hell with them! We'll breed others. Take your miseries back. . . ."

Dostoevsky knew this peasant, who was an old deserter. When he was young he had just arrived from somewhere without papers or documents and he couldn't be called up for another war. He had no official year of birth or name, so he had no official existence at all. So as to designate him somehow, his neighbors called the deserter Incomplete for the sake of everyday convenience, and he wasn't entered at all in the lists of the former village soviet. There had been one village secretary who beneath all the other family names had written "Others-1: Sex-Doubtful," but the next secretary hadn't understood the notation and had added an extra head to the category of large horned cattle, crossing out the category of "Others" completely. And thus Incomplete lived as the spillage of society, like flax that falls from the cart to the ground.

Not long before however Dostoevsky had entered him into the list of citizens in ink, under the rubric of "Evasive citizen of middling means who fails to enjoy a given family name for his own use." This had greatly strengthened the existence of Incomplete, so it was rather as though Dostoevsky had given birth to him for the use of the Soviets.

Life in the steppes followed in the tracks of livestock back into antiquity, and the people retained a terror of starving to death without livestock, so that the people wept more out of prejudice than from fear of loss.

Dvanov and Kopenkin came up as Dostoevsky began to distribute the livestock among the poor.

Kopenkin reminded him, "Don't make a mistake . . . is your revolutionary feeling full up right now?"

Proud with power, Dostoevsky indicated with his hand that it went from his belly to his neck. He had thought up a clear simple method of division. The poorest of all were to receive the best cows and horses. Since, however, there were few head of livestock, by their turn the middling farmers

redistribution - back again!

got nothing, except for one or two that got a sheep apiece.

As the business was drawing to a successful close, the same Incomplete stepped forward and addressed the leader in a hoarse voice.

"Fyodor Mikhailich, comrade Dostoevsky, this business of ours is of course a little awkward, but don't you go getting upset by what I'm going to say to you. Just don't get upset now."

"Speak, citizen Incomplete, speak honestly and without fear," Dostoevsky gave him permission openly and as a lesson for all.

Incomplete turned to the grieving people. Even the poor grieved, all timorous owners of gift horses, which many of them were secretly returning to their owners.

"Since it's like this, then listen to me, the whole bunch of you. I in my fool's way ask what for example is Petka Ryzhov going to do with my pacer? His entire store of fodder is the straw on his roof, his garden doesn't have so much as a bean pole to spare, and all he's got on his belly is a half potato that he's been digesting for three days. And in the second place . . . now don't go getting upset, Fyodor Mikhailovich, revolution is your business and we know what that is . . . and in the second place, what will happen later with the foals? We're the poor now . . . so that means they're going to start dropping foals for us? Just ask them will you, Fyodor Mikhailovich, if the poor horse people are going to want to fatten up foals and calves from us." 1  
↓

The people stood turned to stone by such common sense.

Incomplete weighed the silence, then continued.

"In my opinion, about five years from now there won't be anything much taller than a chicken at anybody's house . . . who's going to want to breed cows for his neighbor? And the livestock we have today, it won't last . . . it's going to up and die. My pacer what Petka there has, he'll be the first to turn his toes up . . . that man there hasn't seen a horse since he was born, and on top of that he's got nothing to feed him but fence posts! So why don't you comfort me, Fyodor Mikhailovich . . . but just don't go getting all upset on account of me."

Dostoevsky comforted him immediately. "Correct, Incomplete . . . the division had no point."

Kopenkin let fly unequivocally from among the circle of people.

"How so no point? You're what, taking the bandits' side now? If that's the way it is, I'll fix you once and for all right now! Citizens!" Kopenkin spoke to everyone passionately and trembling, "What that incomplete kulak just said, nothing of that's going to happen. Even before a single animal has a chance to foal or calf, things are going to be good! Following the example of the revocation of the pacer from Ryzhkov, I propose transferring it now to the plenipotente of the provincial executive committee, comrade Dvanov. And now disperse comrade poor folks and do battle with chaos and ruin!"

The poor set off uncertainly with their cows and horses. They had forgotten how to lead them.

Incomplete looked at Kopenkin in stupefaction. He was no longer tormented by the loss of the pacer as much as by curiosity.

"And might I have a word of inquiry, comrade from the province?" Incomplete finally dared to ask in his child's voice.

"Since the power's not been given to you, then ask to your heart's content!" Kopenkin took pity on him.

Incomplete asked politely and attentively, "What is socialism, and what is going to happen here, and where is the source of the goods that are going to be added to it?"

Kopenkin explained effortlessly.

"If you were poor, then you'd know yourself, but since you're a kulak, you'll never understand a thing."

Dvanov and Kopenkin wanted to leave in the evening, but Dostoevsky asked them to stay until morning so he could find out for sure where to start and how to finish socialism in the steppe.

Kopenkin was bored by the long halt and decided to ride into the night.

"We're already told you everything," he lectured Dostoevsky. "The livestock is done. The classes are on their feet. Now just announce the hauling duty, dig wells and ponds in the steppe, and start moving the buildings in the spring. You look sharp and see that socialism is taller than the grass out here come summer. I'll be checking up on you!"

"But it will turn out that only the poor will be working . . . after all, they're the ones with the horses, and the prosperous ones will be living shiftlessly," Dostoevsky had again grown doubtful.

"So?" Kopenkin wasn't surprised. "Socialism has to spring from the clean hands of the poor and the kulaks will die in the struggle."

"That's true," Dostoevsky affirmed.

Dvanov and Kopenkin left late that night after once again warning Dostoevsky about the schedule for building socialism.

Incomplete's pacer walked beside Proletarian Strength. Both riders felt easier when they sensed the road and distance drawing them outwards from the crush of population. The power of melancholy built up within their hearts from a sedentarization of even one day, and so both Dvanov and Kopenkin feared the ceilings of huts, yearning rather for the road which blotted up the superfluous blood in their hearts.

The wide country road came directly toward the two riders, who brought their horses to a canter.

High columns of night clouds half lit by the sun stood above them, and the air which had been ravaged by the wind of the day no longer moved. Dvanov grew weak from the freshness and silence of the wilting expanse, and he began to drowse on his pacer.

"If we come on a house, let's put over there until first light," Dvanov said.

Kopenkin pointed to a nearby strip of woods which lay on the wide

earth like black silence and comfort.

"There will be a sentry over there."

Just as soon as they rode into the grove of sad concentrated trees, the travellers heard the melancholy voices of the watchdogs, who in the darkness guarded the isolated shelter of man.

The forest watchman guarded his forest out of love for science, and at this hour he was sitting over an ancient book. He was seeking a likeness to Soviet times in the past, so as to discover the further torturous fate of the revolution and to find in it some salvation for his family.

His father, also a warden, had left him a library of cheap books, all by the unread, forgotten, and very least of authors. He used to tell his son that the decisive truths of life exist secretly in abandoned books.

The forest watchman's father used to compare bad books to stillborn children who had perished in their mother's womb from the lack of correspondence between their own excessively-tender bodies and the coarseness of the world, which penetrated even a mother's womb.

"If only ten of those children could stay whole they would make man a triumphant and exalted being," the father bequeathed to his son. "But instead the mind gives birth to all that is dull and the heart to that which is least feeling, to suffer in the sharp air of nature and the battle for raw food."

Now the warden was reading a work by Nikolai Arszakov, printed in 1868. The work was called *Second-Rate People*, and the warden rummaged through the boredom of dry words for that which he needed. The warden held that there are no senseless or boring books if a reader will only seek the meaning of life in them attentively. Boring books come from boring readers, for it is the reader's searching melancholy which works in books, and not the author's skill.

"Where do you come from?" the warden considered the Bolsheviks. "Certainly you were already somewhere else, for nothing comes into being without being similar to something else, and nothing exists without plundering the pre-existing."

His two little children and his chubby wife slept peacefully and instinctually. As he glanced at them, the warden's thoughts grew heated, called out to guard these three priceless beings. He wanted to unfold the future so as to determine its course in good time and thus not allow his closest relatives to perish.

Arszakov wrote that only second-rate people can provide slow improvement, while a mind that is too large is totally worthless, like grain on rich soil that bends over before ripening and thus cannot be reaped. The goading which life receives from superior people worries it, so that life loses that which it had before.

"People," Arszakov taught, "began very early to act, having understood little. It follows therefore that insofar as one may, actions should be held in abeyance and freedom given to the contemplative half of the soul."

Contemplation is self-edification based upon the actions of others. Thus people should study as long as possible the condition of nature and begin their actions late, but without mistake, firmly, and with the sword of mature experience clasped solidly in the right hand. It is to be remembered that all sins of community life grow from the reason of young men interfering with that life. It is sufficient rather simply to leave history in peace for fifty years, and the nourishing state of well being will be achieved without effort."

The dogs began howling in alarmed voices, so the warden took down his carbine and stepped out to meet his late evening guests.

The warden led the horses with Dvanov and Kopenkin still on them through the crowds of faithful dogs and fast-maturing pups.

Half an hour later the three stood around the lamp in the log cabin, which was warm and fragrant with life. The warden set out milk and bread for his guests.

He was guarded, prepared in advance for any evil from people of the night. However Dvanov's common face and the way his eyes often came to rest soon calmed the warden.

After eating Kopenkin took the open book and with effort read what Arsakov had written.

"What do you think?" Kopenkin handed the book to Dvanov.

Dvanov read.

"It's a capitalist theory . . . live, but don't make a move."

"I think so too," Kopenkin said, pushing the depraved book aside. "Hey you, what are we supposed to do with this forest when socialism comes?" Kopenkin sighed in bitter meditation.

"Comrade, please tell me what this forest yields an acre," Dvanov said to the warden.

"Oh, it depends. . ." the warden answered with difficulty. "Depends on what kind of tree, how old it is, what condition it's in . . . there's a lot of conditions here."

"All right, but as an average?"

"On the average . . . ten, fifteen rubles, you'd have to say. . . ."

"That's all? Rye would give more, wouldn't it?"

The warden began to grow alarmed, and strove to make no mistake.

"The rye would be a bit more . . . twenty, thirty rubles a muzhik gets, clear profit, on an acre. Not less, anyway, I think. . . ."

The rage of a man deceived appeared upon Kopenkin's face.

"Then this forest has to be cut down immediately and the land put under a plow! These trees are just taking up space that ought to go to winter wheat! . . ."

The warden fell silent and began watching the excited Kopenkin with attentive eyes. Dvanov was figuring out the losses from forestry with a pencil on the pages of Arsakov's book. He asked the warden how many acres there were in the forest, and then he totalled it all up.

cutting down the forest  
KOPENKIN

"The muzhiks lose about ten thousand a year on this forest," Dvanov announced calmly. "Looks like rye would be a better deal."

"Of course it's a better deal," Kopenkin shouted. "The ranger himself told you that! This whole grove here has got to be chopped down to the bare ground and rye put in. Write out an order, comrade Dvanov!"

Dvanov remembered that he had not communicated with Shumilin in ages. However Shumilin could not condemn him for direct actions which were in accord with obvious revolutionary benefit.

The warden found the courage to object a little.

"I wanted to tell you that unauthorized cutting has spread so much in the recent past as it is that it's better not to cut hard plants like that anymore."

"Well, so much the better," Kopenkin replied less hostilely. "We march in the people's tracks, not before them. That means the people themselves sense that rye is more useful than trees. Sashsa, write out an order for cutting down the forest."

Dvanov wrote out a long order and appeal to all poor peasants of Upper Motinsky region, proposing in the name of the provincial executive committee that upon presentation of certification of membership in the class of the poor, the forest of the Bittermanovsky tract be cut as quickly as possible. In this way, the order continued, two paths to socialism will be extended, for on the one hand the poor will receive lumber for the construction of new Soviet towns in the high steppe, while on the other hand land will be freed for the sowing of rye and other crops more profitable than slow-growing trees.

Kopenkin read the order through.

"Excellent!" he gave his opinion. "Now give it here and I'll sign it, so it will be more threatening . . . there's a lot of folks that remember me here . . . and after all, I'm an armed man."

Then he signed his full name and title: "Commander of the Rosa Luxemburg Bolshevik Field Detachment of the Upper Motinsky Region, Stepan Efimovich Kopenkin."

"Tomorrow you carry this round the nearby villages and the others will find out by themselves," Kopenkin assigned the order to the warden.

"And what am I supposed to do after the forest?" the dismissed warden asked.

Kopenkin gave his orders. "You too! Plow the land and feed yourself! You probably get so much salary a year that you ate up one entire farm by yourself! Now go live like the masses instead!"

It was already late. A deep revolutionary night lay over the doomed forest. Until the revolution Kopenkin had not sensed anything attentively; forests, people, and the wind-chased spaces failed to move him and he did not interfere with them. Now however a change had come. Now Kopenkin listened to the even moan of the winter night and hoped that it would pass

well over Soviet lands.

Not only love for the fallen Rosa lived within Kopenkin's heart; that snuggled in its own warm nest, but the nest was woven of green boughs of concern for Soviet citizens, difficult pity for all things grown dilapidated in poverty, and savage victories over the ubiquitous and oft-encountered enemies of the poor.

Night was crooning its last few hours above the massive of Bitterman-sky Forest, and Dvanov and Kopenkin slept on the floor, their horse-wearied legs stretched out in dreams.

Dvanov dreamed that he was a little boy, pressing his mother's breast in childish joy, just as he had seen others do, but he was afraid and unable to raise his eyes to her face. He understood his fear unclearly, alarmed that he might see another's face on his mother's neck. A face as beloved, but still not that of his own flesh.

Kopenkin dreamed of nothing, because for him everything had come to pass while he was awake.

In that hour, perhaps, happiness itself sought those who would be happy, but the happy were resting after their social worries of the day and did not remember their kinship with happiness.

\* \* \* \* \*

The next day Dvanov and Kopenkin set off with the rising sun into the distance, arriving after noon at a session of the directorate of the commune "Friendship of the Poor Man," which was living in the southern part of Novoselkovsky District. The commune occupied the former Karyakin estate, and was now considering the question of adapting the existing structures to the needs of the seven families who were members of the commune. Right at the end of the session the directorate accepted Kopenkin's proposal that the commune be left only the most necessary, a house, a barn, and a threshing shed, while the remaining two outbuildings be given to the neighboring villages for scrap, so that the commune would not oppress the surrounding peasants with its excess property.

The commune's scribe then began to write orders for supper, writing out the slogan "Proletarians of All Lands, Unite!" by hand on each order.

All of the adult members of the commune, who were seven men, five women, and four girls, had defined duties in the commune.

A duty list of names hung on the wall. In accordance with the list and established routine all of the people were busy the entire day rendering services to themselves, but the titles of the duties had been changed with the goal of somehow conveying greater respect for labor. There was a directress of communal nourishment, a superintendent of non-mechanical locomotion, an iron master, who was also the overseer of inanimate inventory and

constructive property (which must have been the blacksmith, carpenter, and so on, contained within one personality), a director of communal security and inviolability, a director of communist propaganda in unorganized villages, a communal nourisher of the generations, and other service capacities.

Kopenkin read the paper for a long while, considering something, and then asked the president who had signed the orders for supper, "All right, but who does the plowing for you?"

The president answered without ceasing to sign papers.

"We didn't do any plowing this year."

"Why so?"

"We couldn't disrupt the internal order . . . we would have had to take everybody off their posts, and what kind of commune would we have left then, huh? Even as it was we just barely kept her running smooth, and as for later, well, there's still grain on the estate. . . ."

"Well, that's all right then, if there was grain," Kopenkin said, his doubt abandoning him.

"Oh, there was all right," the president said, "and we took account of it immediately, for the satiation of the commune."

"Correctly done, comrade."

"Without a doubt. We have everything written down, and each mouth has its reservation. We called in a medic so as to set the portion of food once and for all, and without prejudices. Here you'll find there's been deep thinking done about every single thing. A commune is a mighty business! Why, it's a complication of life!"

Kopenkin agreed here as well. He believed that people would set things right in a just way by themselves if they are left in peace. His job was to keep clear the road into socialism, for which end he brought to bear his armed hand and weighty instruction. Only one part of what the president said, the complication of life, bothered Kopenkin. He even asked Dvanov's advice about whether it might not be better to liquidate the cooperative "Friendship of the Poor" as quickly as possible, since when life became complicated it would be impossible to make out who was oppressing whom. Dvanov however advised against it.

"Let them be," he said. "They are complicating things out of sheer joy, the pleasure of mental labor. Earlier they worked with nothing but their bare hands, without any sense in their heads, so let them rejoice in their own reason now."

"Well, all right," Kopenkin said, understanding. "But then they ought to do a better job of complicating. We'll have to give them full aid. You think up something unclear for them."

Dvanov and Kopenkin stayed in the commune for a day so that their horses could have time to fatten up for the long road ahead.

The normal general assembly of the commune began at daybreak of the fresh, sunny day. Assemblies were set for every other day so that

contemporary events could be followed up in good time. The day's agenda contained two points, "the current moment" and "current events." Kopenkin asked for a word before the assembly, which he was joyfully given, and a resolution was even introduced that the speaker be given unlimited time.

"Speak without limit, it's a long time until evening," the president said to Kopenkin. However, Kopenkin could not speak fluently for more than two minutes at a time, because extraneous thoughts continually popped into his head, each mutilating the other to the point of incoherence, so that Kopenkin would stop his own point to listen with interest to the clamor of his own voice.

Now Kopenkin began with the approach that the goal of "Friendship of the Poor" was to complicate life, with the further goals of creating involutions of their business and repulsing hidden kulaks by causing all possible difficulties. When everything had become difficult, cramped, and incomprehensible, Kopenkin explained, then the honest mind would see the work come out, while the other element would not be able to crawl through the tight spots of the difficulties. "And for that reason I move that general assemblies be called not just every other day, but every day, or even twice a day . . . in the first place for the complication of the common life, and second so that current events won't follow the current off into someplace unnoticed, with no result. After all, there's no telling what can happen in a day, and you'll just stay here in oblivion like in a weed patch."

Kopenkin drew to a halt in the dry bed of his own speech as though he had hit a sandbank and put his hand on the hilt of his sword, his own words immediately forgotten. Everyone looked at him with respect and fear.

"The chair moves this be passed unanimously," the president concluded in an experienced voice.

"Excellent," said a man who stood in front of all the members of the commune. This was the superintendent of non-mechanical locomotion, he believed the wisdom of people he did not know. Everyone raised their hands at once, straight up, thus showing their good habits.

"Now this just won't do!" Kopenkin announced loudly.

"What's wrong?" the president grew alarmed.

Kopenkin waved an irritated hand at the meeting.

"At least have one of the girls always vote against . . ."

"But why, comrade Kopenkin?"

"What's the matter, are you all queer in the head? For *complication*, that's why. . ."

"Got it! Right you are!" the president rejoiced, when moved that the assembly designate directress of rye and fowl Malanya Otvershкова as the permanent nay-sayer.

Then Dvanov reported on the current moment. He brought to the attention of the assembly the deadly danger which threatened communes settled in the desolate inimical steppe, the danger of wandering bandit hordes.

complication  
bandits

"These people," Dvanov said of the bandits, "want to extinguish the dawn, but dawn isn't a candle, it's a great sky where on distant stars is concealed the noble and mighty future of the heirs of mankind. For doubtless after the conquest of the earthly globe shall come the fatal hour of all the universe, the moment of man's Last Judgment over the universe. . . ."

"Sure talks nice," said the same superintendent of non-mechanical locomotion.

"You think on it with your mouth shut," the president advised him quietly.

"Your commune," continued Dvanov, "must outsmart the bandits so that they don't understand what you've got here. You must set up your affairs here so cleverly and in such a complicated way that there is absolutely no communistic obviousness, when in actual fact it will be right in front of your face. Let's say a bandit comes riding into the commune's estate with his sword and begins looking around for what to take and who to do in. But then the secretary comes straight out to him with a coupon book and says, 'Citizen, if you need anything, then come get a coupon and take it from the storehouse yourself. If you're poor, then take your rations for free, and if you're something else again, then work it off by laboring for us one day as . . . let's say, our wolf hunter.' I assure you, citizens, that not a single bandit will strike you down immediately, because he won't understand you right away. And then you can either buy off the bandits, if there's more of them than there is of you, or else you can capture them bit by bit when they get amazed and start riding around the estate without comprehension, but their weapons at peace. Am I telling the truth?"

"Yes, that's about the size of it," agreed the same superintendent of non-mechanical locomotion, who talked all the time.

"Unanimously, then, with one against?" the president said. The business, however, turned out even more complexly. Malanya Otvershkova of course voted nay, but in addition to her the director of soil enrichment, a red-headed member of the commune with a monotonous, common face, abstained.

"What's your story?" the president asked, perplexed.

"I abstain for the further complication!" he answered, having invented the idea himself.

So, following the motion of the president, he was appointed the permanent abstainer.

Dvanov and Kopenkin wanted to push farther on in the evening into the valley of the river Chernaya Kalitva, where there were bandits living openly in two villages, systematically killing representatives of the Soviet government all over the region. However the president of the commune requested they stay for the evening assembly, so that together they could all think up a monument to the revolution. The secretary advised putting the monument in the middle of the yard, while Malanya Otvershkova said no, it should be in

monument  
fertile soil

the garden. The director of soil enrichment abstained in silence.

"So you think it shouldn't go anywhere, or what?" the president asked the abstainer.

"I abstain from stating my opinion," the director of soil enrichment said logically.

"But the majority is for it, so it must be constructed," the president asserted in a harrassed way. "The main thing is to think up some kind of figure."

Dvanov drew a figure on a sheet of paper.

He gave the sketch to the president and explained, "The eight on its side signifies eternity of time and the upright arrow with two heads means infinity of space."

The president showed the figure to the entire assembly.

"There's both eternity and infinity here, and that means there's everything. Couldn't think up anything smarter if we tried. I move we accept it."

It passed with one nay and one abstention. They decided to erect the monument in the middle of the estate on an old mill wheel which had waited many long years for the revolution. The making of the monument itself was assigned to the iron master to form from iron rods.

"We have organized it well here," Dvanov said to Kopenkin in the morning. They were moving along a clay road, heading beneath the high clouds of summer into the distant valley of the Chernaya Kalitva. "Now they'll have complexity which grows ever stronger, and for sure they'll start plowing by spring, just to make things more complicated, and then they'll stop eating the left-overs on the estate."

"Well thought out," Kopenkin said happily.

"Of course, it was clear. Sometimes you only have to tell the healthy man who's pretending to be sick just to complicate things that he's not sick enough, and then convince him of that a bit further, and then finally he'll cure himself."

"I understand. Then health will seem like a fresh complication to him, as well as an overlooked happiness," Kopenkin grasped the idea correctly. He thought to himself what a fine, unclear word "complexity" is, like "the current moment." It's a moment, and yet it's flowing in a current. He just couldn't picture it.

"What are those words called, the ones that can't be understood?" Kopenkin asked modestly. "Dermatology, or something?"

"Terminology," Dvanov answered briefly. In his soul he loved ignorance more than culture, for ignorance is a bare field, while culture is a field already grown over with plants, so that nothing else can grow there. It was for that reason that Dvanov was happy that in Russia the revolution had weeded absolutely clean the few spots where there had been sprouts of culture, while the people remained what they had always been, fertile space. And Dvanov was in no-hurry to have anything sown in it. He felt that good soil cannot

contain itself for long, and would of its own accord push forth something absolutely new and valuable, if only the winds of war did not carry from western Europe the seeds and spores of capitalistic weeds.

Once he glimpsed a distant crowd of people wandering within the uniformity of the steppe, and the power of joy arose within him at the sight of their multitude, as though he had concerns in common with this unattainable people.

Kopenkin rode drooping from his monotonous memories of Rosa Luxemburg. An insight about his own inconsolability dawned suddenly upon him, by chance, but then the delirium of life as it continued enveloped his sudden wisdom in its warmth and he had again foreseen that he would soon ride into another country, where he would kiss Rosa's soft dress (which her relatives had preserved), then dig up Rosa from her grave himself and take her with him to his home in the revolution. Kopenkin could even smell Rosa's dress, which smelled of dying flowers and the hidden warmth of life's remains. He did not know that in Dvanov's memory Sonya Mandrovna smelled like Rosa Luxemburg did in his.

Once Kopenkin had stood a very long time before the portrait of Luxemburg which hung in a provincial revolutionary committee office. He had looked at Rosa's hair and imagined it as a mysterious park. Then he studied her pink cheeks and thought about her flaming revolutionary blood which could instantly suffuse those cheeks and the rest of her face which though pensive strained as well into the future.

Kopenkin stood before that portrait until invisible agitation caused him to burst into tears. That same night he had passionately slashed down a kulak who had the month before incited the muzhiks to rip open the belly of a grain requisitioner and stuff it full of millet. Afterwards the requisitioner had lain in the square before the church while chickens pecked the millet out of his stomach grain by grain.

That was the first time that Kopenkin had sabred a kulak with any savagery. Usually he killed not after his manner of living, but indifferently, although to the death nonetheless. It was as though there was some force of efficiency and economy at work within him. Kopenkin saw the White Guards and the bandits as not terribly important enemies, unworthy of his personal savagery, and so he killed them with the same everyday zeal that a woman applies to weeding her millet patch. He fought precisely, quickly, on the fly and on his horse, unconsciously saving his feelings for future hopes and action.

The modest Great Russian sky shone above the Soviet earth with such habit and uniformity that it seemed as though the Soviets had existed since the beginning of time, and the sky corresponded to them absolutely. The immaculate conception that before the revolution both the sky and all space had been different had formed within Dvanov, the conviction that these things had then been not so gentle as now.

The quiet distant horizon rose up like the edge of the world, where the

Kronstadt  
literacy

PASHINTSEV

sky touches the ground and man touches man. The horseback travellers rode into the silent depths of their motherland. Occasionally the road bent over the top of a rise, revealing some unhappy village in the distant lowlands. Pity for the unknown solitary settlement arose within Dvanov, who wanted to turn off toward the village so as to begin immediately the happiness of mutual life in such a place. Kopenkin however did not agree. He said that they had to finish their business with Chernaya Kalitva first, and then they could come back there.

The day continued dull and desolate, and not one bandit turned up to face the armed horsemen.

"They've all hidden!" Kopenkin exclaimed of the bandits, and felt within himself the crushing burden of his strength. "You bandits, we'd have skewered you for the common safety! The swine, all sitting around their sties slurping down beef. . . ."

There marched down to the road an alley of birches which though not yet chopped down completely had been cut up by the muzhiks. The alley probably came from an estate set back from the road.

The alley ended at two stone pillars. A handwritten newspaper hung on one of the pillars, while the other had a tin sign whose inscription had been half erased by atmospheric precipitation. It read: "The World-Wide Communism Memorial Revolutionary National Park of Comrade Pashintsev. Friends are Welcome. Death to Enemies."

The handwritten newspaper was partially torn away by some enemy hand, and was being made even rarer by the wind. Dvanov held the paper still, then read it through aloud, so that Kopenkin could hear.

The newspaper was called "Pore Man's Good," and was the organ of the Velikomestny Village Soviet and the Duly Empowered Regional Revolutionary Committee for the Assurance of Security in the South Eastern Zone of Pososhansky County.

There remained of the newspaper an article about "The Tasks of World-Wide Revolution," and half of an exhortation to "Preserve the Snow on Fields and Raise the Productivity of the Earned Harvest," though in its middle this digressed to say, "Plow the snow and we need not fear even thousands of Kronstadts of excess!"

"What 'Kronstadts of excess'?" This puzzled and upset Dvanov.

"They write like that to frighten and oppress the masses," Kopenkin said, unable to understand it. "Those word-writing marks are just thought up to complicate the masses. A man what can read casts spells with his mind while the man what can't stands in his spot and works with his hands."

Dvanov smiled.

"Nonsense, comrade Kopenkin. Revolution is the people's ABC."

"Don't lead me astray, comrade Dvanov. Remember that in this country it's the majority that decides things, and almost everybody is illiterate, and it'll turn out that one day those who can't read will decide that

those who can will have to be untaught their letters. For the general equality. And especially since it's a lot more manageable to unteach some few the letters than to teach them to everybody from the top. And who in hell is going to teach them? Teach them something, and right away they forget everything. . . ."

"Let's drop in on comrade Pashintsev," Dvanov said, thinking. "I've got to send a report in to the center. It's been a long time since I knew what was going on there."

"And what's there to know?! The revolution continues at its own pace!"

They rode about a mile down the alley. Then a white estate appeared on a rise before them, magnificent and uninviting. The columns of the main building were in the lively form of well-turned female legs, which importantly supported crossbeams upon which rested only the sky. The house itself stood back a few yards. It had a special colonnade in the form of bent, motionless toiling giants. Kopenkin did not understand the meaning of the solitary columns, and took them to be the remains of some revolutionary revenge upon unmoveable property.

One column had fixed within it a white relief with the name of the landowner-architect and his profile. Beneath the relief a Latin poem was carved into the column:

*The universe is a fleeting woman:  
Her legs turn the earth  
Her body flickers in the air  
And in her eyes sparkle stars.*

Dvanov sighed sadly in these depths of feudalism's silence and once again examined the colonnade, the six shapely legs of three chaste women. Peace and hope entered within him, as always occurred when he saw remote and vital art.

One thing however seemed a pity to him, that these legs tight with the firmness of youth, were alien. It was good however that the girl who had been carried by these legs had directed her life towards charm and not towards reproduction, and that although she fed upon life, life was for her only the raw material, and not the end, the goal, and that this raw material was processed and worked into something else, and the shapelessness of the living became the unfeelingness of the beautiful.

Kopenkin too grew serious before the colonnade. He respected the majestic as long as it was pointless and pretty. If there was some point within the majesty however, as in for example a large machine, Kopenkin considered it then an instrument of the masses' oppression and despised it with all the cruelty of his soul. He stood before the senseless, such as this colonnade, full of pity for himself and hatred for tsarism. Kopenkin supposed tsarism to be

guilty in this instance since he was not himself upset by the enormous female legs, but could only see by Dvanov's face that he too ought to be sad.

"It wouldn't be a bad thing if we could build something world wide and astounding, besides all the troubles," Dvanov said with grief.

"It's can't be built right off," Kopenik said doubtfully. "The bourgeoisie has blocked out all of our light for us. Right now we are building our pillars higher and better, and not just for some strumpet's hooves there."

The remains of the smaller houses and outbuildings lay to the left, overgrown in grass and shrubs, like graves in a cemetery. The columns guarded an empty buried world. The noble ornamental trees held their slim torsoes above this total destruction.

"But we'll do something even better! And on every square inch of the earth, not just in some backwaters and holes," Dvanov waved his hand at the whole thing. At the same time however he felt something deep within himself, something incorruptible and not given to caution that warned him to take care.

"Of course we'll build. That's a slogan and a fact," Kopenkin affirmed in the inspiration of his hopes. "Our labor never flags!"

Kopenkin came upon the tracks of enormous human feet, and he pushed his horse along them.

"What in hell does this local fellow wear for shoes?" Kopenkin was mildly amazed. He bared his sword in case a giant were suddenly to pop up, a guardian of the old order. The landowners used to keep some well-fed bruisers like that around, and they'd come right up and clobber a fellow with one of their bear paws, without any warning at all, and all of the tendons in your body would pop.

Kopenkin liked his tendons. He thought of them as cords of power and he feared tearing them.

The riders came up to a massive and eternal door which led into the partial basement of the destroyed house. The inhuman tracks issued from behind it. It was even visible how this statue-person had tramped around by the door, torturing the earth to baldness.

"Well what have we here?" Kopenkin was puzzled. "Nothing else it could be but a fighting man. He's going to have a pop at us now, so get ready, comrade Dvanov."

Kopenkin himself had even grown more cheerful, feeling that alarmed awe which children feel in the forest at night, when their fear must share equally with growing curiosity.

Dvanov shouted, "Comrade Pashintsev! Who have you got there?"

No answer. Even the grass was silent in the still air, and day was already growing dusky.

"Comrade Pashintsev!"

"Eh!" The answer sounded distant and huge, from the damp echoing bowels of the earth.

“Come on out here, fellow villager!” Kopenkin ordered loudly.

“Eh!” rang out again darkly and deep from the womb of the basement. However neither fear nor a desire to come out could be heard in this voice. The person answering was probably doing so lying down.

Kopenkin and Dvanov waited a bit, then got angry again.

“Come out, I tell you!” Kopenkin blustered.

“I don’t want to,” the unknown person answered slowly. “Go into the central building. There’s bread and homebrew in the kitchen.”

Kopenkin got off his horse and knocked on the door with his sword.

“Come out or I’ll throw a grenade!”

The other man was silent. Maybe he was interested, waiting for the grenade and to see what would happen next. Then he answered.

“So throw it, you snake! I’ve got a whole stock of them in here, and when they go off it will be enough to make you crawl back inside your mother!”

Then he fell silent again. Kopenkin had no grenade.

“Throw it, throw it, you snake!” the unknown person said from his depths, his voice calm. “Give me a chance to check my arsenal. Maybe all the bombs got all rusted up from being wet. Maybe they won’t go off not for anything, the little devils.”

“That’s it!” Kopenkin muttered oddly. “Well then, come on out and take a package from comrade Trotsky.”

The man was silent, thinking.

“What comrade is he of mine, if he’s commanding everybody? The commanders of the revolution are no comrades of mine. It would be better if you threw the bomb. It would make things more interesting!”

Kopenkin dug a brick out of the dirt with his foot and threw it hard at the door. The door screamed with iron and then again remained in peace.

“Damn it, it didn’t go off!” Kopenkin defined the problem. “All its stuff got froze up!”

“Mine are quiet too!” the unknown man answered seriously. “Did you pull the pin? Just a second, I’ll come out and see what kind it is. . . .”

An even sound of metal rocking began. Someone was really walking with steps of iron. Kopenkin waited with his sword unsheathed. His curiosity had overcome his caution. Dvanov stayed on his horse.

The unknown person was already clanking nearby, but he did not hasten his gradual pace, apparently having to overcome the burden of his might.

The door opened at once. It had been unlocked.

Kopenkin fell silent at the sight and stepped back two paces. He had expected either some horror or immediate clarification, but the man had already revealed himself, while his mystery remained intact.

A man of no great stature stepped through the open door, completely bound round in armor and chain mail, wearing a helmet, holding a heavy

broadsword, shod in powerful metal boots whose tops were three joined bronze pipes, and which crushed the grass to death as he walked.

The man's face, particularly his forehead and chin, were protected by the flanges of the casque, and over all of this there was a grillwork visor, now worn shut. Together all of this protected the warrior within from any of the enemy's blows.

However the man himself was short and not particularly frightening.

"Where's your grenade?" the man asked in a hoarse thin voice. His voice boomed only from a distance, when it was reflected from the metal appurtenances and hollowness of his shelter, and in nature it proved to be a pitiful sound.

"Oh, you snake!" Kopenkin exclaimed, without malevolence but also without respect, staring the entire while with fascination at the knight.

Dvanov burst out laughing openly. He had immediately guessed whose clothes this man had assumed, despite the difference in size. He laughed however because he had noticed that there was a Red Army star fixed to the ancient casque with a bolt and held fast with a nut.

"What are you so happy about, swine?" the knight asked coldly, unable to discover the defective grenade. There was absolutely no way the knight could bend, so he merely pushed lamely at the grass with his broadsword and struggled constantly with the weight of his armor.

"Don't go looking for trouble, fool," Kopenkin said seriously, returning to his usual feelings. "Show us to some lodgings for the night. You have hay?"

The knight's shelter was in the half-basement of one of the estate out-buildings. He had one hall, lit by the smoking light of a drip oil lamp. Knightly armor and weapons of cold steel lay in the far corner in a heap and the nearer corner held a pyramid of hand grenades. There was also a table, by it a chair, and on it a bottle with an unknown beverage, or possible poison. There was glued to the bottle with flour paste a label bearing the inscription "Death to the Bourgeoisie" in indelible pencil.

"Will you undo me for the night?" the knight asked.

Kopenkin took quite a time to unharness him from the immortal clothing, pondering each clever aspect of the armor as he worked. At last the knight fell apart, and from the bronze skin emerged ordinary comrade Pashintsev, a man of brownish color, about thirty seven, and minus an intransigent eye, although the one remaining was even more attentive.

"What would you say to a glass?" Pashintsev asked.

However even in the olden times vodka had not possessed Kopenkin. He consciously refused to drink it, considering it a beverage pointless for the feelings.

Dvanov too did not understand wine, so Pashintsev drank in isolation. He took the bottle with the inscription "Death to the Bourgeoisie" and poured it directly down his throat.

"Rot!" he said, turning over the dishes, and then he sat down with a more gentle face.

"Good?" Kopenkin asked.

"Made from sugar beets," Pashintsev explained. "There's an unmarried girl here who brews it with her own immaculate hands. An unrepachable drink, and the smell? Lord above . . . perfume!"

"All right, what the hell are you?" Kopenkin was mortally interested.

"I am a private person," Pashintsev informed Kopenkin. "I resolved with myself that for us everything ended in 1919 . . . armies, governments, and ways of life have come and gone, but to the people they always said the same thing . . . 'Stand up, get back in the ranks, you start work on Monday' . . . the mother . . ." Pashintsev quickly sketched the entire current situation with a wave of his hand. Dvanov ceased thinking and began slowly to listen to the man as he explained.

"You remember 1918, 1919?" Pashintsev asked with tears of joy. The times now lost forever evoked within him savage memories. He hammered on the table with his fist in the midst of his story, threatening the entire surroundings of his basement. "Now nothing will come of it," Pashintsev tried to convince the squinting Kopenkin with his hatred. "Everything's ended. The law's come, distinctions have sprung up between people, like some devil's weighed everybody on his scales. Take me for instance . . . could you ever in your born days figure what is breathing up here?" Pashintsev tapped himself on his low skull, at the place where the brains must be compressed to make room for his wits. "Why, right there, brother, you can find room for all spaces and expanses. And it's the same in everybody! And yet somebody still wants to have power over me! How can that be understood whole?—Speak up! Is it a trick or what?"

"It's a trick," Kopenkin agreed in the simplicity of his soul.

"See?" Pashintsev concluded approvingly. "And now I stand away from the bonfire and mourn alone."

Pashintsev sensed Kopenkin to be the precise sort of orphan of the earthly sphere as he was himself, and with heartfelt words he asked Kopenkin to remain with him forever.

"What else do you need?" Pashintsev said, agitated to the point of self-oblivion from the joy of sensing a human being well-disposed to him. "Live here, eat, drink . . . I've got five barrels of apples put by, and two sacks of shag tobacco dried already. We'll live among the trees as friends, sing songs out on the grass. . . . Thousands of people come to me. All the poor people rejoice in my commune. Except for this here the people have no easy moorings. In the villages the Soviets always have an eye on them, the commissar guards keep on guarding the people, the grain committees look for grain right down into your belly . . . me here, though, I don't get a single government man showing up."

"They're afraid of you," Kopenkin concluded. "After all, you are

*maintaining the revolution  
by talking to the wall?*

always wearing iron and you sleep on bombs. . . .”

“They’re afraid for sure,” Pashintsev agreed. “They were getting set to join me up and take the estate into their inventory, but I went out to the commissar dressed in my whole rig and chucked a bomb at him. The commune is ours! Then another time they came to take the allotment. I said to the commissar, ‘Drink, eat, but if you take any extra, there won’t be anything left of you but your smell.’ The commissar drank a cup of homebrew and left. . . . ‘Thanks, comrade Pashintsev,’ he says. I gave him a handful of sunflower seeds and a poke in the back with that iron rod over there, and sent him back to the government regions. . . .”

“But what now?” Kopenkin asked.

“Nothing special. I live without any guidance, and things turn out first class. I declared this to be a revolutionary national park, so that the government can’t harvest here, and I maintain the revolution in its untouched, heroic category.”

Dvanov was puzzling out the inscriptions which had been written on the wall with a shaky but penman-like hand. Dvanov picked up the drip lamp and read the wall-scratchings of the revolutionary national park.

“Read them, read them,” Pashintsev advised him eagerly. “There’s times when you keep quiet and stay quiet, and finally you get all done with being quiet, and then a fellow starts talking on the wall. If I don’t have people around for a long time, then things get all muddled up for me. . . .”

Dvanov read the poem on the wall.

*The bourgeois’s gone, so there’ll be work.  
Again the muzhik bears the load.  
Believe, oh peasant toiling there,  
That in the fields the lilies live far better!  
So leave your plowing, sowing, reaping—  
Let the field seed itself!  
You go live and make your merry  
For you won’t be round again!  
Oh holy commune, all grab hands  
And thundering shout to all:  
Enough of being poor and sad  
It’s time we all put on some fat!  
Down with earthly toiling for the poor  
The soil will nourish us for free!*

Someone knocked on the door with an even, careful hand.

“Yo!” Pashintsev responded. He had already steamed the last homebrew out of himself and thus was quiet.

“Maksim Stepanych!” sounded from without. “Requesting permission to look for a pole out in the forest to make cart shafts with. Ours busted

halfway there, and otherwise we'll end up putting up with you for the winter."

"Impossible," Pashintsev refused. "How long is it going to take you to learn! I already hung the damned order on the barn. The land is self-made, so that means it's nobody's. Now if you'd have gone and took it without asking, then I'd have let you have it. . . ."

The man outside snorted in pleasure.

"Well then, thanks! I won't touch the pole, since I asked you for it. I'll just give myself some other little present then."

Pashintsev spoke freely. "Never ask. That's the mind of a slave. Just give yourself everything on your own. I mean hell, you got born free of charge, not because of anything you did. So now live without accounting for it!"

"That's right, Maksim Stepanych," the supplicant beyond the door affirmed in complete seriousness. "Whatever you can grab off for yourself, live on that. If it wasn't for the estate, half our village would have turned up their toes. It's five years now we're taking stuff away from here. The Bolsheviks are fair people! Thank you, Maksim Stepanych!"

Pashintsev got mad again. "Again you did it, damn you! Don't take anything, you old gray hair devil! Thank you!"

"How come, Maksim Stepanych? How come I poured out my blood at the front for three years? Me and my father, we've come up with a team to fetch that iron tub, and now you say don't you dare. . . ."

"There you have it . . . the Fatherland!" Pashintsev said to himself and Kopenkin. Then he addressed the door again. "I thought it was cart poles you came for. Now a tub, you say!"

The supplicant was unsurprised. "Well, something or other, anyhow . . . one time you take a chicken and you see an iron shaft lying in the road. You can't take her by yourself, so it just lies there all teasing you like. It's stuff like that what makes up for the collapse of the economy everywhere. . . ."

"As long as you've got the team," Pashintsev finished the conversation, "cart off one of those tart's legs from the white columns. You can find a place for her at home."

"Maybe so," the supplicant approved. "We'll put a line around her and tug her down slow. Chop her up into tiles for the stove."

The supplicant wandered off to do a preliminary examination of the column, so as to steal it as neatly as possible.

At the beginning of night Dvanov proposed to Pashintsev that things be worked out better, and that instead of dragging the estate into the village, the village be resettled on the estate.

"There'd be less work," Dvanov said. "And the estate is on high ground, so there'd be better soil."

Pashintsev simply could not agree to this.

"Every hobo, bum, and wanderer in the province comes here as soon

nobles & burghers  
"volunteer plants"

as spring comes on. That's the purest proletariat there is. Where would they go to, huh? No, sir, I won't allow anybody of the kulak persuasion in here!"

Dvanov realized that the muzhiks really would not get along with the barefoot beggars, but on the other hand, rich land was being wasted for nothing. The population of the revolutionary national park wasn't saving anything, but just living at the expense of the remaining orchards and volunteer plants. They were probably making their soup from goosefoot and thistle.

"Here's what," Dvanov guessed the answer correctly, even for himself. "Exchange the village for the estate. Give the estate to the peasants, and then set up a revolutionary park in the village. It's all the same to you, isn't it? It's the people that are important, not the place. The people are being tormented down in the ravine, and you're all alone up here on the hill!"

Pashintsev looked at Dvanov with happy amazement.

"Now that's excellent! That is just what I'm going to do! First thing tomorrow I'll ride into the village and pick up the muzhiks."

"Will they come?" Kopenkin asked.

"In twenty-four hours every last one of them will be here," Pashintsev declared with savage conviction, his body even twitching with impatience.

"Hell, I'm going there right now!" Pashintsev changed his mind. Now he loved Dvanov too. At first he hadn't taken to Dvanov completely, thinking that he just sat there keeping still, and probably knows all the programs, rules, and theses by heart. Pashintsev had no love for smart fellows like that. He saw in life that the unlucky and stupid are kinder than the wise and those who are more able to turn their lives into freedom and happiness. Pashintsev hid from everyone that he believed workers and peasants were of course stupider than the educated bourgeoisie, but for that same reason they were more soulful, which is why their fate was so excellent.

Kopenkin calmed Pashintsev, saying there was no need to hurry. "Victory is ours," he said, "so all the same, it's guaranteed."

Pashintsev agreed, then told them about weeds. In the destroyed days of his youth he had loved to watch the pitiful doomed grass grow among the millet. He knew that the proper day would come and the women would without mercy pluck baskets full of wild inappropriate grass, cornflowers, clover, and milkweed. These grasses were prettier than the unattractive grains. Their flowers resembled the sad eyes of dying children. They knew they were to be torn up by sweating women. That kind of grass though is more alive than any cowardly grain, because after the women had passed by it grew again, in uncountable, deathless quantities.

"That's poverty for you, too," Pashintsev made the comparison, regretting that he had finished off "Death to the Bourgeoisie." "We've got more power in us and we're more sincere than any other elements. . . ."

Pashintsev could not master himself that night. He put his hauberk on over his shirt and went out into the garden somewhere. There he was embraced by the chill of the night, but he did not cool off. Just the opposite,

in fact, for the starry night and the realization of his own shortness beneath such a sky called him to greater feeling and some immediate feat. Pashintsev grew ashamed of himself before the power of the enormous nocturnal world and wanted immediately, without further thought, to raise his own worth.

A few people who were completely unsheltered and totally unregistered anywhere lived in the main house. Four windows flickered with the light of a well-stoked open stove. They were boiling food in the fireplace. Pashintsev knocked on the window with his fist, showing no mercy for the peace of the occupants.

A curly-haired girl in high felt boots came out.

"What do you want, Maksim Stepanych? What are you raising the alarm at night for?"

Pashintsev went over to her and fleshed out all her clear deficiencies with his own sense of inspired sympathy.

"Grunya," he said, "let me give you a kiss, you little unmarried cutie! My bombs have dried up and won't go off anymore. I wanted to mow the columns down with them just now, but I've got nothing to do it with. Let me give you a comradely little hug there."

Grunya let him.

"Something's come over you. You used to be a sort of serious fellow like. Take off your iron though, you're upsetting all of my soft parts. . . ."

Pashintsev however rapidly kissed the dark dry crusts of her lips and went back home. He felt lighter and not so anguished beneath the hanging night of the sky. All that was larger in capacity and higher in quality within Pashintsev was whetted not by sensual satisfaction, but rather by some martial feeling, a drive to overcome the large and the excellent in strength and importance.

"What are you?" Pashintsev asked the newly-arrived riders without the slightest reason, rather simply to discharge his own replenished feelings.

"It's time to sleep," Kopenkin yawned. "You took note of our rule, didn't you? You'll plant the muzhiks on roomier ground? After all, why should we stay with you for nothing?"

"I'll drag the muzhiks over tomorrow, and no sabotage, either!" Pashintsev said definitely. "And you stay here, to strengthen the connections. Tomorrow Grunka will cook you up some dinner. What I've got here you won't find anywhere else! All I've got to do it figure out how to get Lenin here. After all, he is the leader."

Kopenkin looked at Pashintsev, thinking "Lenin, the man wants!" then reminded him, "While you were out I looked over your bombs. They're all ruined. So how can you be in power?"

Pashintsev did not try to object.

"Of course they're ruined. I defused them myself. But the people haven't guessed it, see? I've got the people with nothing but politics. I walk around in iron, I sleep on bombs. You understand how lesser forces maneuver

"Commune of the new life"  
watchman.

around an enemy? Well, you just don't give up the game when you talk about me!"

The drip lamp ran dry. Pashintsev explained the situation.

"So, my friends, lie down right where you are. There's nothing to be seen, and I've got no beds. I guess when you consider the human race, I'm a pretty sad member. . . ."

"Queer in the head, but not sad," Kopenkin corrected him as he stretched indifferently.

Pashintsev responded without offense. "This here, brother, is a commune of the new life, not some old woman's town. That means no feather-stuffed anythings!"

Towards morning the starry magnificence of the world grew threadbare and the glimmering twinkle was replaced by a gray light. Night departed like cavalry on the fly, and the infantry of toiling, marching day mounted above the earth.

Pashintsev brought in roast mutton, to Kopenkin's astonishment. Then the two riders left the revolutionary national park heading south along the road, making for the valley of the Chernaya Kalitva. Pashintsev stood beneath the white colonnade in his firm knightly gear, following his fellow-thinkers with his eyes.

\* \* \* \* \*

And once again there were two men riding as the sun rose over the poverty of the land.

Dvanov lowered his head, consciousness lessened by the monotony of an even pace of motion, and what he felt now in his heart was a dam trembling continuously before the pressure of a rising lake of feelings. Feelings rose high against his heart, then tumbled down its other side, already transformed into a stream of mitigating thought. Still however the duty light of his watchman burned above the dam, the watchman who takes no part in the life of man, drowsing within him for a pittance of salary. Occasionally this light allowed Dvanov to see both expanses, the warm swelling sea of feelings and the long tumbling thought which ran down the dam, cooling itself with its own speed. It was then that Dvanov could overcome the labor of his heart, which fed his consciousness as it braked it, and could be happy.

"Let's canter, comrade Kopenkin!" said Dvanov, bubbling over with impatience for his future, which awaited him beyond this road. A childish happiness arose within him, as when he had driven nails into the wall, made ships out of chairs, and taken apart alarm clocks to see what was inside. There trembled above his heart the same flickering, frightening light that flashes above the fields on stuffy summer nights. This was perhaps some abstract youthful love which lived within him, transformed into a part of his body, or

Rosa resurrected  
Jews

"all men are brothers"

perhaps it was the continuing power of his birth. It was though because of this light that Dvanov could also suddenly glimpse the indistinct phenomena which swam without a trace through the lake of feeling. He looked Kopenkin over. Kopenkin rode with calm spirit and an even faith in the nearby summery land of socialism, where mankind would become refreshed from the powers of friendship, and citizen Rosa Luxemburg would be resurrected.

The road ran down a slope of several miles. It seemed as though if one were to ride down it like the wind, one could break free and fly. In the distance premature evening shadows stood rooted above the sad dark valley.

"Kalitva!" Kopenkin pointed out, rejoicing as though he had actually ridden on into the town. The riders were thirsty now, able to spit earthward only dry white foam.

Dvanov peered at the poor landscape before him. Both heaven and earth were luckless to the point of fatigue. Here people lived alone and without movement, dying like firewood set upon the bonfire.

"There you go . . . the raw material of socialism!" Dvanov said, studying the country side. "Not even a single building, just the misery of nature . . . orphans!"

When they were within sight of Staraya Kalitva the riders were met by a man carrying a sack. He took off his cap and bowed to the men on horseback, in accordance with the ancient memory that all men are brothers. Dvanov and Kopenkin also answered with bows, and all three felt good. 19

"The comrades have come to loot, but they won't find a whole hell of a lot," the man with the sack decided quietly, after getting a careful distance away.

There were two muzhiks standing guard at the edge of the village. One carried a pruning hook, the other a fence post.

"What are you folks?" they asked in a business-like way as Dvanov and Kopenkin rode up.

Kopenkin reined in his horse, with difficulty pondering the meaning of a military post like that.

"We're internationalists!" Kopenkin said, recalling Rosa Luxemburg's profession, international revolutionary.

The sentries thought for a bit.

"Jews, you mean?"

Kopenkin coolly bared his sword, so slowly that the sentry-muzhiks did not believe it was a threat.

"I ought to cut you down right here on the spot, for saying something like that," Kopenkin said. "You know who I am? Here, here's our documents. . . ."

Kopenkin reached into his pocket, where there had never been any documents or any other sort of paper either. He touched only bread crumbs and similar litter.

"Regimental adjutant!" Kopenkin turned to Dvanov. "Show our papers

to this patrol here!"

Dvanov fished out an envelope that he had carried everywhere with him for three years and the contents of which he did not know, and he threw it to the guards. The sentries grabbed the envelope greedily, overjoyed at this rare opportunity to do their duty.

Kopenkin jumped down and with the easy motion of a master craftsman knocked the pruning hook out of the sentry's hand with his sword, without wounding him in the least. Within him Kopenkin had the gift of revolution.

The sentry shook his afflicted hand. "What's the matter with you, you idiot? We aren't Reds either. . . ."

Kopenkin changed his manner. "You have a lot of soldiers? Who are you?"

The muzhiks thought that over and through, then answered honestly. "There's about a hundred head of us, but maybe twenty guns total. We've got Timofey Plotnikov staying here, from Ispodnye Khutory. Yesterday a food confiscation detachment retreated from us, with losses. . . ."

Kopenkin pointed up the road down which they had ridden.

"You two quick march up that way and when you get to a regiment, lead them here to me. Where's Plotnikov's headquarters?"

"At the elder's house, next to the church," the peasants said, looking mournfully at their native village and wanting to escape the events to come.

"Well, step lively," Kopenkin ordered them, then slapped his horse with his scabbard.

An old woman was squatting on the far side of the fence, prepared now to die. The reason why she had come out had stopped halfway out of her.

"Just sprinkling, old lady?" Kopenkin said, noticing her.

The woman turned out to be not old, but gentle-faced and middle-aged.

"And you've already done your sprinkling, you unwashed devil," the woman said, offended to her roots. She stood up with wide-open skirts and a spiteful face.

Kopenkin's horse suddenly lost its clumsiness and reared up savagely, throwing its forelegs high.

"Watch me, comrade Dvanov, and don't get left behind!" yelled Kopenkin, flashing his ready sword in the air.

Proletarian Strength drummed heavily at the earth and Dvanov heard glass shattering in the huts. However there was no one at all on the streets. Not even dogs came out to chase the horsemen.

Kopenkin held a course for the church, avoiding the lanes and crossroads of the huge village. Kalitva though had been settled with family trees for four hundred years, so some streets were dammed up by unexpected houses set crossways, while other streets were shut off completely by new households and broke out into the fields in narrow summer paths.

Kopenkin and Dvanov wound up in a tangle of blind alleys, where they

circled in place. Finally Kopenkin opened a gate and went through a detour of threshing floors. At first the village dogs barked cautiously and singly, but then they began to toss their voices back and forth, until, aroused by their own numbers, they all began howling at once, from one end of the city to the other.

Kopenkin yelled, "Well, comrade Dvanov, let's let her rip!"

Dvanov understood that they ought to gallop through the village and break out into the steppe on the other side, but he had guessed wrong. As soon as they got out onto a wide street Kopenkin started galloping along it into the depths of the town.

The smithies stood locked and the houses kept their silence as if abandoned. Only one old man who was fixing something by a fence turned up, but he didn't turn to face them. He was probably used to all sorts of dark times.

Dvanov heard a weak ringing sound. He thought it was the clapper of the church bell rocking, just barely touching the metal.

The street turned, revealing a crowd of people by a dirty brick building where the state wine concessions had once been quartered.

The people buzzed in one heavy, solid voice, but it reached Dvanov as a wordless hum.

Kopenkin turned his pinched thin face back and said, "Shoot, Dvanov! Now everything will be ours!"

Dvanov shot twice somewhere in the direction of the church and sensed how he was yelling right behind Kopenkin, who was already inspiring himself with flourishes of his sword. The crowd of peasants rolled back in a smooth wave, illuminated by the turned-back faces of strangers, and then it began to issue from itself streams of running people. Others simply danced in place, grabbing their neighbors for aid. The dancers were more dangerous than the runners because they bound their fear to one tight place and did not allow the brave to enter into action.

Dvanov gulped the peaceful smell of the village, rotting straw and scalded milk, and it turned his stomach. At that moment he would have been unable to eat so much as a pinch of salt. He feared dying in the big warm arms of the village, of smothering in the sheepskin-like air of submissive people who conquered enemies not with their savagery, but with the sheer crush of their numbers. Kopenkin though was for some reason overjoyed at the crowd and already counted on freedom.

Suddenly a hasty volley of guns of various calibers flashed from the window of the house around which the people were darting. The sound of each separate shot was different.

Kopenkin had arrived at the self-oblivion which locks up the sense of life in a dark place, not allowing it to interfere in deadly matters. Kopenkin shot his revolver left-handed into the hut, rattling the window panes.

Dvanov came to on the threshold. He had just to dismount and run

into the house. He shot at the door, and the door opened slowly at the impact of the bullet. Dvanov dashed inside. The hallway smelled of medicine and the sorrows of an unknown, defenceless man. A peasant wounded in previous battles lay in the storeroom. Dvanov did not bend over him, but rather burst through the kitchen into the living room. A red-headed muzhik stood upright in the room, his healthy right arm high above his head, while his left arm, with his pistol, hung down. Blood occasionally dripped from it, like drops from the leaves after a rain, as though a tedious inventory of the man were being taken.

The window in the room was knocked out, but Kopenkin wasn't there.

"Throw down your gun!" Dvanov said.

The bandit whimpered something in fright.

"Come on!" Dvanov grew angry. "I'll shoot it out of your hand!"

The peasant threw the revolver into a pool of his own blood, then dropped his eyes. He was sorry that he had had to get the gun wet, rather than being able to surrender it dry. If it had been dry perhaps he would have been more quickly forgiven.

Dvanov did not know what to do next with the wounded prisoner or where Kopenkin was. He relaxed and sat down in a plush kulak armchair. The muzhik stood in front of him, unable to control his dangling arms. Dvanov was astounded. The man did not look like a bandit. He was a normal muzhik, and certainly not rich.

"Sit!" Dvanov told him. The peasant did not sit.

"You a kulak?"

"No, we're the last people left here," the muzhik answered the truth wisely. "Your kulak doesn't fight. He's got lots of grain . . . it can't all be confiscated. . . ."

Dvanov believed him and was frightened. In his imagination he recalled the villages he had ridden through, villages inhabited by pale sorrowing people.

"You could have shot me with your right hand . . . it's just your left that's wounded."

The bandit looked at Dvanov and thought slowly, not to save himself but to recall the entire truth.

"I'm a lefty. I didn't have time to ride away, and they said a regiment was coming . . . but as it is I'm ashamed to die alone. . . ."

Dvanov got upset. He could think in any situation. This peasant intimidated him some futility and shame of the revolution which was beyond his young mind. Dvanov already sensed the alarm of the poor villages but he would not have known how to put it down in words.

"That's stupid!" Dvanov thought, vacillating silently. "As soon as Kopenkin gets here, this peasant should be shot. When the grass grows it has to break up the soil. Revolution is a violent thing and a natural force. . . ."

"You're a pig!" Dvanov's consciousness changed immediately, with no

*Faith & doubt  
Dvans*

-consistency.

"Go home!" he ordered the bandit, who went out the door backwards, keeping his fascinated, terrified eyes on the pistol in Dvanov's hand. Dvanov guessed the man's thoughts and purposely did not hide his revolver, so as not to move and scare the man.

"Stop!" Dvanov shouted. The peasant stopped obediently. "Did you have any White officers here? Who's Plotnikov?"

The bandit was weakening and tried in torment to endure himself.

"No, no one was here," the peasant answered softly, afraid to lie. "I swear to you, kind sir, nobody at all . . . Plotnikov is a muzhik from the outskirts of our town. . . ."

Dvanov saw that the bandit too was afraid to lie.

"Oh, don't be afraid. You can go on home peaceably."

The bandit believed Dvanov and left.

The remaining fragments of glass tinkled in the window. Kopenkin's Proletarian Strength came galloping up at an easy rolling gait.

"Where are you going? And who are you?.. Dvanov heard Kopenkin's voice. Without listening to the answer Kopenkin locked the captive bandit in the storeroom.

"Know what, comrade Dvanov? I just almost caught that very Plotnikov of theirs," Kopenkin announced, his chest rattling in excitement. "Two of the carrion got away . . . damn good horses they've got! Ought to be plowing with mine here, and instead I'm fighting! . . . of course I'm happy on him though. That's a horse with consciousness! Well, what the hell, got to get the assembly together. . . ."

Kopenkin himself climbed up on the bell tower and sounded the alarm. Dvanov went out onto the porch in anticipation of the gathering of peasants. Off in the distance some children leapt into the middle of the street, looked in Dvanov's direction, and then ran away again. No one came out at the urgent ringing of Kopenkin's summons.

The bell sang darkly over the big village, evenly spacing its proclamation with breathing. Dvanov began to listen, forgetting the meaning of the alarm. In the melody of the bell he heard alarm, faith, and doubt. These same passions are also at work in revolution, for people are moved no only by cast-iron faith, but by shattering doubt as well.

A black-haired, hatless muzhik wearing an apron came up to the porch. A blacksmith, apparently.

"What are you getting people all upset for?" he asked directly. "You just go ride on a bit further there, my comrade friends. There's about ten morons here in our village, and that's all the support you've got."

Dvanov asked him directly why he was offended by the Soviet government.

"Because you always are shooting first and asking questions later," the blacksmith answered hatefully. "It's a sly business. First you hand over the

land, and then you take away the grain, right down to the last kernel. You can choke on land like that! The muzhik doesn't have anything left from the land anymore except the horizon. Who are you fooling?"

Dvanov explained that the confiscated goods were going into the life-blood of the revolution to feed its future forces.

"You can just keep that for yourself!" the smith rejected the explanation knowingly. "Every one out of ten of these people here is either a moron or a bum . . . sons of bitches, they haven't worked a day of their lives on a farm . . . those kind will follow anybody you like. If there was a tsar, you could scare up a party cell for him here. And it's exactly those worthless people you've got in that party of yours. . . . You say 'Bread for the Revolution'!? Are you crazy of something? Hell you can see the people are dying out, so who is it you're keeping the revolution for? And they say the war is all gone. . . ."

The smith stopped talking, realizing that he had before him precisely the same kind of odd person as all communists. A normal person to look at, but everything he does is against the simple folk.

Dvanov involuntarily smiled at the blacksmith's thought. Among the people there is about ten percent eccentrics who will follow any course, whether into revolution or into a hermitage to pray.

Kopenkin came up and answered all the blacksmith's arguments clearly. "You, old man, are a pig! Now everybody lives equal, and you want to make it so the worker's got nothing to put into his face while you're busy boiling grain into homebrew!"

"Equal maybe, but not smooth!" the blacksmith took his revenge. "You don't understand snot about living equal! As soon as I got married I started thinking this business over. It turns out that we've always had the crazy ones over us giving the orders and the people never took the power themselves. They had more important things to look after, my friend . . . they were feeding the morons, and for nothing!"

The blacksmith laughed in a wise voice and twitched his cigar.

"But what if they removed the confiscations?" Dvanov posed the question.

The blacksmith had only just grown cheerful, and now he frowned again.

"Impossible, can't be done. You'd only think up something different, and even worse. . . might as well just let old troubles live on, especially since the muzhiks have learned how to hide grain. . . ."

"Nothing means a damn to him! The man's a pig!" Kopenkin said, evaluating his partner in the conversation.

People began creeping up to the house. About eight of them came up and sat to one side. Dvanov went over to them. It turned out that these were the surviving members of the Kalitva party cell.

The blacksmith laughed. "Start a speech. You've got all the feeble-

minded here for the assembly . . . there's just a couple missing . . .”

The blacksmith was quiet a bit, then began to speak easily again. “You listen to me now. We've got maybe five thousand people here, kids and adults. You remember that. And now let me make a little guess. You take ten percent of the adults, and when there's that many in the cell, then your whole revolution will be over.”

“How come?” Dvanov didn't understand the figures.

The blacksmith explained in his partisan way. “Then all the crazies will drift off towards the power and the people will take care of themselves. It'll be a pleasure for both sides. . . .”

Kopenkin moved before the assembly that Plotnikov be pursued without the loss of another minute, in order to liquidate him before he set up a new and living band. Dvanov found out from the village communists that Plotnikov had wanted to announce a general mobilization in Kalitva, but that nothing had come of it. At the time the assemblies had run on for two days while Plotnikov tried to talk everyone into volunteering. It was exactly that sort of assembly which had been going on today when Dvanov and Kopenkin had attacked. Plotnikov knew the peasants precisely. He was a wild muzhik, faithful to his fellow villagers and thus an enemy to the entire rest of the world. The peasants revered him in the place of the now-deceased priest.

During the meeting a woman ran up and yelled, “Muzhiks! The Reds are at the edge of town! A regiment's galloping in on horses!”

And then Kopenkin and Dvanov showed up in the street and everyone thought it was the regiment.

“Let's go, Dvanov,” Kopenkin said, bored of listening. “Where's that road go? And who's going with us?”

The communists were abashed. “That's the road to the village of Chernovka . . . but comrades, we've got no horses. . . .”

Kopenkin waved a disavowing hand at them

The blacksmith looked vigilantly at Kopenkin, then went over to him himself.

“Well, it's goodbye, then,” he said, extending a spacious hand.

“Goodbye to you at least,” Kopenkin answered with the extension of his own hand. “Remember me. As soon as you start to wriggle the least little bit, I'll be back to put an end to you.”

“You remember me too, hear? My name's Sotykh. I'm the only one here like this. When things come up to a showdown, then I'll be horseback with a poker of my own, too. And I'll find a horse, too . . . those ones there, see, now they're got no horses, the sons of bitches. . . .”

The village of Kalitva lived on the slope where the steppe dropped into the valley. The valley of the Chernaya Kalitva itself was a solid thicket of swampy growth.

While the people argued and trampled flat the differences among themselves the age-old labor of nature continued. The river grew old, beating down

its virginal stands of grass beneath the fatal liquids of the swamp, through which only the hard spiky reeds could poke their way. Now the dead tufts of the valley heard only the apathetic songs of the wind. At the end of the summer there was always an uneven battle there between the weakened current of the river and the alluvial sand washed from the gulches and gulleys, the minor flakes of which were cutting the river off forever from the distant sea.

"Over there, comrade Dvanov, look over there to the left," Kopenkin pointed at the blue of a flood meadow. "I used to come here with my father when I was still a little boy. It was an unforgattable place. You could smell good grass a mile away, and now there's nothing here but rotting water. . . ."

Out in the steppe Dvanov had rarely encountered such large mysterious lands as those he found in the valleys. Why when they die do the rivers stop their water and cover their grassy and protective shores with impassable muck? Probably the entire land around the valley grows paler from the death of a river. Kopenkin told Dvanov about the quantities of livestock and poultry the peasants used to have in those parts when the river had been fresh and alive.

The darkening evening road ran along the edge of the dead valley. It was only four miles from Kalitva to Chernovka but the riders only noticed Chernovka when they had already ridden into someone's threshing barn. At that time Russia was expending herself to light the way for all the peoples of the earth and so kept no light for herself in her huts.

Kopenkin went to find out who held the village while Dvanov stayed on the outskirts with the horses.

Night was coming on, murky and dull. Children fear such nights, recognizing for the first time the nightmares of sleep. They won't sleep then, rather following their mother and making sure that she doesn't sleep either, so she can preserve them from the horrors.

Grown-ups however are orphans and Dvanov stood alone then on the outskirts of an enemy village, watching the melting run-off of the steppe night and the chill lake of the sky above him.

He walked back and forth listening to the blackness and counting the slow passage of time.

"I had to find you by force," the invisible Kopenkin said from far away. "Did you miss me? You can drink some milk now."

Kopenkin hadn't found out anything about who was in power in the village or whether Plotnikov was there, but somewhere he had managed to get a jug of milk and a hunk of vitally necessary bread.

After eating Kopenkin and Dvanov rode to the village soviet. Kopenkin had found a hut with a sign that said it was the soviet, but it was empty, decrepit, and the inkwells had no ink. Kopenkin stuck his fingers into all the inkwells to determine whether the local authority was functioning.

In the morning four elderly muzhiks came to begin to complain that

they had been abandoned by all authorities and that it had become impossibly hard to live.

"If we just had somebody, anybody. . ." the peasants said. "Otherwise we'll be living on the fringe here . . . neighbor will be crushing neighbor. Is that the way to get on, without authorities? The wind doesn't blow without something to start it, but we are living here without a reason."

There had been many authorities in Chernovka, but they had all drifted away. Soviet authority had also collapsed of its own accord. The peasant who had been elected president had ceased functioning. Not enough respect, he said. Everybody knows me, he said, and you can't have authority without respect. And thus he stopped coming to the village soviet for work. The people of Chernovka then went to Kalitva to get a stranger to put in the presidency, so that everyone would respect him. But it hadn't worked out right. In Kalitva they were told that there were no instructions for the resettlement of presidents from other parts and that they had better choose a worthy from their own society.

"But we've got no worthies!" the people of Chernovka mourned. "We're all equal and well matched. One's a thief, another's a bum, a third's got a devil for a wife . . . she hid his pants. So what are we supposed to do now?"

"Your life is dull?" Dvanov asked sympathetically.

"Like flies in a jam jar! The people passing through have been telling us that all over Russia the cultural gap has closed up, but it hasn't touched us. It's humiliating, that's what!"

The smell of wet manure and warm tillable land wafted through the soviet windows. This ancient village air brought to mind peace and reproduction, and the speakers gradually fell silent. Dvanov went outside to look to the horses. He was cheered there by a needy sparrow who was standing and laboring with his beak in the rich horse manure. Dvanov hadn't seen any sparrows for six months and he had not wondered once where in the world they took shelter. A great deal of good went past Dvanov's narrow, impoverished mind. Even his own life often flowed around his mind, like a stream around a stone. The sparrow flew to the fence. The peasants who were humiliated about their government came out of the soviet. The sparrow tore himself from the fence, muttering his gray poor man's song as he flew.

One of the peasants, a pockmarked hungry man, went over to Dvanov. He was of the sort who never says immediately what he wants, instead always bringing the conversation from some distance away through middling things, testing intensively the character of the person with whom he is speaking, to discover if the person will allow him to request some relief. With a man like that it is possible to spend the entire night talking about what had given Orthodoxy such a push on this earth when lumber was really what he wants. And in fact he has already cut the trunks he needs in a former state summer cottage and is now asking for lumber again just to find out by way

"The more dangerous the necessary"  
confiscations

of inference what will happen to him for his earlier independence.

The muzhik who approached Dvanov resembled the departed sparrow a bit in his face and in his habit of looking at his own life as a criminal activity for which he must constantly expect some vengeful authority.

Dvanov asked the peasant to make his request immediately and directly. Kopenkin heard Dvanov through the only window and warned him that never in his born days would the peasant show anything openly. "Better," he said, "comrade Dvanov, that you let the conversation proceed at a walk."

The muzhiks started laughing, realizing that before them were people who were neither dangerous nor necessary.

The pockmarked fellow began to talk. He was a hermit and according to social condemnation it was his responsibility to watch other people's interests.

Little by little the conversation came round to the good points of Kalitva, mixed in with those of Chernovka. Then they passed through the disputed settlement and came to rest on governments.

"We ought to have some kind of government, even though we don't really need it," the pockmarked fellow explained, speaking from both sides of the fence. "If you look at the matter from the middle then you can't see the ends and starting at either end takes a long time. So you have to think on it here. . . ."

Dvanov said hurriedly, "If you have enemies then you need the Soviet government."

However the pockmarked man knew what was up.

"We don't have any enemies to speak of, but there's nothing but empty space all about. They could just come galloping up, and you know a thief thinks my kopek is bigger than his ruble. . . . Everything stays the same, the grass grows, the weather changes, but all the same we get jealous. And suppose all of a sudden we miss something good from not having any government. They tell us there's no more grain confiscation, but we're all afraid to plant. And there's other easy times what have gone to the people and we didn't get any of it!"

Dvanov jumped up. "What do you mean, no confiscation? Who said?"

However the pockmarked man didn't know himself, for he had either truly heard this or he had accidentally thought it up from within his own heart. In general he could only explain that some deserter without documents had passed through, eaten kasha at the pockmarked man's house, and then announced that there was no more confiscation now, that the muzhiks had gone to Lenin there in his Kremlin tower, sat for three nights, and together they had thought up an easement.

Dvanov immediately grew sad, went into the soviet, and did not return. The muzhiks returned home, long accustomed already to fruitless petitioning.

"Listen to me a second, comrade Kopenkin!" Dvanov said, disturbed. Kopenkin feared the misfortune of another more than anything, and as a

Dvanov / Kopenkin part  
Luxemburg

boy he had cried at the funeral of an unknown muzhik on behalf of the man's offended wife. He grew sad in good time and opened his mouth slightly so as to hear better.

"Comrade Kopenkin," Dvanov said. "You know what? I sort of want to go to the city. . . . You wait here for me, I'll return soon. For the time being you be the president of the soviet, so it won't be boring for you. The peasants will agree. You see what sort they are. . . ."

"What's the problem?" Kopenkin was overjoyed. "Please, go, go ahead and go. If need be I'll wait a whole year for you. And I'll set myself up as president. We've got to get this region tamed a bit anyway. . . ."

That evening Dvanov and Kopenkin kissed one another goodbye in the middle of the road and both felt senselessly abashed. Dvanov rode off the railroad, into the night.

Kopenkin stood a long while on the street, no longer able to see his friend. Then he returned to the village soviet and burst into tears in the empty building. The entire night he lay silent and unsleeping, his heart helpless. Around him the village did not budge, did not betray its existence with a single living sound, as though it had forever abandoned its own tormented shuffling fate. Only occasionally the bare branches moved in the empty yard of the village soviet, biding their time until spring.

Kopenkin saw the darkness beyond the window grow agitated. Occasionally a pale, languishing light ran through the night smelling of damp and the boredom of a new and unpeopled day. Perhaps that was morning coming on, or perhaps it was a lost dead moonbeam.

In the long silence of night Kopenkin imperceptibly lost the tension of his feelings, as though he were being cooled by solitude. Gradually a weak light of doubt and self-pity rose in his consciousness. He turned his memory to Rosa Luxemburg, but he could only see a dead emaciated woman in a coffin, like a woman who had died in childbirth. That tender affection which used to give his heart the gay and limpid power of hope now did not budge within Kopenkin.

Amazed and grieving, he was engulfed by the heavenly night and long years of exhaustion. He did not see himself in sleep, and if he had he would have been frightened. An old wizened man with the deep wrinkles of a martyr on the face of a stranger was asleep on a bench. A man who in the course of his life had done nothing for the good of his own life. There is no transition from clear consciousness to dreaming: the exact same life continues in sleep, only in a bared form. Kopenkin saw his long-dead mother for the second time. He had dreamed about her for the first time just before his marriage. Then his mother had been walking away from him along a muddy road that went through the fields. Her back was so thin that her ribs and spine showed through her greasy shirt, which smelled of cabbage soup and children. His mother was walking away, bent forward, reproaching her son in nothing. Kopenkin knew that she had nothing in the place for which she was headed,

so he ran ahead along the gully to build a shack for her. Kitchen gardeners and melon farmers used to live somewhere on the edge of the forest in warm weather and Kopenkin thought to put his mother's shanty right there, so that his mother could find herself another father and a new son in the forest.

Now Kopenkin dreamed of his mother and her usual mournful face. She was wiping the wrinkled tearwells of her eyes with the end of her kerchief so as not to get him all spotted, and she was walking, tiny and desiccated before her grown son.

"So you've found yourself a little slut again, Stepushka. Again you left your mother alone so she's a nuisance to others. God be with you, my boy."

His mother forgave him because she had lost her maternal powers over the son which had been born of her blood and who had sinfully departed from her.

Kopenkin loved his mother and Rosa identically, for his mother and Rosa were the very same primary being for him, just as the past and the future lived within his one life. He didn't know how it was, but he sensed that Rosa was a continuation of his childhood and his mother, and not an insult to the old woman.

And Kopenkin's heart grew numb, because his mother was cursing Rosa.

"Mama, she died too, just like you did," Kopenkin said, pitying the helplessness of her natural anger.

The old woman took off her kerchief. She was no longer crying.

"Oh my son, my baby son . . . you just go and listen to them!" his mother began to gossip. "She'll talk to you and twist everything all around and everything will come out matched up fine, but when you get married? You'll have nobody to sleep with! Skin and bones and a face like a stone. Here she comes, that little sponge of yours, walking along with her little steps . . . ooooo, you trash, you've lured the poor little thing astray! . . ."

Rosa, tiny, alive, real, was walking along the street with black, mournful eyes, like the picture in the village soviet. Kopenkin forgot his mother and knocked out the windowglass so as to see Rosa better. Beyond the glass there was a summery village street, empty and depressing like all villages during droughts and heat waves, and Rosa was gone. A chicken flew out of a side alley and ran along a rut, its dusty wings extended. Behind it there came some people who were looking about, and then some other people carried in a cheap unpainted coffin, like those in which strangers who had no kinship to remember are buried at the expense of society.

In the coffin lay Rosa, her face covered in yellow spots, as happens to women during a difficult labor. There lived eternally within the blackness of her hair an unwomanly gray, and her eyes were sunk beneath her brow in exhausted renunciation of all the living. She needed no one and she was not dear to the muzhiks who carried her. The pall bearers toiled only out of social obligation, because it was the turn of their households.

<sup>a sparrow</sup>  
Unreasoning hope. - K

Kopenkin peered at her in disbelief. The woman lying in the coffin was not the one he knew. That one had had vision and eyelashes. The nearer they brought Rosa, the darker grew her ancient face, which had seen nothing but the nearby villages and need.

"That's my mother you're burying!" Kopenkin yelled.

"No, she's an unmarried wife," a muzhik said without the slightest grief, then straightened the cloth on his shoulder. "See, she couldn't die in another village. No sir, she had to come straight here to kick off . . . like it made a difference to her. . . ."

The muzhik was considering his work. Kopenkin understood this immediately and calmed the involuntarily laboring people.

"Soon as you get her covered up, come back here. I'll treat. . . ."

"Now that's a possibility," the same peasant answered. "It's a sin to bury somebody dry. She's God's servant now, but all the same you can't lift her. She keeps cutting into your shoulder."

Kopenkin lay on his bench and waited for the muzhiks to return from the cemetery. There was a cold draft from somewhere. Kopenkin got up to block up the broken window, but all the panes were unharmed. The draft was from the morning wind, while outside the horse Proletarian Strength had long been neighing to be watered.

Kopenkin set his clothes straight, burped, and went out into the fresh air. The wellboom over the neighbor's well was bent low after water and the young woman beyond the fence was stroking her cow to make it easier to finish milking. She spoke in a tender chesty voice.

"Masha, Mashenka, now don't go getting all puffed up, don't be fussy . . . the good will stick to you and the rest fall off. . . ."

From the left a barefoot man yelled to his invisible son while correcting a need from the porch. "Hey Vaska, lead the mare down to drink!"

"Go drink yourself! She's had hers!"

"Vaska, go flail the millet or I'll give you one upside the head with my foot!"

"I flailed it yesterday! It's Vaska this and Vaska that! You finish the flailing!"

Sparrows were fussing around the yards like native domestic fowl. No matter how unlike the beautiful swallows they are, the swallows fly away to luxurious lands in the fall, while the sparrows stay put to share the cold and human want. It is a truly proletarian bird, pecking up its bitter grains. All of the soft creations on earth might perish from long and miserable bad weather, but live-bearing creatures like the muzhik and the sparrow will remain and endure until a warm day returns.

Kopenkin smiled at the sparrow who had in his own fruitless crummy life been able to find enormous promise. It was clear that in the mornings he warmed himself not with seeds but with a dream no man could know. Kopenkin too lived not on bread or well-being, but rather on an unreasoning hope.

"That way it's better," he said, not removing his gaze from the toiling sparrow. "What a one you are! Tiny, but fiesty. If man was like you the whole world would have blossomed ages ago. . . ."

The pockmarked muzhik of the day before arrived with the new morning. Kopenkin drew him into conversation, then went to his house to eat breakfast. There at the table he suddenly asked, "You have a muzhik named Plotnikov around here?"

The pockmarked man aimed his thoughtful eyes at Kopenkin and tried to guess what was up.

"I'm Plotnikov. But what is it you want? In the whole village we've got only three names that will work. There's Plotnikovs, Ganushkins, and Tselnovs. Which Plotnikov do you need?"

Kopenkin looked for a way to put it.

"The one what's got a chestnut stallion. He's quick and good looking and he rides all hunkered down. You know him?"

"Ah, that's Vanka! I'm Fyodor. I've got nothing to do with him. The stallion pulled up lame three days ago. . . . You need him real bad? I'll go out right now and give him a yell. . . ."

Pockmarked Fyodor left. Kopenkin pulled out his revolver and set it on the table. Fyodor's big wife looked dumbfoundedly at Kopenkin from the stove, then began to hiccup faster and faster from fear.

"So somebody just forgot you, huh?" Kopenkin asked sympathetically.

The woman crunched her face into a smile so as to please the guest, but she didn't know what to say.

Fyodor came back with Plotnikov quickly. Plotnikov turned out to be the same barefoot muzhik who had yelled at Vaska from his threshold that morning. Now he wore felt boots and politely kneaded in his hands the ancient cap which he had bought before his wedding. Plotnikov had an exterior without distinction. In order to be able to make him out among a bunch like him, it would be necessary to live with him a while. Only the color of his eyes was unusual, for they were a deep brown. The color of thievery and hidden designs. Kopenkin studied the bandit morosely. Plotnikov either was not intimidated or else had deliberately taken a certain tack.

"What are you staring at? Looking for your people?"

Kopenkin immediately put a stop to him.

"Speak up, are you going to mix the people all up? You going to raise the people up against Soviet power? Tell me straight out, yes or no?"

Plotnikov understood Kopenkin's character and deliberately made his lower face frown, so as to express clear submission and voluntary regret for his illegal actions.

"Nope, I never will again. I'll tell you that right out."

Kopenkin remained silent a bit, for the sake of sternness.

"Well, remember me then. I'm not your trial, I'm your retribution. Soon as I find out, I'll rip you up by the roots in a minute, even if I have to

government / force of nature  
city / NER

dig clear back to your mother's mother! And I'll bury you right where you stand. . . . Now go home, and take account of me in this world. . . ."

When Plotnikov left, the pockmarked man gasped and hiccuped in respect.

"Now there, that was real just, it was! Yes sir, it was! Must be that you're the government now!"

Kopenkin had already come to love pockmarked Fyodor for his business-like desire for a government of some sort, especially since Dvanov said that the Soviet government is the reign of a multitude of natural unimpressive people.

"What do you mean government?" Kopenkin said. "We are a natural force!"

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The houses in the city seemed too large to Dvanov. His scale of vision had grown used to huts and steppe.

Summer shone above the city and the birds who had had time to multiply sang among the buildings and on the telephone poles. When Dvanov had left the city it had been a stern fortress where there was nothing but disciplined service to the revolution, and for the sake of precisely this point the workers, office personnel, and Red soldiers lived and endured daily. At night there were only sentries who checked the documents of aroused midnight citizens. Now Dvanov saw the city not as a place of desolate holiness, but as a festive settlement illuminated by summer light.

At first he thought the Whites had taken the town. There was a buffet at the train station where gray rolls were sold without a line and without ration cards. Near the station, on the grounds of the provincial food committee, there was a raw sign whose letters dripped because of the poor quality of the paint. The sign announced primitively and shortly that:

*"Everything On Sale To All Citizens! Pre-War Bread!  
Pre-War Fish! Fresh Meat! Our Own Preserves!"*

Beneath the sign in little letters was written the name of the firm: "Arduyants, Romm, Kolesnikov, and Co."

Dvanov decided this was all by design and went into the shop. There he saw the normal tools of trade, which he had seen only in early youth and long ago forgotten. Glassed-in counters, shelves on the walls, real scales instead of bismans and beam-balances, polite clerks instead of the stewards and agents of the food bases, a lively crowd of customers, and stores of goods emitting wafting smells of repletion.

"This isn't your provincial food distribution committee, no sir!" said

some passive observer of the commerce sympathetically. Dvanov looked hatefully at him. The man feared looks like that, but then smiled solemnly, as if to say, see, I'm rejoicing at a legal fact!

In addition to the customers there was an entire crowd of people standing in the shop. These were simply observers, who were taking a lively interest in this comforting occurrence. There were more of them than there were customers, and they too participated tangentially in the trade. Somebody would go over to the bread, break off a bit, and put it in his mouth. The clerk would wait further developments without objection. The admirer of commerce would chew the piece of bread a long while, pushing it every which way with his tongue and looking deeply thoughtful. Then he would give his evaluation to the clerk.

"It's got a bite to it! Just the tiniest bit, you know? Made with yeast?"

"No, sourdough," the clerk said.

"Ah-ha! That's it, you can tell. But just the same you know, the flour's not coarse like in the rations, and it's baked well, like bread ought to be. No complaints, no sir!"

The fellow stepped over to the meat, felt it, then stroked it lovingly, then sniffed it closely for a long while.

"You want me to cut you a piece or something?" the merchant asked.

"I'm looking to see if it's horsemeat," the man investigated. "But looks like it isn't. It died young and there's no lather to be seen. You know how you get lather instead of fat when you boil horsemeat, and my stomach just won't take that. I'm a poorly sort of man. . . ."

The merchant grew offended and bravely seized the meat.

"Horsemeat! What horsemeat! That's good white Cherkash beef! Straight filet! You see how tender it smells? It'll melt in your mouth. You could eat it raw, like pot cheese!"

The satisfied man returned to the crowd of observers and gave a detailed report of his discoveries.

Without leaving their posts the observers sympathetically followed all the functions of commerce. Two of them could no longer endure it and went to help the clerks. They blew dust off the counters, wiped the scales with a feather duster to insure greater accuracy, and tidied up the sets of counterweights. One of these volunteers cut up little pieces of paper, wrote the names of goods on them, and stuck the papers to the proper goods with little wire pins. Thus there was a little advertisement above each article, which immediately brought the customer to a clear understanding of things. The volunteer plunged a sign that said "Millet" into the box of millet, sticking "Meat Red-Hot from the Cow" into the beef, and so on, in accordance with the more normal movement of goods.

His friends admired the pains he took. These were the grandsires of the improvers of government services, simply ahead of their time. Customers entered, read the signs, and believed all the more in the inscribed goods.

LENIN give the  
Food - farm

One old woman came into the shop and looked the establishment over for a considerable length of time. Her head trembled from age reinforced by hunger, for her support points had grown weak, and involuntary moisture dripped from her nose and eyes. The old woman went up to the clerk and held out her ration book, its rips mended with sternly stitched thread.

"You don't need it, granny, we'll let you have it just like that, without the book," the clerk announced. "What did you eat while your children died?"

"Have I really lived to see the day?" the old woman said, touched with emotion.

"We've lived to see the day. Lenin tooketh away, and now Lenin giveth."

The old lady whispered, "Him land sakes!" Then she burst into tears so abundant that it seemed as though she still had forty some years to live in so marvellous a life. The clerk handed her a chunk of the well-baked bread for the trip home, thus making up for the sins of wartime communism.

Dvanov understood that this was serious, that the revolution had acquired another expression on its face. He didn't see any more stores on the way to his house, but people were selling piroshki and doughnuts on every corner. People bought food, ate food, and talked about food. The city was feasting richly. Now all people knew that it is difficult to grow grain, that a plant lives as tenderly and complexly as a man, that after the rays of the sun the earth must be watered by the sweat of torturous labor. Now people had grown used to keeping an eye on the weather and hoping along with the tillers of the soil that the weather would be as required, that the snow would melt all at once and that the water of the fields wouldn't freeze over in an icy crust. That is hard on the winter wheat. People had learned many things previously unknown. Their professions had expanded, their sense of life had become social. Thus they now savored these doughnuts, through the doughnuts increasing not only their own fullness, but also their respect for nameless labor as well. Their pleasure was thus twofold. And thus as they ate people held their open palms beneath their mouths to catch the falling crumbs. Then they ate these crumbs as well.

Crowds walked along the boulevards, observing a life which was new to them. The day before many of them had eaten meat and felt an unaccustomed burst of strength. It was Sunday and almost stifling. The warmth of the summer sky was cooled only by a wandering wind from the faraway fields.

Occasionally there were poor people sitting around buildings and consciously cursing the Soviet government, though the passers-by were giving them money as a sign of the easing of life. In the four years before that pigeons and the poor had disappeared from the towns.

Dvanov cut across the square, abashed at the masses of people. He was already used to the airy freedom of the steppe. For a while a girl who looked

like Sonya walked even with him. She had the same weak, gentle face which frowned slightly at impressions. However the eyes of this girl were darker than Sonya's, and slower, as though they held some unresolved trouble, and they looked about half-closed, hiding their misery. "By the time socialism comes it will be time to call Sonya Sophia Alexandrovna," Dvanov thought. "The time will pass."

Zakhar Pavlovich was sitting in the hall and cleaning Alexander's ragged children's shoes with polish, so that they would remain intact longer, as reminders. He embraced Sasha and burst into tears. His love for his foster son grew continually. As he clutched Zakhar Pavlovich's body Dvanov thought, "What are we to do in the communism of the future with fathers and mothers?"

In the evening Dvanov went to Shumilin. Beside him many marched off to their beloveds. People were beginning to eat better and to feel within themselves a soul. Not everyone was drawn to the stars. The citizens were fed up with big ideas and endless expanses. They were convinced that the stars could be turned into a handful of rationed millet, while it is the typhus louse that carries ideals.

Shumilin was eating dinner, so he sat Dvanov down to eat too.

An alarm clock labored on the dinner table. Shumilin compared himself with it jealously. A clock is always working, while he broke his life into pieces by sleeping. Dvanov however did not envy time. He sensed his excess supply of life and knew that he would have time to overcome the ticking of the clock.

"No time to let the food digest," Shumilin said. "It's already time to go to the Party meeting. . . . You coming, or did you get too smart for us?"

Dvanov remained silent. On the way to the regional committee Dvanov recounted as well as he could what he had done in the province, but he saw that Shumilin was completely uninterested.

"I heard, I heard," Shumilin muttered. "You moron, they sent you just to have a look around, to see who and what was going on. Because otherwise all I do is look at documents and I can't see a damned thing. But you've got fresh eyes. And then you go and make an entire disruption. You egged the muzhiks on to chop down the Bitterman tree plantation, you son of a bitch. And then you gather up some kind of dregs and set off to wander about. . . ."

Dvanov turned red from shame and conscience.

"They're not dregs, comrade Shumilin. If need be they'll make another three revolutions without so much as a word. . . ."

Shumilin didn't try to converse. That meant his papers were more reliable than people. And so they walked on in silence, each shy of the other.

Air was blowing from the doors of the hall in the City Soviet where the Party meeting was to be held as if powered by a fan. The welder Gopner held his palm up against the air and said to comrade Fufayev that there were two atmospheres of pressure there.

"If they was to get the whole Party together in this hall here," Gopner reasoned, "you could set up one whole electric generating station and run it on nothing but Party breath. I'll be god-damned!"

Fufaev was tiredly examining the electric lighting, burdened down by the delay of the meeting's start. Little Gopner was dreaming up still more technical calculations of some sort and relaying them to Fufaev. Apparently Gopner had no one to talk with at home and was overjoyed at the presence of people.

"You're all the time talking and thinking," Fufaev said precisely and peaceably, then sighed deeply, lifting his chest like a mound of bones. Long ago this had burst all his shirts, and he wore them all mended. "And it's past time we should all be working broader and more quiet."

Gopner couldn't figure out why Fufaev had twice been given the Order of the Red Banner. Fufaev himself never said anything to Gopner about it, for he preferred the future to the past. The past he considered destroyed forever and a useless fact, so he kept his medals in a trunk at home, not on his chest. Gopner had found out about the medals only from Fufaev's boastful wife, who knew the details of her husband's life as precisely as if she had given birth to him herself.

There was just one thing that she did not know, why special rations and medals are distributed. Her husband had told her it was "for service, Poly, and that's how it ought to be." His wife was reassured, for she imagined service as the cultivation of letters within government buildings.

Fufaev himself was a man with a savage face if you looked at him from a distance, while close up he had some kind of primal power from the silent mind which mourned within his skull. Despite his glorious and forgotten deeds in war, consolidated only in the records of disbanded divisions, Fufaev revered agriculture and quiet productive labor in general. Now he was the director of provincial salvage and was bound by his post to be continually inventing things. This turned out to be a gift of his. His last measure had been the establishment of a provincial network of manure depots, which issued manure to the horseless poor according to their needs for the fertilization of their lands. He did not however rest upon his achieved successes; at first light he was out riding around town on his cab, looking at the streets, dropping round the back yards, and interrogating the poor he met, all to find still more trash for government salvage. It was also on the broad soil of salvage that he had met Gopner. Fufaev asked everyone he met with equal seriousness, "Comrade, our government isn't so very rich. You haven't got anything that's no good, have you? For scrap?"

"Such as, for example?" the comrade would ask.

Fufaev wasn't troubled for an answer. "Anything eaten or raw or maybe an old loofah sponge of some kind or anything else . . . something not obvious. . ."

"Fufaev, you've got goose fat for brains!" the comrade would growl

angry. "What loofah sponge? I'm using twigs in the bath as it is!"

Just the same however Fufaev occasionally got business-like advice and suggestions, such as for example that the prerevolutionary archives be scrapped to heat the children's homes or that the weeds in back lots and blind alleys be systematically harvested to serve as ready fodder for a goat's milk industry which could be introduced on that basis and which could supply invalids of the civil war and the unpropertied classes with cheap milk.

In his sleep at night Fufaev would see various scrap materials in the form of abstract mountains of nameless and antiquated things. He would awake in horror about his position of responsibility, for he was an honest man. Once Gopner had proposed to him that he should not get disturbed beyond the limit of his powers. Better, he said, to write a circular ordering the citizens to guard the old world without distinction, to keep their rubbish in case the revolution might perhaps have need of it, although it wouldn't be needed anyway, since the new world would be built of eternal materials which would never enter into a discardable condition.

After that Fufaev calmed down somewhat and was less often tormented by massive dreams.

Shumilin knew both Fufaev and Gopner, while Dvanov only knew Gopner.

"Hello, Fyodor Fyodorovich," Dvanov said to Gopner. "How are you?"

"Regular like," Gopner answered. "Only now they're selling freely, God damn it."

Shumilin spoke with Fufaev. The city committee was preparing to appoint him president of a commission to aid seriously wounded Red soldiers. Fufaev agreed, already accustomed after the front to holding obscure positions. Many commanders also served in the social security office, the trade unions, the insurance offices, and other such establishments which had no great weight in the fate of the revolution. When such institutions were criticized for enticing people to the tail of the revolution, then these institutions were moved from the tail to sit on the revolution's neck. For some reason military people honored all service and thus were always ready, in the name of iron discipline, to direct even a Red Reading Corner, when in the past they had commanded entire divisions.

When he heard Gopner's dissatisfied voice, Shumilin turned to him.

"What's with you? Getting bigger rations than the rest of us or something? You don't like free trade?"

"No sir, I don't like it at all, I don't," Gopner announced seriously and at once. "You think maybe that food and revolution can live together? Not in all your born days they won't. I'll be god-damned if it isn't so!"

"What kind of freedom does a hungry man have?" Shumilin smiled with intellectual disdain.

Gopner raised his inspired tone.

comrades  
NGP

“And I say to you that we are all comrades only when there is identical trouble for everybody. As soon as there is bread and property, why you’ll never get a man out of it! What do you mean freedom, if everybody has bread fermenting in his belly and your heart is watching him like a hawk? Thought loves lightness and misery. Has there ever been a time that fat people lived like free men?”

“You’ve read history?” Shumilin doubted him.

“I’m guessing!” Gopner glowered.

“So what do you guess?”

“That we ought to destroy bread and all things for each other, and not save them up. If you can’t do the very best by a man, then give him bread at least. But what we wanted to do was the very best. . . .”

A bell rang in the hall, signalling the start of the meeting.

“Let’s go debate some,” Gopner said to Dvanov. “After all, you and me, we’re not objects now, we’re subjects, god-damn it! I talk now and don’t even understand my own respect!”

There was only one item on the agenda, the New Economic Policy. Gopner fell immediately to pondering it. He had no love for policy or economics because he felt that while calculation was handy in a machine, life has nothing but variables and first persons.

The secretary of the provincial committee, a former railroad technician, held the meetings in low esteem, seeing them as a formality, since all the same a working man would not have time to think during such rapid speech. A proletarian’s thought moves in emotion and not under his bald spot. Thus the secretary usually cut the orator short.

“Squeeze it tighter, comrade, squeeze it! The requisition teams have to get the grain to feed your blither, remember that!”

Occasionally however he simply turned to the meeting at large.

“Comrades, did anyone understand a single thing? I didn’t understand a damned thing. We have to know,” the secretary rapped out angrily, “when we leave here through those doors over there. And this fellow here is snivelling about some objective conditions! I say that when there is a revolution, there are no objective conditions!”

“Correct!” the meeting would drown him out. Even if it was not correct, all the same there were so many that would have arranged things in their own way anyway.

That day the secretary of the provincial committee sat with a long face. He was already elderly and in secret wished to direct some little library in the country, where he could build socialism with his own two hands, raising it up until it was clear to everyone. Informational bulletins, reports, conclusions, and circulars had begun to destroy the secretary’s health. When he took such papers home he never brought them back. Instead he would say to the business coordinator, “Comrade Molelnikov, you know what? That little devil my son burned those papers in the stove while I was asleep. I woke up and all

NBP  
party people  
in tractor drive

there was in the stove was ashes. Let's try not sending copies. We'll see whether that will bring on counterrevolution."

"All right, let's see," Molelnikov agreed. "When it's papers, the business is clear. Nothing to be done, nothing but understandings written there. All the same they hang onto the province like they got a mare by the tail."

Molelnikov came from muzhik stock and was so homesick from his duties in the provincial committee that he had laid out a garden plot in the courtyard of their office building and would go out there during office hours to work a bit.

That day the secretary of the committee was partly satisfied. He saw the New Economic Policy as the revolution being allowed to run ahead in its own direction, following the desires of the revolution's own proletariat. Earlier the revolution had been powered by the winches and traction engines of devices and institutions, as if the government apparatus was in actual fact the machine which would build socialism. The secretary began his speech with that.

Dvanov sat between Gopner and Fufae. In front of him an unknown man muttered continually, thinking something in his closed mind and unable to refrain from words. Those who had learned to think during the revolution always talked loud, so no one complained about him.

The Party people did not resemble one another. Each face had about it some home-made quality, as though the man had extracted himself from someplace with his own solitary strengths. It is possible to distinguish that kind of face among a thousand faces; a frank face darkened by constant tension, and somewhat distrustful. If these unusual home-made people had been suspected in their time, they would have been destroyed with that same fevered frenzy with which normal children beat monsters and animals, with fear and passionate pleasure.

The gas of exhalations had already formed a sort of hazy local sky along the ceiling of the hall. A dull electric light burned up there, pulsating slightly. Probably there was not a single drive belt for the dynamo of the sheave, changing the tension of the dynamo. This could be understood by half of those who were present. The farther the revolution progressed, the greater the opposition showed it by tired machines and things. They had all worked off their terms already, and held on only because of the underpinning mastery of the welders and machinists.

The Party man that Dvanov did not know muttered audibly onward, his head bent down and paying no attention to the speaker.

Gopner looked abstractedly into the distance, carried off by a current of double strength, by the speech and his own hurrying consciousness. Dvanov always felt a painful discomfort when he could not imagine a man closely and live his life a bit, if even for but a short time. He looked with agitation at Gopner, who was an elderly, leathery man eaten almost completely away by forty years of work. His nose, cheekbones, and earlobes had the skin

GOPNER  
NBP - bourgeoisie as scrap

pulled over them so tightly that anyone looking at Gopner came down with a nervous itch. When Gopner undressed in the bathhouse he probably looked like a boy, but in actual fact Gopner was enduring, strong, and patient, as are only the very few. Long years of work had greedily chewed and swallowed Gopner's body, leaving only those parts which also last longest in the grave, his bones and hair. As his life lost all desires and was dried beneath the flat iron of hard work, it compressed itself until it was nothing but concentrated consciousness, which lit Gopner's eyes with the late passion of the bare mind.

Dvanov recalled his earlier meetings with Gopner. At one time they had talked a good deal about putting locks on the Polny Aidar river, on which their town stood, and they had smoked a lot of shag from Gopner's pouch. They talked not so much for the benefit of society as much as out of their own excessive inspiration which other people had not put to their own advantage.

The speaker spoke now in minor simple words, in every sound of which was a movement of thought. The speaker's words held an invisible respect for man and fear of his countering intelligence, which made the listener feel that he too was intelligent.

One Party man, Dvanov's neighbor, announced indifferently to the hall, "There's no rags, so we're laying in a supply of burdocks!"

The electricity faded to a red color. That meant the dynamo at the station was still turning by inertia. All the people looked up. The electricity slowly died out.

"There you go!" somebody said in the dark. In the silence they heard a cart pass loudly along the sidewalk and a baby cry in the watchman's room.

Fufaev asked Dvanov what was meant by exchange of goods with the peasants within the confines of local exchange conditions. This was the subject of the secretary's report. However Dvanov did not know. Gopner did not know either. He said that Fufaev should wait a bit, that if they managed to stitch the belt together down at the power plant, then the man giving the report would tell him.

The electricity began to burn again. At the power station they had grown used to working out snags almost while the machines were still turning.

"Free trade is the same thing for the Soviet government," the secretary continued, "as fodder that's close at hand and easy to harvest, that we can use to smear over our chaos with, at least in the most shameful spots. . . ."

"Understand?" Fufaev asked Gopner quietly. "The bourgeoisie has to be taken into the local turnover. It's also a scrap of sorts. . . ."

"That's the stuff!" Gopner caught the drift and turned dark from a hidden weakness.

The speaker stopped.

"What's with you, Gopner, bellowing like a bull? Don't be in a hurry to agree, there's a lot of stuff I don't get myself yet. I'm not trying to convince

you, I'm asking for your advice. I'm not the smartest one, you know."

"That's just what you are!" Gopner defined him loudly but good-naturedly. "Soon as you get stupider than the rest of us, we'll get another secretary, god-damn it!"

The meeting laughed approvingly. In those days there was no definite cadre of famous people, so every man felt his own name and meaning.

"And you drag the words out to a thread and bring it down to nothing," Gopner again advised the speaker without leaving his seat.

Mud began to drip from the ceiling. Dirty water was coming down from some little break in the attic. Fufaev thought that his son had died of typhus in vain, that in vain had the blockading detachments sealed the cities off from bread, breeding up the fat lice.

Suddenly Gopner turned green, clenched his dry, stubby lips, and got up from his chair.

"I feel awful, Sash!" he said to Dvanov and left, his hand clamped over his mouth. Dvanov went out with him. Gopner stopped outside and leaned his head against a cold brick wall.

"Go on a little farther, Sasha," Gopner said, embarrassed at something. "I'll come on in a second. . . ."

Dvanov stood still. Gopner heaved up some undigested black food, but just a tiny amount.

Gopner wiped his skimpy moustache with a red handkerchief.

"How many years did I live with an empty belly? And not a single problem," Gopner said, embarrassed. "And today I ate three doughnuts in a row . . . looks like I'm not used to it. . . ."

They sat on the stoop. The window from the hall was open for air, and all the words were audible from within. Only the night said nothing, carefully bearing its blossoming stars above the dark and empty places of the earth. The stables of the fire department were opposite the city soviet, but their fire watchtower had burned down two years before. Now the on-duty firewatchman walked along the roof of the city soviet and observed the town from there. It was boring up there, so he sang songs and stamped his boots on the sheet iron roof. Probably the speech from the hall had even reached him.

At the moment the secretary of the city committee was talking about how doomed comrades were being sent to work in food procurement, and how their red banner was used most often for covering coffins.

The fireman did not wait until the end, but began singing his song again.

*Bast shoes through the fields do stalk  
They're empty and people alongside do walk . . .*

"What's he singing there, god-damn him?" Gopner said and listened closer. "He's singing about everything, just so as not to think. The water

pipes are all broken, but for some reason we've still got firemen!"

At that moment the fireman was looking at the city, which was lit solely by the stars, and asking himself what would happen if the entire town were to go up in flame. Then the bare earth beneath the town would go to the muzhiks for land allotments and the fire brigade would be made into a rural police committee, and it would be a lot calmer to work in a police committee.

Behind him Dvanov heard the slow steps of a man climbing down a staircase. The man was muttering his own thoughts to himself, unable to think silently. He was unable to think in the dark. He had first to place his mental agitation into a word and only later, when he had heard the word, could he sense it clearly. Probably he also read books aloud, so as to transform the puzzling dead signs into things of sound, and through that could sense them.

JAP

"I ask you now!" he said to himself convincingly, then listened attentively to himself. "Like we wouldn't know without him! Taxes, trade, exchange of goods. . . . It's just like it used to be! And trade got through all the detachments and the muzhik brought the requisitions down on himself and then what comes out of the whole thing is taxes? Do I have it right, or maybe I'm a fool?"

"No, you're a fool! You really think that Lenin is dumber than you? I ask you now!"

The man was clearly tormented. The fireman on the roof began singing again, not sensing what was taking place below him.

"A new economic policy, he says!" the man was quietly astonished. "They're just given communism a nickname, like I'm called the Jap. . . . and you've just got to put up with it."

The man came over to Dvanov and Gopner and asked them whether he could stop the policy or not.

"You shouldn't do it," Dvanov said.

"Well, since I shouldn't, what's there to doubt?" the man answered himself consolingly, then fished a tobacco pouch out of his pocket. He was short and dressed in the special clothing of the communist, an overcoat from the shoulders of a soldier who had deserted the tsarist war. He had a weak nose on a face that looked Japanese.

Dvanov recognized him as the communist who had been muttering in front of him at the meeting.

"Where do you come from, looking like that?" Gopner asked.

"From communism. Ever hear of the place?" the visiting man answered.

"What's that, a village named in memory of the future?"

The man was cheered that he had a story to tell.

"What do you mean village? You not a Party man or something? There's a place called that, an entire county center. Old style it used to be

called Chevengur. And me, for the meantime I was president of the revolutionary committee."

"Chevengur, not far from Novoselovsk?" Dvanov asked.

"Of course it's not far. Only there's nothing but noisemakers what live there and they don't come over our way. We've got the end of everything in our town."

"The end of what, for God's sake?" Gopner asked distrustfully.

"All of world history, that's what! What do we need it for?"

Neither Dvanov nor Gopner asked any further. The fireman stomped peacefully along the edge of the roof, watching the town through sleepy eyes. He stopped singing, and then grew completely quiet. Probably he had crawled into the attic to sleep. That night however the careless fireman was caught out by his superiors. A formal man stopped before the three men conversing and began to yell up from the sidewalk to the roof.

"Raspopov! Watchman! This is the inspector of the fire department talking! Anybody up there?"

There was pure silence on the roof.

"Raspopov!"

The inspector grew despairing, he climbed up on the roof himself.

The night whispered, barely moving its young leaves, its air, and its grass blades scrabbling through the soil. Dvanov closed his eyes and it seemed to him that somewhere water was moaning evenly and at length as it poured down an underground drain. The president of the Chevengur County Action Committee drew tobacco into his nose, then sneezed expertly. The meeting had for some reason grown quiet. Probably the people were thinking.

"So many interesting stars in the sky," he said, "but there's no connections to them."

The fire department inspector led the duty watchman down from the roof. The watchman went to his fate on submissive legs which were cold from sleeping.

"You're going on a month of forced labor," the inspector said dispassionately.

"If they'll lead me, I'll go," the guilty one agreed. "It makes no difference to me. The rations are the same as they are here and they work according to the law."

Gopner got up to go home. Now he felt sick throughout his body. The Chevengur president snorted his tobacco one last time and announced sincerely, "Oh lord how pleasant it is now in Chevengur, fellows!"

Dvanov suddenly missed Kopenkin, his far-away comrade who was hale and hearty off in the blackness of the steppes.

At that hour Kopenkin was standing on the porch of the Chernovka village soviet quietly whispering a poem about Rosa that he had composed in the current days. Stars hung over him, ready to drip on his head, and the fields of socialism, the motherland of the unknown peoples of the future,

collapse  
Jap - chepurny

spread out beyond the town's last fence. Proletarian Strength and Dvanov's pacer munched hay evenly, relying in everything else upon the bravery and intelligence of man.

Dvanov too got up and stuck out his hand to the president of Chevengur.

"What's your name?"

The man from Chevengur could not come around immediately from his own churning thoughts.

"Let's go, comrades! Come work with us," he said. "Oh, things are so fine in Chevengur now! There's a moon in the sky and beneath that there's an enormous work zone, and all of it is in communism, like a fish in a lake! There's only one thing we don't have . . . fame."

Gopner stopped the boaster quickly.

"What moon damn you? Last week it was in its last quarter."

"I was carried away when I said that," the man from Chevengur said. "It's even better without a moon where we live. We've got lamps to light things up. With lampshades."

The three men set off along the street, accompanied by the troubled exclamations of some birds in the picket fences who sensed light in the east. Sometimes it is good to stay up all night. On such nights the invisible half of the windless world opened up to Dvanov.

Dvanov liked the word Chevengur. It resembled the attractive rumbling of an unknown land, although Dvanov had heard of this small county seat before. When he found out that the man from Chevengur would pass through Kalitva, Kopenkin asked him to visit Kopenkin in Chernovka, to tell him not to wait for him, but to continue on his own road. Dvanov wanted to start studying again and to finish the polytechnicum.

"Not hard to drop by," the Chevengurian agreed. "After communism it's interesting to have a look at people cut from odd lots."

"The devil alone knows what he's blithering!" Gopner said, getting worked up, "There's collapse everywhere, and he's the only one that's got lights under a lampshade!"

Dvanov leaned a piece of paper up against the fence and wrote Kopenkin a letter.

"Dear comrade Kopenkin! Nothing special. The policy now is different, but correct. Give my pacer to some poor man and go. . . ."

Dvanov stopped, wondering where Kopenkin might go that he could find himself a place for some time.

"What's your name?" Dvanov asked the man from Chevengur.

"Mine, you mean? Chepurny. But just write 'the Jap.' The whole region is orientated on 'the Jap.'"

"Go to the Jap. He says that he has socialism. If it's true, then write me, because I won't be coming back now, even though I don't want to part from you. I still don't know what's the best thing for me. I won't forget you

NP  
"a lost cause"

and I won't forget Rosa Luxemburg. Your companion, Alexander Dvanov."  
Chepurny took the paper and read it right there.

"You wrote all foggy," he said. "That's a weak feeling for the mind of you!"

Then they said good-bye and separated in their own directions, Gopner and Dvanov towards the edge of town and the Jap to an inn.

"Well, how was it?" Zakhar Pavlovich asked Dvanov.

Alexander told him about the New Economic Policy.

"So it's a lost cause then," the father concluded, lying on his bed.

"What doesn't ripen in the correct time was sown in vain. When they took power they promised the entire earthly sphere that things would be better the very next day and now you say that objective conditions won't let us get going. . . . I mean, the devil made it hard for priests to go to heaven too."

When Gopner got to his apartment all his pains passed.

"Do I want something?" he thought. "My father wanted to see God with his own two eyes, and what I want is some sort of empty place, damn it, so as to do everything over from the beginning, depending just on my own mind. . . ."

The Jap wasn't pressed about anything. In his town of Chevengur the  blessings of life, the precision of truth, and the woe of existence all arose of their own accord in correspondence with their need. At the inn he let his horse eat grass and he lay down to nap in the buckboard.

"I think I'll take that pacer from this here Kopenkin as a relief horse," he decided in advance. "Why give it to some poor man, when as it is the poor have such enormous advantages. I ask you now!"

In the morning the yard of the inn became jammed with the carts of peasants who had come to the market. They were each bringing in very little, some a bushel of wheat, some five buckets of milk, so that they would not be upset if it was confiscated. However they had not been met at the city gates by a blockade detachment, so now they expected raids in the city. For some reasons however, the raids never came and the muzhiks sat on their goods in misery.

"They aren't confiscating anything now?" Chepurny asked the peasants.

"They haven't touched us, for some reason. We don't know whether to be happy or sad. . . ."

"How's that?"

"Well, suppose that something even worse has come! It'd be better if they was to take the stuff. All the same this government won't let us live for nothing!"

"That's the sort you are, eh? That's where he's getting hit!" Chepurny thought to himself, guessing the man's point. "We ought to declare them all petty land-owners, set the beggars on them, and liquidate them all in twenty-four hours! The whole courtly bourgeois bunch of them!"

"Give me a smoke," the same elderly peasant asked.

Chepurny glowered at him with hostile eyes.

"You have your own house and here you go begging from somebody who's got nothing!"

The muzhik understood, but concealed his offense.

"But after all, comrade, it was the requisitions what took it all away. If it wasn't for it I'd be pouring tobacco into my own pouch!"

"You pouring it in?" Chepurny was dubious. "You'd pour it out, that's more like it!"

The peasant noticed a loose linchpin and got down from his cart. He picked it up and stuck it in his boot top.

"It depends," he announced in an even voice. "Comrade Lenin like they say in the papers has fell in love with reckoning. Seems like now you can take stuff out of evil hands and put it in your sack, if it's spilling out of their sack onto the ground."

"You live with a sack too?" Chepurny asked straight.

"No other way. Soon as I eat, I tie the mouth up. And here it comes pouring out of yours and nobody picks it up. Us, countrymen, we're knowing fellows. So how's come you offend a man for nothing?"

The Jap fell silent, used from Chevengur to large minds. Despite bearing the title of president of the revolutionary committee, Chepurny took no advantage of the title. Sometimes when he used to sit in the office the melancholy thought would come to him that out in the villages there were people who were absolutely similar to one another and who didn't know themselves how they were to continue life and that if they weren't touched, they would die out. Thus it seemed the entire county needed his mental concern. As he wrote about the area of the county, the Jap convinced himself of the personal mind of each citizen, and so had long since cancelled all administrative aid to the populace. The elderly man with whom he had spoken again convinced the Jap of the simple feeling that a living man had learned his fate while still in his mother's stomach and thus has no need of an overseer.

As he was leaving the yard of the inn the Jap was cut off by the owner's henchman, who asked for his money for the night's lodging. The Jap had no money, and could not have had any. Chevengur had no budget, to the great joy of the province, which suggested that life in Chevengur proceed on the healthy basis of paying their own way. The citizens had long preferred a happy life to labor of any sort, to structures and mutual gains which required sacrificing the comradely body of man, the body which lives but once.

The Jap had nothing to give for his lodging.

"Take what you want," the Chevengurian told the henchman. "I am a naked communist."

At the sound of this conversation the same muzhik who had had thoughts against the Jap came over.

"And how much does the law say he should pay?" he asked.

"A million, if he didn't sleep in the heated room," the myrmidon said definitively.

The peasant turned away and pulled a leather pouch from under his shirt.

"There you go, little fellow, and now let the man go," the Jap's former partner in conversation said, handing over the money.

"It's my job . . . I have to. . ." the henchman excused himself. "I'd knock your soul loose for you, but I can't let you out of the yard for free."

"And with reason," the peasant agreed calmly. "This isn't the steppe here, it's an establishment, a shelter for man and beast alike."

Once out of town the Jap felt freer and more intelligent. The calming expanse once more opened before him. The man from Chevengur disliked forests, mounds, and buildings. He liked the flat belly of the earth leaning against the sky as it inhaled the wind and pressed down beneath the weight of a traveller on foot.

Listening to the secretary of the revolutionary committee reading him the circulars, tables, questions for the formation of plans, and the other government materials from the province, the Jap always said simply, "Politics." Then he would smile thoughtfully, having secretly understood nothing. Soon the secretary stopped reading things to him and instead began coping with the entire volume of business without the Jap's management.

The Jap was drawn now by a black horse with a white belly. Who it belonged to, he did not know. The Jap had first seen it on the city square, where the horse was eating the plantings for a future park. He had led it into his yard, harnessed it, and driven off. That the horse belonged to no one made it even dearer and more pleasant for the man from Chevengur, for there was no one to take care of it, except for random citizens. It was for this reason that all the livestock in Chevengur county had a fat, well-fed look and round body contours.

The road dragged the Jap onward for ages. He sang all the songs he could remember, then wanted to think a bit about something, but there was nothing to think about. Everything was clear. There remained but to act, to somehow turn about and torment his own happy life so that it wouldn't become too good, but it is hard to become overburdened on a buckboard. The man from Chevengur leapt down from the wagon and ran alongside the horse, which blazed with tired steam. After exhausting himself running, the Jap jumped onto the horse's back, while the buckboard rattled along behind as before, empty. The Jap looked the wagon over. It seemed to him poorly and incorrectly made. It was too heavy to pull.

"Whoa," he said to the horse, then unhitched the buckboard. "Should I waste the living life of a horse on dead weight? I ask you now!" The Jap abandoned the harness and rode off on top of the liberated horse. The buckboard dropped its shafts and stood waiting for the whims of the first peasant to drive past.

"Now the blood's flowing in me and this horse!" the Jap thought aimlessly as he galloped, spared efforts of his own. "I'll have to keep Kopenkin's pacer just in reins. No point in putting the harness on him. . . ."

Towards evening the Jap reached some tiny little steppe village, as desolate as if all the people there had long ago laid down their bones. The evening sky looked like a continuation of the steppe, and the horse beneath the man from Chevengur looked to the endless horizon as the terrible fate of its tired legs.

The Jap knocked at someone's peaceful hut. An old man came out of the back door and looked at him from behind the fence.

"Unlock your gates," the Jap said. "You've got bread and hay around here, don't you?"

The old man remained fearlessly silent while he studied the horseman with his acute and accustomed eyes. The Jap climbed over the fence himself and unlocked the gate. Once in the barn the famished horse immediately began to crop at the grasses which had long ago settled down for the night. The old man's legs, it seemed, buckled in the face of such autocratism on the part of a guest, and he sat on a felled oak sapling as though a stranger in his own house. The Jap found no one in the hut, which smelled of the cleanliness of dry old age, which no longer sweats or splatters things with the traces of an aroused body. On a shelf the Jap found a hunk of bread made from oat husks and dried grass. He left half for the old man and ate the other half with effort.

The old man came into the hut as night began. The Jap was gathering up the snuff crumbs in his pockets so that he could have a snort and not grow bored before going to sleep.

"Your horse is carrying on out there," the old man said, "so I gave him a little hay, from the second cutting. There's just an armful left from last year . . . he might as well eat it, I suppose."

The old man spoke in a distracted, unthinking voice, as though he had some burden on his soul. The Jap grew cautious.

"Is it far from your place to Kalitva, pops?"

"Far, near. . ." the old man answered. "Leastwise it's closer if you's to ride there than it is if you stay here. . . ."

The man from Chevengur looked the hut over quickly and noticed the tongs at the corner of the stove. He had no revolver with him, since he considered the revolution already silent.

"Who is it you've got here? Bandits, maybe?"

"To stay alive two rabbits will eat a wolf, kind sir. There's a real sad people that goes past out there and our village is next to the road, so it's handy for anybody what wants to do a bit of robbing. . . . So the muzhiks sit down in the gullies and the far-off washes with their families, and whoever shows up here is even forbidden life. . . ."

Night dropped its cloud-covered, inescapable low sky. The Jap rode out

of the village into the secure blackness of the steppe, and the horse walked into the distance, sniffing out the road for itself. A fertile warmth oozed from the earth in thick clouds. The Chevengurian breathed deeply and then fell asleep, his arms tightly wrapped about the neck of the wandering horse. That night the person toward whom he rode was sitting at a table in the Chernovka village soviet. A lamp burning on the table, lighting the enormous murk beyond the windows. Kopenkin was telling three muzhiks that socialism is water on the high steppe, where excellent land was going to waste.

"We've known that since we was little, Stepan Efremych," the peasants agreed. They were happy to chat because they didn't feel like sleeping. "You're not a local lad, and all the same right off you noticed what we need. Who gave you the idea? But what'll we get if we go making this socialism for the Soviet government, for free? Seems like there's more than a few things have to be done to it . . . wouldn't you say?"

Kopenkin mourned that he didn't have Dvanov with him. He could have proved socialism to them intelligently.

"What do you mean, what'll you get?" Kopenkin asked independently. "You'd be the very first to have calm in your souls forever, that's what. And what have you got there now?"

"In there? Now?" the man stopped talking and looked at his chest, trying to see what he had withing himself. "All I've got in there. Stepan Efremych, is sadness and a black space of some sorts. . . ."

"Well, there you go then! You see it yourself!" Kopenkin pointed out.

"Last year I buried my woman from cholera," the saddened citizen concluded, "and this year the requisition detachment ate up my cow. The soldiers lived in my hut two weeks and drank my well dry. The muzhiks remember that. . . ."

"You bet we do!" the two witnesses affirmed.

Kopenkin's horse Proletarian Strength had fattened up and rounded out over the weeks because it stood without campaigns. At night it neighed because of the strength stagnating within it and homesickness for the steppe. In the daytime the muzhiks came into the yard of the village soviet and walked around Proletarian Strength, a couple of turns each. Proletarian Strength watched his audience gloomily, raised his head, and yawned miserably. The peasants backed away from the grieving beast in respect, afterwards saying to Kopenkin, "That's a real horse you have there, Stepan Efimych. Priceless, a regular Draban Ivanych!"

Kopenkin had long known the worth of his horse.

"A class animal, for sure. His consciousness is more revolutionary than you are!"

Occasionally Proletarian Strength set to work tearing down the barn in which it stood idle. Then Kopenkin would come out on the porch and order it shortly, "Stop it, you bum!"

The horse would calm down.

From proximity to Proletarian Strength Dvanov's pacer had become completely mangy, overgrown with a long shaggy coat, and had begun to shy even at sudden swallows.

"That horse is begging for a firm hand," visitors to the village soviet decided, "or else he's going to ruin himself."

In his duties as president of the village soviet Kopenkin met no direct responsibilities. Muzhiks came into the soviet every day to talk. Kopenkin listened to their conversation but he almost never answered them, and only stood guard over the revolutionary village to prevent bandit attacks. However it seemed as though the bandits had quieted down somehow.

At an assembly he announced once and for all, "The Soviet government has given you material well-being. Use it so there's no left-overs for bandits. You are people and comrades, and I'm not one of your brainy types, so don't come to the soviet with backyard squabbles. My job is a short one, to cut off any half-baked intentions at the roots. . . ."

The peasants respected Kopenkin more and more each day because he made no mention of requisitions or forced hauling responsibilities and because he put all the papers from the county revolutionary committee in a file for Dvanov to deal with when he returned. The literate muzhiks read these papers and advised Kopenkin to destroy them without doing anything further. They said that now government could be organized on any spot and no one would reproach it.

"You read the new law, Stepan Efremych?" they asked.

"No. What of it?" Kopenkin asked.

"What do you mean? Lenin has announced it. Government is a local power now, not one up above!"

"Then the county isn't valid for us," Kopenkin drew the conclusion. "Those papers have to be thrown out. It's the law."

"Absolutely legal," the peasants confirmed. "But instead let's divvy them up so's to make cigarettes from."

Kopenkin liked the new law and was interested to discover whether the Soviet government could be established out in the open, without structures.

"It could," his pondering partners in conversation responded, "if the poor were a little closer and the White guard a little farther off. . . ."

Kopenkin was reassured. That night the conversation ended at midnight. The lamp had run out of kerosene.

"The county seat doesn't give us much kerosene," the muzhiks said sympathetically as they left, not having talked themselves out. "The government doesn't service us too well. Look, they send us that entire thing of ink over there, and nobody needs it. They should have sent kerosene, or maybe sweet butter."

Kopenkin went outside to have a look at nature. He loved this element and always observed it before going to sleep. Proletarian Strength sensed his friend and nickered softly. Kopenkin heard his horse, and once again the

Proletarian Strength brings down barn

little woman appeared in his imagination like irrevocable regret.

Even at that moment she lay somewhere alone beneath the dark agitation of the spring night, while her empty shoes lay dumped in some storeroom, the shoes in which she had walked while warm and alive.

"Rosa!" he said in his second, little voice.

The horse whinnied in the barn as though he had glimpsed the road, and he bashed his leg against the cross beam of the lock. He was prepared to break out into the roadlessness of spring and fly off straight to that German cemetery, the better land of Kopenkin. The hidden alarm that usually languished in Kopenkin beneath the concerns of village soviet presidential vigilance and comradely devotion to Dvanov now bared itself on the surface. Knowing that Kopenkin was nearby the horse began to act up in the barn, throwing the weight of its enormous feelings against the walls and bolts of its stall, as though it were he who loved Rosa Luxemburg, not Kopenkin.

Kopenkin was seized by jealousy.

"Stop it, you bum!" he said to the horse, feeling within himself a warm wave of shame. The horse grumbled a bit and fell still, translating his passions into a shriek within his chest.

Ragged black clouds scudded terribly across the sky, the remnants of a distant cloudburst. Up above there was probably a dark nocturnal whirlwind, but down below it was quiet and peaceful. Even the neighbor's chickens could be heard shifting position and the fence squeaking from the movements of harmless petty vermin.

Kopenkin leaned an arm against the stuccoed wall. His heart sank within him as it lost its firm will.

"Rosa! Oh my Rosa!" he whispered to himself, so that the horse wouldn't hear. However the horse watched through a crack with one eye and breathed so dryly and hot on the boards that the wood became dessicated. When he noticed the bowed, drained Kopenkin, the horse pushed his muzzle and chest against one of the uprights and brought the entire structure down on its hindquarters. Proletarian Strength was startled by the unexpected nervous horror and roared like a camel, then tossed the entire crushing framework of the barn from its rump. Then it flung itself toward Kopenkin, ready to gallop, to swallow the air with a foaming mouth, and to feel the invisible roads beneath its feet.

Kopenkin immediately dried his face and a wind passed inside his chest. He leapt up on the horse without bothering to bridle or saddle him, and then he grew joyous. Proletarian Strength ran out beyond the village with a flourish. Because of the weight of its body it didn't know how to jump, so the horse simply trampled the fences of threshing floors and kitchen gardens with its forelegs, then stepped over and continued on its way. Kopenkin cheered up, as though he had only twenty-four hours to wait until he saw Rosa Luxemburg.

"It's great to be riding!" Kopenkin said aloud, inhaling the damp of late

night and sniffing the smells of the grass as it pushed its way through the ground.

The horse scattered the warmth of its powers along the tracks of its hooves, hurrying to leave for the open spaces. Kopenkin sensed how speed was making his heart rise to his throat as it grew lighter in weight. A bit faster and Kopenkin would have burst into song from the lightness of his joy, but Proletarian Strength was too completely equipped to gallop for long, and soon he was walking with his usual vast stride. It was impossible to see whether or not there was a road beneath the horse. Only the edge of the world was touched with light, and Proletarian Strength tried to reach that edge as quickly as he could, thinking it was the place Kopenkin had to go. The steppe stopped nowhere, running right up to the lowered sky in a smooth lingering slope that no horse had ever conquered entirely. A cold damp steam from the distant swales rose up on both sides in quiet columns, as did the stove smoke of starving villages. Kopenkin liked the steam and the smoke and the unknown, well-rested people.

"The joy of life!" he said to himself, while cold crept down his neck like pesky bread crumbs. A sharply outlined distant man stood among the strips of light, scratching his head with one hand.

"Nice place he's found to have a scratch!" Kopenkin said, condemning the man. "He must have some kind of business there for him to be standing out in the middle of a field at daybreak when he should be sleeping. I think I'll ride over and have a look at his documents. I'll give the devil a scare!"

However disappointment awaited Kopenkin. The man who was scratching by the light of the breaking day had not even a trace of pockets or other slits where he could keep his vital documents. Kopenkin reached him a half hour later, as the sunlight rustled throughout the entire sky. The man was sitting on a dry hummock and carefully picking mud from the folds of his body with his fingernails, as though there were no water on earth in which to bathe.

"There's a devil what needs to be organized!" Kopenkin said to himself and decided not to check any documents, since he remembered that apart from the portrait of Rosa Luxemburg he had sewn in his cap he also had no papers whatever.

In the distance a horse stood motionless in the rolling fog of the exhaling earth. Its legs were too short for Kopenkin to be able to believe that the horse was alive and real, while some tiny person clung feebly to its neck. Kopenkin yelled "Rosa!" with the itching rapture of valor and Proletarian Strength carried its full body lightly and quickly through the mud. The place where the short-legged horse stood motionless proved to be a pond which once had been full but was now disappearing. The horse had sunk its legs into the silty sediment. The man on the horse was sleeping deeply, wholeheartedly clasping the neck of his horse, as though it were the body of a devoted and emotional woman. The horse wasn't really asleep and looked trustingly at

Kopenkin, anticipating nothing worse for itself. The sleeping man breathed unevenly and chortled joyously in the depths of this throat. He was probably participating in happy dreams at that moment. Kopenkin looked the man over completely and failed to sense in him an enemy. His overcoat was too long, and even in sleep his face was ready for revolutionary deeds and the tenderness of world-wide cohabitation. The sleeper's personality was of no particular beauty, but the heartbeat in the arteries of his thin neck forced one to think of him as a good, unpropertied, and pitiful person. Kopenkin removed the sleeper's cap and looked inside. There in greasy, sweaty, ancient embroidery was written "G.G. Breyer-Lodz."

Kopenkin put the cap back on the sleeper's head, which did not know itself what capitalist object it wore.

"Hey you!" Kopenkin addressed the sleeping man, who had stopped smiling and grown more serious. "How come you don't change your bourgeois cap, huh?"

The man was gradually waking up of his own accord, hastily concluding his attractive dreams. He was dreaming of the gulches near his birthplace, where a happy crush of people sheltered, people whom the sleeping man knew had died in the poverty of labor.

"Pretty soon in Chevengur you can get any hat you want made just like that," the man said, awake now, "Just measure your head size with a piece of string."

"And just who might you be?" Kopenkin asked with icy indifference, long since accustomed to masses of people.

"Me? I live nearby now. I'm the Jap from Chevengur, a Party member. I've come to see comrade Kopenkin and get his pacer, but then I got my horse all stuck and fell asleep myself."

"What kind of Party member are you, you devil?" Kopenkin asked "It's somebody else's pacer you want, and not communism!"

"Not true, comrade, not true," the Jap said, offended. "Do you really think I'd dare take the pacer before communism comes? We already have communism. There just aren't many horses in it."

Kopenkin looked at the rising sun and marvelled that such an enormous hot globe could float so easily up toward noon. That meant that not everything in life was hard and poor.

"You mean you've already coped with communism?"

"Oho, I ask you now!" the Jap exclaimed, offended.

"That means you're just short on caps and horses, and there's more than enough of everything else?"

The Jap could not hide his violent love for Chevengur. He took off his cap and threw it in the mud, then fished out Dvanov's note about giving up the pacer and tore it into four parts.

"No, comrade, Chevengur doesn't collect property, it destroys it. A general and excellent man lives there, and just take note of the fact that

that's without any commode in the house. And they are completely necessary for each other. And as for the pacer, it's like this. I was in town and got somebody's prejudice in the city soviet and somebody else's fleas in the inn. And what are you going to do here, I ask you now!"

"Show me Chevengur then," Kopenkin said. "Is there a monument to comrade Rosa Luxemburg there? Probably your lackeys didn't think of that, huh?"

"What do you mean? Of course there is! It stands in one of the country settlement points, made out of native stone. In the same place there's comrade Liebnicht reading a speech to the masses, and full height too. They was thought up in their turn, and if somebody else was to go die, we wouldn't let them slip by either!"

"Say, what do you think?" Kopenkin asked. "Was comrade Liebnicht what a muzhik is to a woman for Rosa, or is it just me thinking that?"

"You're just thinking that," the Jap reassured Kopenkin. "Why, they were people with a consciousness! They didn't have any free time, and when people think, they don't love. What is this? You or me, I ask you now!"

Rosa Luxemburg became even dearer to Kopenkin. His heart struck within him untiring blows of attraction to socialism in the confines of his body.

"Tell me what you've got in this Chevengur of yours. Socialism on the watersheds or just the steps up to it?" Kopenkin asked now in a different voice, in the way that a son asks his brother when they meet after five silent years of separation whether their mother is still alive, when he believes the old woman is already dead.

The Jap lived in socialism and thus had long ago grown unaccustomed to this calamitous unease for the defenseless and beloved. In Chevengur he had demobilized society along with the tsarist army, because no one wanted to disperse his own body for an invisible common good. Each wished to see his life returned to him from close, comradely people.

The Jap calmly snorted snooze, and only after that grew bitter. "What are you holding up some watershed for me? And who do you think the bottom lands went to? Landowners? We've got socialism everywhere in Chevengur. Every last lump of the place is international property! We've got a high superiority of life!"

"And who owns the livestock?" Kopenkin asked, regretting with all the amassed power of his body that it had not been Dvanov and he who had achieved the foundation of that luminous world which lined the road to Rosa, but rather the puny little fellow across from him.

"Pretty soon we're going to turn the livestock out into nature," the man from Chevengur answered. "After all, they're almost people. It's just that age-old oppression has made the livestock lag behind man. But the livestock wants to become people too, you know!"

—Kopenkin stroked Proletarian Strength and felt their mutual equality. He

Women  
Firs

had known this earlier too, only his thoughts were not as strong as those of the Chevengurian. For that reason a lot of Kopenkin's feelings remained unexpressed and had thus turned into torment.

At the edge between the earth and sky a string of buckboards appeared over the break in the steppe and drove crossways through Kopenkin's sight. They carried tiny little village people past the clouds. The carts raised up dust, which meant that there had been no rain over there.

"Let's go to your parts, then!" Kopenkin said. "Let's have a look at the fact itself."

"Let's go," the Jap agreed. "I miss my Klavdyusha!"

"What's that, your wife or something?"

"We don't have wives. All that's left is female companions."

\* \* \* \* \*

The mists perished in the sharp sight of the sun like dreams and what by night had been terrifying lay pale and illuminated in simple expanses. The earth slept bare and tormented, like a mother whose blankets have slipped to the floor. Gloom still hung in quiet ravings over the steppe stream where wandering people drank water and fish floated pop-eyed on the surface as they waited for the light.

It was still some three miles from there to Chevengur, but already vistas were opening onto the unploughed fields of Chevengur, onto the dampness of the little county river, onto all the sad low places where the people of that region lived. The poor man Firs was walking along the damp bottomland. He had heard at the last ~~few places~~ he had spent the night that a free place had been opened out in the steppe, where passers-by lived and everybody got fed what they produced. His entire road, his entire life Firs had walked along water or dry ground. He liked flowing water. It aroused him, demanded something of him. Firs though did not know what the water needed and why he needed it. He just picked out spots where the water was thickened with earth and dipped his sandals in that direction. At night he wrung out his foot cloths for a long time, in order to test the water with his fingers and once again see its weakened flow. When near brooks and riffles he would sit and listen to the living currents until he became totally calm, ready himself to lie down in the part and become part of the nameless meadow brook. The night before he had slept on the shore of a river channel, listening all night to the singing water, and then in the morning he had crawled down and lowered his body to the enticing dampness, thus achieving peace before reaching Chevengur.

Somewhat beyond Firs among the relaxed plains could be seen a small town in the piercing purity of the morning. The biting freshness of the air and the sun standing opposite the elderly man who stood looking at the town made his kind eyes run with tears. Not only his eyes were kind. So too was

his entire soft, warm face, a face which had the incorruptability of the newborn. He was already well on in years and he had an almost white beard. However the mites that shared the beards of all other old men did not live in his. He walked at a middling pace towards his life's useful goal. Those who had walked beside the old man knew how sweet-smelling and touching he was, how pleasant it was to carry on honest, peaceful conversations with him. His wife had called him Daddy and spoken to him in a whisper. The initial gentle timidity of new spouses never ended between them, and perhaps for that reason they had no children and an eternal dessicated silence always hung in their house. Only occasionally his wife's peaceable voice was heard, saying, "Alexei Alexeevich, Daddy, come eat what God has sent and don't torment me."

Alexei Alexeevich ate so precisely that even in his fiftieth year his teeth were not ruined and his mouth did not smell of rot, but solely of the warmth of breathing. In youth while his contemporaries were embracing the girls and in the same sleepless strength of their youth uprooting the suburban groves by night, Alexei Alexeevich through his own efforts had concluded that food must be chewed as long as possible, and from that time on he had chewed until the food dissolved in his mouth completely. This activity occupied one-fourth of Alexei Alexeevich's entire waking life. Before the revolution Alexei Alexeevich had been on the board of directors of a credit association and a member of the town council of his entirely unimportant town, which stood now on the edge of the district of Chevengur.

Alexei Alexeevich was now walking to Chevengur and watching the district center from the surrounding heights. He sensed himself the constant odor of freshly sifted flour that wafted from the surface of his clean body and he chewed a bit of saliva in his quiet joy at being present in life.

The old town was already in turmoil despite the early hour. People could be seen wandering around the town among the clearings and the brush, some in pairs, some alone, but all without bundles or property. Not one of Chevengur's ten bell towers was ringing. Only the rustling of the town's populace beneath the quiet sun of the tilled fields could be heard. At the same time the houses in the town were moving about. They were probably being dragged somewhere by people invisible from where he stood. Before Alexei Alexeevich's own eyes a garden of no great size suddenly bent forward and moved gracefully into the distance. It too was being resettled from the place of its roots to a better place.

Alexei Alexeevich squatted down two hundred yards from Chevengur in order to purge himself before entering the town. He did not understand the science of Soviet life. He was attracted solely by one of its branches, the cooperatives, about which he had read in the newspaper *Poverty*. From that day on he lived in silence, lost his spiritual calm, and cleaved to no business whatever. Thus it often happened that Alexei Alexeevich would fly into a sudden rage and extinguish the votives in the ikon corner of their home,

which would cause his wife to lie down in fear and cry loudly. When he finished reading about the cooperatives, Alexei Alexeevich had gone over to the ikon of Nikolai Mirlilisky and lit the votive with his own gentle and wheaten hands. That day he had found his sacred task and the pure path of his further life. He sensed Lenin as he did his own dead father, who once long ago when little Alexei Alexeevich was frightened by a distant fire, unable to understand the terrifying occurrence, had said to his son, "Now just hold on to me tight as ever you can, Alesha!" Alesha had clung to his father, who also smelled of sifted flour, and then grew calm and began to smile sleepily. "There, you see?" his father had said. "And here you were all afraid!" Alesha had fallen asleep without letting go of his father, and in the morning had seen the fire in the stove which his mother had kindled to make cabbage pies.

After studying the article on cooperatives Alexei Alexeevich began to cling with his entire soul to the Soviet government, taking it to be a warm native blessing. A broad highway of holiness opened before him, leading upwards into God's kingdom of worldly prosperity and concord. Up until then Alexei Alexeevich had only feared socialism, but now, when socialism was called a cooperative society, Alexei Alexeevich fell sincerely in love with it. As a child for a long time he had not loved God, fearing Sabaoth, Lord God of Hosts, but when his mother said to him, "But where do you think I'm going when I die, baby boy?" then Alesha came to love God too, so that He would defend his mother after death, and so recognized God as a replacement for his father.

Alexei Alexeevich had come to Chevengur to search for the cooperative, the people's salvation from poverty and mutual spiritual savagery.

As could be seen from his nearby vantage point, some unknown force of the human reason was at work in Chevengur, but Alexei Alexeevich forgave that mind in advance, for it was acting in the name of the cooperative union of people and a business-like love between them. Alexei Alexeevich wanted first to find the charter of the cooperative and then of the district executive and have a brotherly chat with the president, Comrade Jap, about the organization of a network of cooperatives.

First though Alexei Alexeevich did some preliminary thinking about Chevengur, which was susceptible to the unprofitable capital expenditures of revolution. Summer dust climbed from the industrious earth up into the heights of the intense heat. The sky above the gardens, the little district churches, and the immobile town property comforted Alexei Alexeevich with touching memories, though of a sort which not all could achieve. Now Alexei Alexeevich stood in complete awareness of himself, sensing the warmth of the sky like the skin of his mother and childhood itself, and all was as it had been so long ago, before it had passed into the eternal vaults of memory, and the sunny center of the sky flowed with nourishment for all people, like blood from the maternal cord.

The sun might illuminate the well-being of Chevengur for ages yet,

lighting its apple orchards, its tin roofs beneath which the inhabitants fed their children, and the purified burning domes of the churches which meekly summoned man from the shades of the trees into the emptiness of round eternity.

Trees grew on almost all the streets of Chevengur, giving their branches as staffs to the wanderers who roamed through Chevengur but did not stay the night. A multitude of grasses blossomed in the yards of Chevengur, giving shelter, food, and some point in life to the hordes of insects in the lower depths of the atmosphere, so that Chevengur was only in part settled by people. The tiny excited creatures were far thicker than people in the towns, but the old-time Chevengurians took no account of that in their minds.

cl +  
make re

They took account of larger occurrences, such as the summer heat, the storms, and the Second Coming of God. If the summer was hot, the Chevengurians warned one another over the back fences that now there wouldn't even be a winter and that soon the houses would begin to burn up of their own accord. On orders from their fathers the youths of Chevengur carried water from their wells and poured it over the houses to delay these fires. At night after a hot day there was often rain.

"First it's like an oven, then rain," the Chevengurians marvelled. "Never been such a thing in all my born days!"

If a blizzard blew up in the winter, the Chevengurians already knew in advance that the next day they would have to crawl out through the chimney—snow would cover the houses up for sure, even though each of them had a shovel ready in the room.

"You really think you can dig out of that with a shovel?" an old man somewhere doubted. "With a blizzard like that howling out there? Why there shouldn't ought to be anything like it in these parts. Now Old Nikanor, he's older than me . . . why, it's eighty years since he started smoking! . . . even he doesn't remember such a plague of a winter. Something's going to happen for sure!"

During windstorms at night in the fall the Chevengurians slept on the floor so as to take as solid a comfort as they could and to be nearer to the earth and the grave. In secret every Chevengurian believed that each storm or heat wave would turn out to be the Second Coming of God, but no one wanted to leave his home early and die before the fullness of his years, which is why they always relaxed and drank tea after heat waves, windstorms and coldspells.

"The Lord be praised, it's over!" the Chevengurians crossed themselves with happy hands at the end of a dying event. "We expected Jesus Christ, but He went past, His holy will be done!"

If the oldtimers of Chevengur lived with no memory of the past, then the others didn't know at all how they were to live, when every moment might be the beginning of the Second Coming, when the people would be split into two ranks and turned into naked and penniless souls.

"Uninsured spiritual state"  
40 miles from train station  
ideology / Second Coming

At one time Alexei Alexeevich had lived awhile in Chevengur and knew most well its uninsured spiritual fate. When the Jap had arrived on foot from the train station, a walk of forty miles, to take power in the town and district, he first thought that the town lived by banditry because everyone so clearly did nothing, although everyone ate bread and drank tea. For that reason the Jap had given out a compulsory questionnaire to be filled in. It had one question: "For what reason and by means of what production of what substance do you live in the workers' government?"

Almost the entire population of Chevengur answered the same way. The answer had first been thought up by the church singer Loboshikhin, and then his neighbors had copied it and passed it along orally.

We live for the sake of God, and not our own," wrote the Chevengurians.

The Jap was unable to clarify the godly life for himself smoothly, so he immediately founded a commission of forty people to conduct a one day, house by house investigation of the town. There were more questionnaires, and of clearer import, for in them the people named their various occupations, such as prisoner service in a key position, expectation of the truth of life, impatience with God, deathly old age, reader aloud to wanderers, and sympathizer to the Soviet government. Chepurny studied the questionnaires and was tormented by the complexity of civilian occupations, but in time he remembered Lenin's slogan that "It is devilishly difficult to run a government." Then he grew completely calm again. The forty men came to the Jap early in the morning, drank water in the entrance after their long treks, and announced, "They're lying, comrade Chepurny. They don't do anything. They just lie there and sleep."

The Jap understood. "You guys all cracked or something? It's nighttime. Now tell me something about their ideology! I ask you. . . ."

"They don't have any," the president of the commission said. "They are all waiting for the end of the world."

"Did you tell them that the end of the world would be a counterrevolutionary step now?" the Jap asked, long used to checking all measures against the revolution, as a precaution.

The president was frightened. "No, comrade Chepurny. I thought that the Second Coming would be useful for them, and a good thing for us too. . . . too."

"How so?" the Jap asked sternly.

"Oh, definitely useful. It doesn't apply to us, you see, and the bourgeoisie is subject to evaluation after the Second Coming. . . ."

"You're right, you son of a bitch!" the Jap exclaimed, seized by understanding. "How is it I didn't guess that myself? I'm smarter than you after all!"

Here one of the forty moved forward modestly and asked, "Comrade Chepurny, with your permission?"

"And who are you?" The Jap had not seen this face in Chevengur, though he remembered the exteriors of all the others by heart.

"Comrade Chepurny, I am president of the liquidation committee for the affairs of the zemstvo of Chevengur district within its old boundaries. My name is Polubezev. I was proposed for the commission by my committee. I have with me a protocol of the assignment session of the committee. A copy, of course."

Alexei Alexeevich Polubezev bowed and extended a hand to the Jap.

"Is there such a committee?" the Jap asked in surprise, not feeling Alexei Alexeevich's hand.

Chepurny's mind  
Zemstvo dissolved

"There is," someone said from the mass of the commission.

"Disband it today without further thought! Investigate whether there is anything else left of the empire's remnants and destroy it today too!" the Jap finished giving his orders, then turned to Polubezev. "Please speak, citizen."

Alexei Alexeevich explained the municipal production of materials with great precision and care, thus clouding even more the Jap's clear head. The Jap had an enormous, if somewhat disordered, memory.

Chepurny absorbed life in bits. Fragments of the world he had seen and events he had encountered floated in his head as though in a quiet lake, but they never united into a single whole, since for Chepurny they had neither connections nor living sense. He remembered the wattle fences of Tambov province, the names and faces of the poor, the color of artillery fire at the front, and he knew Lenin's teachings word by word, but all these clear memories floated in the Jap's mind in an elemental form and constituted no useful ideas whatever. Alexei Alexeevich was saying that the steppe is smooth and people wander about it, seeking their existence far away. Their road is long and they have brought nothing from home except their bodies. And for this reason they exchange their working flesh for food, which in the course of long years had given rise to Chevengur, and a populace had ripened within the town. Since that time the itinerant workers had left, but the town remained, relying on God.

"Do you also exchange a working body for something as small as food?" asked the Jap.

"No," Alexei Alexeevich said. "I'm a civil servant. My business is thinking on paper."

"I've just had the most gifted feeling," Chepurny spoke further. "But look, I've got a secretary, who could dictate from me right now! The first thing though is that it is absolutely vital to liquidate the non-working elements completely."

Слово

Since that day Alexei Alexeevich had not seen the Jap and had no idea what was happening in Chevengur. The zemstvo committee had of course been swiftly dispersed for all eternity, and its members scattered to their relatives. Today Polubezev wanted an interview with Chepurny on another theme, for he was now within socialism, thanks to the cooperatives announced by Lenin, and he had sensed the living holiness and so desired good for the Soviet government. Alexei Alexeevich met not a single familiar face. There were only some sort of thin people walking about, thinking about some kind of future. On the outskirts of Chevengur about twenty men were quietly moving a wooden house, while two men on horseback watched the work joyfully.

Polubezev recognized one of the horsemen.

"Comrade Chepurny! Permission to speak with you a short while!"

"Polubezev!" The Jap recognized Alexei Alexeevich, remembering him concretely. "Speak please, tell us what's bothering you. . . ."

"I'd like to talk briefly about the cooperatives. Comrade Chepurny, have you read in the newspaper about the moral path to socialism for the haplessly deprived, of that same name, to wit, *Poverty*?"

The Jap had read nothing. "What cooperatives? What do you mean 'path,' when we've already arrived. Whatever can you mean, my dear citizen? It was you all who lived here on the workers' road, for the sake of God. Now my friend there are no paths. The people have arrived."

u.s. has ended  
MAY - end of history

"Where?" Alexei Alexeevich asked meekly, the cooperative hopes in his heart slowly fading.

"What where? At the communism of life, that's where! Have you read Karl Marx?"

No, comrade Chepurny."

"Well, you ought to read him, dear comrade. History has ended here, and you didn't even notice."

Alexei Alexeevich gave up without further questions and went off into the distance where the old grasses grew, the former people lived, and his old woman of a wife waited for her husband. Life there was perhaps sad and hard, but it was there that Alexei Alexeevich had been born, grown up, and occasionally sobbed in his younger years. He remembered his furniture, his ancient household, and his wife, and was happy that he didn't know about Karl Marx, because they didn't know about Karl Marx either, and thus would not part from their husband and master.

Kopenkin had not had time to read Karl Marx through and so was abashed in the face of the Jap's erudition.

"How's that?" Kopenkin asked. "It's obligatory to read Marx here?"

The Jap cut Kopenkin short. "No, I just wanted to scare the fellow. I haven't read a line of Marx in all my born days. I've just picked up a thing or two at meetings, and now I agitate with it. And there's no point in reading anyway. You know how it used to be, people all the time writing and reading, but you take living now . . . they didn't do a damn bit of living. They were just always looking for paths for other people. That's the kind of sharpies they were, brother."

"How come they're moving the houses and carrying the gardens around town today?" Kopenkin asked, looking about.

"Today's a voluntary Saturday," the Jap explained. "The people in Chevengur all came on foot and they are zealous to live in comradely closeness."

The Jap had no defined place of residence, just like the rest of the Chevengurians. Thanks to those conditions Chepurny and Kopenkin stayed in a brick house that the participants of the volunteer Saturday could not budge. Two men who looked to be wanderers were in the kitchen asleep on top of their sacks, while a third was artfully frying a potato, using some water from the cold kettle in place of butter.

"Comrade Piyusya!" the Jap addressed the man.

"What?"

"You don't know where comrade Prokofy is now, do you?"

Piyusya was in no hurry to answer so minor a question, so he struggled a bit with his burning potato.

"He's off someplace with that woman of yours," he finally said.

"You stay here," the Jap said to Kopenkin, "and I'm going to go look for Klavdyusha. I tell you, she's really something. . . ."

Kopenkin unbridled his clothes, spread them on the ground, and lay down half naked, his inseparable armament pushed into a little heap next to him. Although it was warm in Chevengur and smelled of a comradely spirit, Kopenkin felt sad, perhaps from exhaustion, and his heart yearned to ride somewhere farther on. For the time being he had not noticed any obvious, striking socialism in Chevengur, that touching, yet firm and uplifting beauty

in the midst of nature where a second, little Rosa Luxemburg might be born, or where the first, who had perished in the bourgeois soil of Germany, might be scientifically resurrected. Kopenkin had already asked the Jap what was to be done in Chevengur.

"Nothing," the Jap had answered. "We have no needs and no tasks. You can live for yourself internally! Things are good in Chevengur now. We have mobilized the sun for eternal labor and dispersed society forever!"

Kopenkin saw that he was dumber than the Jap and fell silent, unable to answer. Even earlier, while still on the road, he had inquired meekly what Rosa Luxemburg might have done there in Chevengur. The Jap had imparted nothing particular in answer to this.

He merely said, "Soon as we get to Chevengur, you go and ask our Prokofy. He can express everything clearly, and all I do is give him my revolutionary hunch, as a guide. You think I use my own words when I talk with you? No sir, Prokofy taught me everything I know!"

Piyusya finally managed to fry his potato in the water and began rousing the two sleeping wanderers. Kopenkin too got up to eat a bit. This was so he might fall asleep more quickly on a full stomach, and thus cease being sad.

"Is it true that people live well in Chevengur?" he asked Piyusya.

"They don't complain," he answered slowly.

"But where's socialism here, then?"

"You can see better, your eye's fresher," Piyusya explained unwillingly.

"The Jap says we aren't free from habit, that we don't see the good. After all, we're local. Two years we've been living here."

"Who lived here before?"

"Before? Bourgeoisie. Me and the Jap organized a second coming for them."

"~~Wait up a second. We've got science now. Does something like that make sense?~~"

"What if it doesn't?"

"What do you mean? Speak a little fuller there, friend!"

"And what am I to you, a composer or something? It was just a sudden occurrence, according to the directives of an ordinary committee."

"You mean extraordinary?"

"That's the one."

"Oh well then . . ." Kopenkin understood vaguely. "That's absolutely correct, then."

Proletarian Strength, who was tied to a hurdle in the yard, nickered softly after the people who had abandoned it. Many people wanted to saddle the unknown, powerful horse and take a spin around Chevengur on the border road. However, Proletarian Strength gloomily kept such aspirants at bay with his teeth, muzzle, and legs.

"Don't forget, you're a head of the people's livestock now!" a thin Chevengurian tried to persuade the horse gently. "Why are you acting up, anyhow?"

Kopenkin heard the mournful voice of his horse and went out to him.

"Stand back," he said to all the free people. "You horse thieves, can't you see that the animal has his own heart?"

"We see," one Chevengurian answered with conviction. "We all live in a comradely way here, but your horse here, he's bourgeois."

Kopenkin forgot his respect for the assembled exploited and defended

no-se  
SRs

the revolutionary honor of his horse.

"You're lying, you bum. The revolution has ridden that horse's back for five years, and here you are, sitting on top of the revolution yourself!"

Kopenkin could not even express his despair further. He sensed in a disconnected way that these people were far more intelligent than him, but somehow Kopenkin felt remote from such alien intelligence. He remembered Dvanov, who fulfilled life in advance of reason and benefit, and he began to miss him.

The blue air stood above Chevengur like lofty misery and the road to his friend lay beyond the powers of Kopenkin's horse.

Embraced by sadness, suspicion, and alarmed anger, Kopenkin decided to test the revolution in Chevengur immediately, on the spot and in the raw. "Haven't we maybe got us a reserve of banditry here?" Kopenkin sensed jealously. "I'll show those slimy things what came out from under a rock a communism in a very small spot right now!"

Kopenkin drank some water in the kitchen and got himself entirely outfitted. "See, even the horse is getting all worked up against them, the pigs!" Kopenkin thought with displeasure. "They think that communism is all mind and benefit, and that it's got no body . . . nothing but a few trifles and conquering."

Kopenkin's horse was always ready for military service on short notice and so received Kopenkin on its broad comradely back with the resounding passion of his pent-up strength.

"You gallop along in front and show me the soviet!" Kopenkin threatened an unknown pedestrian on the street. The man tried to explain his position, keeping pace with Proletarian Strength. Occasionally the escort turned around and shouted reproaches to the effect that in Chevengur man does not labor and does not run, and that all taxes and obligations are borne by the sun.

"Maybe there's nothing living here except people from the rehabilitation detachments," Kopenkin doubted in silence. "Or else maybe during the tsarist war there were field hospitals here."

"You don't mean that the sun ought to be running along in front of my horse here, while you go lie down?" Kopenkin asked the runner.

The Chevengurian grabbed a stirrup so as to slow his rapid breathing and answer.

"What we have here comrade is rest for man. Only the bourgeois hurried. They had to guzzle and oppress. And what we do is eat and make friends . . . there's your soviet."

Kopenkin slowly read the enormous raspberry-colored sign above the gates of the cemetery: "Soviet of Social Humanity of the Liberated District of Chevengur." The soviet itself was quartered in the church. Kopenkin rode up the cemetery lane to the church parvis.

"Come Unto Me All Ye That Labor and Are Heavy-Laden, And I Will Give You Rest" was written in an arc above the entrance to the church. These words touched Kopenkin, although he also remembered whose slogan it was.

"But where is my rest?" he thought, glimpsing the exhaustion in his own heart. "But no, You can't even comfort people. You're not a class, You're a personality. Today You'd be an SR, and I'd have to destroy You!"

Proletarian Strength was able to walk into the building of the cool temple without bending. His rider entered the church with the astonishment of a returning childhood, just as though he were waking up in his home village

in his grandmother's larder. Kopenkin had encountered other earlier, childish, forgotten places in the districts where he had lived, wandered, and fought. There had been a time when he had prayed in precisely this kind of church in his own village, but from that church he had returned home to the closeness and proximity of his own mother. And perhaps it was not the church, not the voices of the birds, not the now-dead companions of his youth, not the terrifying old women who in the summer wandered to mysterious Kiev, not these things that constituted his childhood, but rather that childish agitation that occurs when one has a living mother and the summer air smells like the hem of her skirts. In that time of ascension all old women are truly amazing people, for their mothers have all died, and yet they live on and they don't cry.

When Kopenkin rode into the church the revolution was even poorer than faith and could not even cover the ikons with red cloth. God Sabaoth who was painted under the dome openly watched the ambo where sessions of the revolutionary committee met. At that moment the ambo held three people, who were sitting at a table of a heart red. These were the president of the Chevengur district executive committee, Chepurny, a young man, and a woman who had a gay, attractive face, just as though she were the communist woman of the future. The young man was proving to Chepurny that the power of the sun was definitely enough for all and that the sun was twelve times larger than the earth. Chepurny had Evtushevsky's math primer on the table, to check the figures.

"Prokofy, you aren't supposed to think. I do the thinking and you do the formulating!" Chepurny ordered.

"Comrade Chepurny, just try and feel for yourself why things move for a man when it's not according to science!" the young man explained without stopping. "If all the people were gathered together for a joint effort, then they'd be against the power of the sun, like the private farmer against the communes. It's useless, I tell you!"

Chepurny closed his eyes to concentrate.

"You've got something right there, but you're lying about something too! You go paw Klavdyusha in the altar there and let me have a go with my hunches. . . . I'll see if it's like that, or some other way."

Kopenkin reined in the weighty pace of his horse and announced his intention of impatiently and immediately probing all of Chevengur to see whether there was a counterrevolutionary nest hidden in the town.

"You are all real smart and all that here," Kopenkin concluded, "but there's always cleverness to be found in the mind for oppressing the quiet fellow."

Kopenkin immediately recognized the young fellow as a predator. He had black opaque eyes, an old economical mind, could be seen on his face, and there was a flaring, sensitive, and shameful nose in the middle of his face. Honest communists have noses that look like bast shoes and credulity makes their eyes gray and more kindred-looking.

"And you, little fellow, are a swindler!" Kopenkin revealed the truth. "Show me your documents!"

"Of course, comrade!" the young man agreed, totally good-humored.

Kopenkin took the little booklets and papers. They showed that he had

before him Prokofy Dvanov, a Party member since August, 1917.

"You know Sasha?" Kopenkin asked, temporarily forgiving the oppressor his face because he bore the name of his friend.

"I used to, when I was little," the young man answered, smiling because of his excessive intelligence.

"Then have the Jap give me a clean piece of paper. I've got to call Sasha to come here. We've got to strike mind against mind here, so the sparks of communism can fly!"

"But we've repealed the mail, comrade," the Jap announced. "The people all live in a heap and see each other personally, so what do they need a postal service for, I ask you now! Brother, the proletarians are united into a solid mass here."

Kopenkin wasn't particularly upset about the postal service because he had received only two letters in his lifetime, and had only written one, when he had discovered while on the imperialistic front that his wife was dead and that he had to mourn over her with relatives from afar.

"Isn't there anybody who's walking into the center?" Kopenkin asked the Jap.

"We've got a pedestrian like that," the Jap remembered.

"Who's that, Chepurny?" asked the woman who was dear to both Chevengurians, then grew lively. She was truly dear. Kopenkin even sensed that if he had been a lad, he would have found one like her to hug and would have held her for a long time without budging. This woman exuded a slow, cool, spiritual calm.

"How about Mishka Lui?" the Jap reminded her. "He can really eat up a road! The only thing is that if you send him to the provincial center, he'll wind up in Moscow, or maybe Kharkov, and he'll come back when the year's over or the flowers are coming up or the snow is lying deep. . . ."

"He'll go quicker for me. I'll give him an assignment," Kopenkin said.

"He can go," the Jap gave permission. "For him the road isn't work, it's just the development of life!"

"Chepurny," the woman said, turning to him. "Give Lui some flour to barter so he can bring me back a shoulder wrap."

"We'll give it to him, Klavdiya Parfenovna, we'll give it to him without fail. We'll take advantage of the moment," Prokofy reassured her.

Kopenkin wrote to Dvanov in block letters: "Dear comrade and friend Sasha! There is communism here, and return. You should be on the spot as quick as possible. The only thing here that works is the summer sun while the people make unloving friends. However the lady folks try to squeeze shoulder wraps out of people even though they are pleasant so they are clearly harmful. Your brother or family relative does not attract me much. By the way, I am living like a subject, so think of something that is only about me, because I am far from being respected here. There are no events to report. They tell me this is science and history, but not well known. With revolutionary

respect, Kopenkin. PS. Please come, for the sake of the general ideological level."

"I'm always thinking of something, imagining something, or thinking I'm seeing something. It's heavy on my heart!" the Jap announced tormentedly in the dead air of the temple. "It's not clear if we have communism fixed here or not. I ought to go see comrade Lenin, so that he could formulate the whole truth for me!"

"You ought to go, comrade Chepurny," Prokofy affirmed, "Comrade Lenin will give you a slogan and you can take it and bring it back here. This way is senseless, with all the thinking just in my head. The avant garde gets tired too! And besides, I'm not supposed to have any privileges."

"And you aren't taking account of my heart? Tell the truth now!" the Jap got offended.

It was clear that Prokofy valued his own reasoning powers and did not lose his reliable calm. "Feeling, comrade Chepurny, is a mass element, but thought is organization. Comrade Lenin himself said that organization us highest of all for us. . . ."

"That means I have to kill myself and you just think? What could be worse?"

"Comrade Chepurny, I'm going to go to Moscow with you," the woman announced. "I've never seen the city. People say it's amazing or something there."

"Now we run smack up against it!" Kopenkin said tersely. "Chepurny, you just go take her straight to Lenin and say, 'There you go, comrade Lenin, one broad, all set for communism and ready to go!' You're swine, all of you!"

"How come?" the Jap asked sharply. "You think it's not right here?"

"Of course it's not right!"

"What's wrong then, comrade Kopenkin? My senses are already all dead."

"How should I know? My job is driving off the inimical forces. When I finish driving them all off, then things will turn out to be as they should be all by themselves."

Prokofy smoked and didn't once interrupt Kopenkin. He was trying to think how to adapt this unorganized armed force to the revolution.

"Klavdiya Parfenovna, how about a bit of a stroll for the sake of the soul? And a bit of a roll?" Prokofy proposed to the woman with precise politeness. "Otherwise you'll get faint!"

When the couple had gone out to the parvis Kopenkin pointed at them and said to the Jap, "Keep this in mind. They're bourgeois!"

"How's that?"

"Swear to God!"

"Well, what'll we do now? Expel them from Chevangur?"

"Now don't go planting panics around your neck! Let your

communism come down from its idea and enter the body! The armed hand, that's the answer! Just wait'll Sasha Dvanov comes. He'll show you!"

"A smart fellow, huh?" the Jap was taken aback.

"He's got blood doing the thinking in his head, comrade, while your Prokofy here, he uses bone," Kopenkin explained proudly and distinctly. "Can you understand that at least once, huh? Here's the note, so get your comrade started, that Lui fellow."

The Jap could invent nothing in the tenseness of thought. He merely recalled useless events which gave no feeling for the truth. His mind now saw the Catholic churches in the forest through which they had marched en route to the tsarist war, then a young orphan girl sitting in a ditch eating angelica. When this girl who so uselessly was preserved in the Jap's soul had been encountered was now unknown forever, and it was pointless even to guess whether she was still alive today. Perhaps that girl had been Klavdyusha, in which case she was truly exceptionally fine, and it would be sad to part with her.

"What are you looking at that makes you look so sick?" Kopenkin asked.

"I'm just doing it, comrade Kopenkin," the Jap said with sad exhaustion. "My whole life is rushing by inside of me like clouds."

"You ought to have it go like a thunderhead. I can see that's why you're getting worn out," Kopenkin reproached him sympathetically. "Let's leave here for a fresher place. It reeks of some sort of raw god here."

"Let's go, and you take your horse," the Jap said, feeling easier. "I'll be stronger out in the open."

When they went outside Kopenkin pointed out the inscription over the church-revolutionary committee door, the "Come Unto Me. . . ."

"Repaint it Soviet style!"

"There's nobody here to think up a phrase, comrade Kopenkin."

"Let Prokofy do it."

"He's not bent that way. He can't manage it. He knows the subject but he's forgot the predicate. I'll make your Dvanov my secretary and let Prokofy fool around all he wants. But how come you don't like that phrase up there, I ask you now? It's completely against capitalism. . . ."

Kopenkin frowned horribly.

"You figure that God's going to give rest to all the masses for you all by himself? That's the bourgeois approach, comrade Chepurny. The revolutionary mass can give itself rest, when it rises up!"

Chepurny looked at Chevengur, which contained within itself his idea. A quiet wind rose up, fanning the Jap's spiritual doubt, the hunch which was clumsily exhausting him of thoughts and thus giving him rest. The Jap did not know that there exist a universal truth and a meaning to life. He had seen too many different people in his life to make them follow one general law. Once Prokofy had proposed to Chepurny that they introduce science and

enlightenment in Chevengur, and the Jap had declined such attempts as hopeless. "What's the matter?" he said to Prokofy. "Maybe you don't know what science is, huh? It'll give the whole bourgeoisie a reverse revolution. Any one of your capitalists could become a scientist and then start preserving organisms with powders and then just try and reckon with him! And science will just spread and spread, and the Lord only knows how it will all end!"

—Chepurny had become seriously ill at the front and had learned medicine by heart, so that he had passed his exams to become a field medic immediately after he was cured. However he regarded the doctors as intellectual exploiters.

"What do you think?" he asked Kopenkin. "That Dvanov of yours won't try to introduce science here, will he?"

"He hasn't said anything about it to me. His job is just communism."

"See, I'm afraid," the Jap confessed as he tried to think. Then he remembered Proshka appropriately, for he had expressed the Jap's suspicion of science in precise terms. "Under my supervision Prokofy formulated that a mind is property just like a house, and that it can oppress the unscientific and debilitated. . . ."

"Then arm the idiots," Kopenkin found a way out. "Then just let the smart fellows try to come crawling over with their powders! Take me now, what do you think I am? I'm also an idiot, brother, but I live totally free!"

People walked weakly by on the streets of Chevengur. Some of them had moved houses that day, others had dragged gardens about in their arms. Now here they were going to rest, chat, and live out the rest of their day in the circle of their comrades. The next day they would have no work or assignments, because in Chevengur the sole sun worked for all, in the place of each, for in Chevengur the sun had been declared the world-wide proletarian. At the incitement of the Jap Prokofy had given labor a special interpretation, where labor was declared once and for all to be a survival of greed and animal exploitative voluptuousness, because labor encourages the formation of property, and property is oppression. However the sun released normal rations which are completely adequate for people to live on, and any increase of those rations through deliberate human labor goes to feed the bonfire of class warfare, since it creates a surplus of dangerous objects. Nonetheless the people of Chevengur worked every Saturday, which surprised Kopenkin, who had somewhat figured out the solar system of life in Chevengur.

"That's not work, that's the voluntary Saturdays!" the Jap explained. "Prokofy understood me straight off and gave me a great phrase!"

"What is he, your diviner or something?" Kopenkin asked, not trusting Prokofy.

"Not really, he's like this. He dilutes my great feelings with his narrow thought. But he's a literary kind of fellow and without him I would have to live in mute torment. Now take these voluntary Saturdays, there's absolutely no production of property during them. You really think that I'd let that

happen? We just allow the voluntary desecration of our petty-bourgeois heritage. Now what kind of oppression could that be? I ask you. . . .”

“None,” Kopenkin agreed sincerely.

The Jap and Kopenkin decided to spend the night in a barn that had been dragged into the middle of the street.

“You should have gone to Klavdyusha,” Kopenkin advised. “You’re upsetting the lady.”

“Prokofy took her off to parts unknown. Let her have her bit of fun. We are all identical proletarians. Prokofy explained to me how I’m no better than him.”

“But you said yourself that you have great feelings, and a fellow like that is too narrow for a lady!”

The Jap was puzzled. It really did come out like that! However his heart hurt and he couldn’t think today.

“Comrade Kopenkin, my great feelings ache in my chest, and not down in my young parts.”

“Well then,” Kopenkin said, “relax with me instead. My heart feels bad too.”

Proletarian Strength chewed up all the grass that Kopenkin had brought to the city square for it, and at midnight it too lay down on the floor of the barn. The horse slept as children do, with half-opened eyes, with which it looked at Kopenkin with a kind of sleepy meekness. Kopenkin at the time had no consciousness and merely groaned in his sad, blackened sense of oblivion.

The communism of Chevengur was defenseless in those dark hours of the steppe, for people were healing the exhaustion of day’s inner life through the strength of sleep, and for the time being their convictions were cut short.

Chevengur woke up late. Its inhabitants were relaxing after centuries of oppression, and it was hard to catch up on one’s sleep. The revolution had won sleeps and dreams for Chevengur district, and the soul had been made the main profession.

The Chevengur pedestrian, Lui, was walking to the provincial center with full strides because he had the letter for Dvanov, and in the second place, he had some rusks and a little birch jug of water, which was growing tepid next to his body. He set off when only the ants and chickens were about, before the sun had bared the last possible corners of the sky. The attractive freshness of the air and the walk drove the smallest doubts of thought and desire from Lui. The road dissipated him, freeing him of superfluous, dangerous life. While he was still young he had of his own efforts figured out why a stone flies. It does so because the joy of movement renders it lighter than air. Knowing no letters or books Lui had convinced himself that communism meant the uninterrupted movement of people into the distance of earth. How many times had he told the Jap that communism should be declared to be a journey and Chevengur removed from its eternal

sedentarization.

"Is man more like a horse or a tree? Tell me that, according to your conscience," he would ask in the revolutionary committee when he grew despairing about the short roads that the street made.

"He's like something higher!" Prokofy invented an answer. "He's like the open ocean, dear comrade, and like the harmony of plans!"

Aside from rivers and lakes Lui had never known any other kind of water and the only kind of harmony he knew was harmony grits.

"I'd say man is more like a horse," the Jap declared, recalling the horses he knew.

"I understand." Prokofy said, continuing the Jap's hunch. "The horse has a chest that had a heart in it and a noble face with eyes, and a tree doesn't have those things."

"That's it, Prosh!" Chepurny was overjoyed.

"That's what I said," Prokofy affirmed.

"Absolutely correct!" the Jap approved the hunch conclusively.

Lui was gratified and proposed that the revolutionary committee immediately throw Chepengur out into the distance. "The wind has to pour over a fellow," Lui said, trying to convince them, "or else right off he'll take up oppressing the weak on you, or else he'll dry up on his own and get all despairing like. You know what I mean? But on the roads nobody can avoid friendship. And there'd be enough jobs for communism!"

The Jap made Prokofy take precise note of Lui's proposal and then the proposal was considered at a session of the revolutionary committee. The Jap sensed Lui's radical truth but gave no guiding hunches to Prokofy, so the session labored heavily through an entire spring day. Then Prokofy thought up a formal rejection for Lui's proposal; it read: In view of the coming epoch of wars and revolutions, the movement of people is to be seen as an urgent indication of communism, for when its crisis is entirely ripe then the entire population of the district must throw itself upon capitalism and thereafter not halt on its victorious path, so that the people may be tempered into a feeling of comradeship on all roads of the earthly sphere. For the time, however, communism must be confined to the area won from the bourgeoisie, so that there will be something to govern.

"No, comrades," Lui disagreed sensibly. "There is no way communism will take place on a sedentarized spot, for it can have neither enemies nor joy!"

Prokofy attentively observed the listening Jap but was unable to make out his vacillating feelings.

"Comrade Chepurny," Prokofy tried to introduce a decision. "After all the liberation of the workers is the job of the workers themselves! Let Lui go out and gradually liberate himself! What have we got to do with it?"

"Right!" the Jap concluded sharply. "Go, Lui. Movement is the business of the masses and we aren't going to mess around under their feet."

"Well, thanks then," Lui bowed to the revolutionary committee and left to seek out some necessity to set out somewhere from Chevengur.

As soon as Lui had noticed Kopenkin on his stout horse, his conscience began immediately to bother him, because Kopenkin was going somewhere while he was living on an unmoving spot. So Lui was seized by the desire to go even farther away from the town, but he decided to make something nice for Kopenkin before he left. There was nothing however that he could use to do this, for there were no things in Chevengur which might serve as gifts. The only thing he could do was water Kopenkin's horse, and he watered him himself. Now Lui regretted that there are so many houses and substances in the world, but so few of the very things which signify the community of people.

Lui decided that after going to the provincial center he would not return to Chevengur, but would make it clear to Petrograd, where he would join the navy and set off on a cruise so he could observe the entire earth, the sea, and people everywhere, thus providing continuous nourishment for his fraternal soul. Once up on the highlands that provided a view of the Chevengur lowlands Lui looked back at the town and the morning light.

"Farewell, comrades and communism! I'll be alive, and I'll remember each of you!"

Kopenkin was limbering up Proletarian Strength beyond the town limits and he noticed Lui on the highlands.

"He's a bum for sure. He'll turn toward Kharkov," Kopenkin decided to himself. "Because of him I'll miss the golden days of the revolution!" Then he let his horse canter back to town, deciding finally today to test the whole communism of Chevengur and then take his measures.

Because of the relocation of the houses the streets of Chevengur had disappeared, and all structures were in flight, not in place. Proletarian Strength, who was used to smooth street roads, grew anxious and sweaty from the frequent turns.

A young man and a girl lay under a sheepskin coat near one of the warped wandering barns. Judging by the trunk, the girl was Klavdyusha. Kopenkin carefully guided his horse around the sleepers. He was shy in the face of youth, revering it as the kingdom of the great future. It was for that same youth, made even more beautiful by its indifference to girls, that he had at some point come to love Alexander Dvanov with respect, his companion in the course of revolution.

Somewhere in the thicket of houses a man began whistling long blasts. Kopenkin went keenly on his guard. The whistle stopped.

"Ko-pen-kin! Comrade Ko-pen-kin! Let's go swim!" the Jap yelled from somewhere nearby.

"Whistle! I'll come toward the sound!" Kopenkin answered low and deafening.

The Jap began to whistle furiously while Kopenkin on his horse con-

tinued creeping toward him through the cracks in the jumbled town. Chepurny was standing on the porch of the stock barn, his overcoat thrown over his naked body. He was barefoot. Two of his fingers were in his mouth, to make the whistle stronger, while his eyes looked into the sunny heights where the solar heat was at play.

Kopenkin locked Proletarian Strength in the barn and followed behind the barefoot Jap, who was as happy that day as a man who had once and for all become a brother to all men. On the way to the river they encountered a multitude of awakening Chevengurians, normal people like everywhere else, only poor-looking and with faces that seemed to come from elsewhere.

"The summer day is great. What are they going to do?" Kopenkin asked.

"Are you asking about their zeal?" the Jap understood imprecisely.

"At the very least."

"But the basic profession is now the soul of man. And the product it produces is friendship and comradeship! So why isn't that an occupation for you, I ask you now!"

Kopenkin thought a bit about his own former oppressed life.

"Hell, it's so good here in Chevengur," he said sadly. "But how is it that there's been no sorrow organized? Communism should be biting, just a tad poisonous even. It's good for the taste."

The Jap tasted fresh salt in his mouth and immediately understood Kopenkin.

"By gosh you're right. Now we ought to organize sorrow on purpose. Let's take that up, starting tomorrow, comrade Kopenkin!"

"I'm not going to. My job is a different one. Wait until Dvanov comes for the time ahead. He'll understand everything for you."

"But we assign that to Prokofy!"

"Will you stop it with your Prokofy?! That boy wants to multiply with your Klavdyusha and you keep drawing him in!"

"Seems like maybe you've got something there. Let's wait for your comrade in arms."

The timeless water was fussing around the banks of the Chevengurka river, and the air left the water smelling of excitement and freedom. The two comrades began to bare themselves as they went to meet the water. Chepurny shucked his overcoat and found himself immediately nude and pitiful, but for the same reason his body exuded a warm smell of some long-ago healed, congealed maternity, which barely wiggled in Kopenkin's memory.

The sun lit the Jap's thin back with individual attention, creeping into all the sweat pores and faults of his skin so as to kill all the invisible critters that make the body itch constantly with the heat of its rays. Kopenkin looked at the sun with respect. Just a few years before it had warmed Rosa Luxemburg and now it was helping the grass on her grave to live.

Kopenkin had not been in a river for ages and he trembled a long time from the cold, but then he came to endure it. The Jap though swam bravely,

opening his eyes underwater and digging up various bones, large rocks, and horse skulls that lay on the bottom. The Jap bellowed songs from the middle of the river, which the novice Kopenkin could not reach, and then became more and more talkative. Kopenkin splashed about in a shallow spot, felt the water, and thought about how the water too was flowing off somewhere to where things were better for it.

The Jap turned completely happy and gay.

"Know what, Kopenkin? When I'm in the water, it seems to me that I know truth exactly, and then as soon as I make my way to the revolutionary committee, I'm all the time imagining things and mixing things up."

"Why don't you work down on the shore?"

"Then the rain will get the provincial theses wet. You're an evil fellow, aren't you?"

Kopenkin did not know what a thesis was. He remembered the word from somewhere, but totally insensibly.

"As long as the rain comes and the sun shines after it you won't have to worry about any theses," Kopenkin said reassuringly. "All the same the grain will grow."

The Jap forced his mind to count, and then helped it with his fingers.

"That means you're announcing three theses?"

"Don't even need one," Kopenkin said, rejecting the question. "Only songs ought to get written on paper, so they'll be remembered."

"What do you mean? There's the sun, that's one thesis. The water is two, and the soil makes three!"

"Did you forget about the wind?"

"Four then, with the wind. And that's that. And, if you like, that's even correct. Only you know what, if we don't answer the theses they send from the province and tell them things are fine here, then they'll liquidate our whole communism for us."

"No way," Kopenkin said, rejecting any such proposition. "The people there are just the same as us!"

"The very same, and even more so. Only they write so no one can understand what they wrote and you know, all the time they ask us to take a little more into account and to lead more firmly. But what is there in Chevengur to take into account and where are we supposed to lead these people?"

"And just where do you think we'll be?" Kopenkin was astounded "You really think we'd let the serpent crawl in? We've got Lenin behind us!"

The Jap made his distracted way into the reeds and began picking some pale flowers that were of a feeble nocturnal color. He was doing this for Klavdyusha, whom he possessed very little, and thus even more had to nurse a concerned tenderness for her.

After the flowers the Jap and Kopenkin got dressed and set off along the river bank, next to the damp grassy overhang. From there Chevengur

seemed a region of warmth. Sunlit barefoot people could be seen reveling in the air and freedom, their heads bare.

"It's nice today," the Jap said abstractedly. "All of man's warmth is outside." The he pointed at the city and the people in it. Then Chepurmy put two fingers in his mouth, whistled, and in a fit of burning inner life he once again climbed into the water, this time without removing his overcoat. He was tormented by some sort of black joy in his abundant body, and the Jap flung himself through the reeds into the clean river, where he could live out his own unclear, grieving passions.

"He thinks that he's let the whole world out into the freedom of communism and look how happy he is, the bum!" Kopenkin thought critically of the Jap's actions. "But there's nothing here that I can see!"

A rowboat sat in the reeds and a naked man sat silently in the boat. He was thoughtfully examining the far shore of the river, although he could have also rowed there. Kopenkin spied his weak, scrawny body and ailing eye.

"Is that Pashintsev?" Kopenkin asked.

"Who else?" he answered immediately.

"But why did you leave your post in the revolutionary national park then?"

Pashintsev sadly lowered his subdued head.

"I've retreated a long ways down from there, comrade!"

"You should have used your bombs."

"It turns out that I defused them too early, so that's why I wander around now without respect, like a dramatic crazy man."

Kopenkin felt contempt for the far-off White bastards who had liquidated the revolutionary national park and an equal and answering force of courage within him.

"Don't be sad, comrade Pashintsev, we can smash the White without even getting off our horses, and then we'll set the revolutionary national park down on a fresh spot. So what have you got left now?"

Pashintsev raised his knightly hauberk from the bottom of the boat.

"Not much," Kopenkin said definitively. "You can only protect your chest."

"And my head, the devil take it," Pashintsev said carelessly. "My heart's the dearest thing to me. And I've got something for my head and my hand too." Pashintsev also held up some minor bits of armor, the vizored helmet with its red star bolted on for all time and his last empty grenade.

"Well, that ought to be enough for you." Kopenkin announced. "But tell me where your national park's gone to. You really got so weak that the muzhiks were able to make it a refuge for kulaks?"

Pashintsev was in a depressed mood and he was so ashamed he could barely speak.

"I told you. They set up a broad organization for a sovkhos. So how come you're staring at my naked body?"

Kopenkin looked at Pashintsev's body once more.

"In that case, get dressed. Let's go look this Chevengur over together. There's not enough facts up there either, and the people are sleeping."

Pashintsev however could not become Kopenkin's companion. Apart from the hauberk and the vizor it seemed he had no clothes.

"Go like that," Kopenkin urged him "What do you think, that people have never seen a living body before? Boy, what a dainty you are. All the same that's the way they're going to put you in the ground."

"No, you don't understand what root of evil it was that came out," Pashintsev said conversationally as he picked up his metal clothes. "They released me from the revolutionary national park in good shape. Even though I'm dangerous, I got to leave alive and dressed. But then in my own village my own muzhiks saw some man from the past walking alone, and defeated by an army too, that's the main point, and so they ripped off all my clothing. Then they threw these two things after me, the hauberk so I could get warm in the morning and the bomb I kept for myself."

"So a whole army attacked you?" Kopenkin was amazed.

"Sure, what do you think? A hundred horse soldiers came out against one man. And there was also three one-inchers ready in reserve. And all the same I held out for twenty-four hours. I had the whole army scared of my empty bombs, and then Grusha . . . that girl there . . . she went and informed on me, the bitch. . . ."

"Ah-hah!" Kopenkin believed him. "Well, let's go. Hand me over your ironware."

Pashintsev climbed out of the boat and followed Kopenkin's faithful tracks along the sandy shore.

"Don't be afraid now," Kopenkin reassured his naked comrade. "After all, it wasn't you that made yourself naked, it was the half-Whites that offended you."

Pashintsev guessed that he was walking along mother-naked for the sake of the poor and of communism, so he was not embarrassed about on-coming women of the future.

Klavdyusha was the first such that they encountered. She hastily looked over Pashintsev's body and then covered her bare eyes with a scarf, like a Tatar woman.

"Horribly shrivelled man," she thought. "All covered in birthmarks and clean, not a trace of roughness!"

The she said aloud, "After all, this isn't the front, citizens! It's not totally polite to walk around naked."

Kopenkin asked Pashintsev to pay no attention to that sort of toad because she was bourgeois and always croaking about something. Now she needs a shoulder throw, now Moscow, and now on account of her a naked proletarian can't walk by. All the same Pashintsev got a little embarrassed and put on his hauberk and helmet, leaving the majority of his body in view.

"It's better like this," he said to clarify his own actions. "People will think it's a form of the new economic policy."

"What's the matter?" Kopenkin had a look. "You're almost dressed now, only maybe the iron will make you catch cold."

"My body will warm it up. After all, I've got blood inside!"

"I do too!" Kopenkin felt.

However the iron of the hauberk did not make Pashintsev's body cold, for it was warm in Chevengur. People sat side by side in the valleys between the relocated houses and spoke soft speeches to one another, so that warmth and vapors also rose up from the people and not solely from the rays of the sun. Pashintsev and Kopenkin walked through the ubiquitous mugginess. The closeness of the houses, the heat of the sun, and the dancing odor of the people made life resemble sleeping beneath a quilt.

"I'm getting drowsy. How about you?" Kopenkin asked Pashintsev.

"Me? In general I'm like usual," Pashintsev answered, unable to make himself out.

Piyusya was sitting alone near the constant brick house where Kopenkin had stayed the first time of his sojourn, and was looking indefinitely at everything.

"Listen, comrade Piyusya!" Kopenkin addressed him. "I've got to make a check on all of Chevengur. You lead us on our itinerary!"

"Can do," Piyusya agreed without getting up.

Pashintsev went into the house and picked up an old soldier's greatcoat, vintage 1914, that was lying on the floor. The greatcoat was for a tall person, so it immediately reassured all of Pashintsev's body.

"Now you're dressed just like a citizen!" Kopenkin said, sizing him up. "But it makes you look less like yourself."

The three men set off into the distance through the warmth of Chevengur's structures. Wilting trees stood sadly in the middle of the road and on the empty lots. They had been replanted several times, carted around on people's shoulders, and they were weakened, despite the sun and rains.

"There's a fact for you!" Kopenkin pointed at the subsiding trees. "The devils build communism for themselves, but not for the trees!"

The rare and alien children who were occasionally visible in the glades were fat from the air, freedom, and the absence of daily education. It was not clear how the adults of Chevengur lived. Kopenkin could still note no new feelings in them. From afar they looked to him like people on vacation from imperialism, but as for what they had within themselves and between one another he had no facts. Kopenkin considered a good mood to be merely a warm exhalation of the blood, not a signifier of communism.

Near the cemetery where the revolutionary committee was quartered there was a long depression of sunken earth.

"That's the bourgeoisie lying there," Piyusya said. "Me and the Jap, we knocked the souls out of them to boot."

Kopenkin tested the settled earth of the grave approvingly with his foot.

"Seems like you had to be that sort," he said.

"There's no way around it," Piyusya justified the fact. "It became vital for us to live."

Pashintsev however was offended that the grave lay there untamped. He felt it should have been tamped down and then an old park should have been moved there, so that the trees could have sucked up the last remnants of capitalism out of the ground and turned them into the greenery of socialism in an economical way. Piyusya himself however also considered tamping to be a serious measure, but he had not yet had time to realize it, because the provincial center had hurriedly removed him from the presidency of the extraordinary commission. This had barely insulted him, for he knew that service in Soviet institutions required educated people unlike himself, and that the bourgeoisie was of some use there. It was thanks to that consciousness that after he was fired from his job as a revolutionary that Piyusya admitted once and for all that the revolution was smarter than him, and he fell quiet among the masses of the Chevengur collective. More than anything Piyusya was frightened of offices and papers with writing on them. As soon as he spotted such things he used to immediately shut up and grow gloomily weak throughout his entire body, while he sensed the mighty black power of thought and the written word. In Piyusya's day the Chevengur extraordinary commission had been quartered on the village green and instead of posting notes about reprisals against capitalism Piyusya brought them out to be obvious to everyone by proposing that captured landowners be killed by his own hired hands, which was how it was done. Now however that Chevengur had reached the final development of communism within itself, the extraordinary commission was closed forever, following the Jap's personal conclusion, and houses were moved onto the green it had occupied.

Kopenkin stood musing over the mass grave of the bourgeoisie, which was without trees, mound, or marker. It seemed to him vaguely that this had been done so that Rosa Luxemburg's distant grave might have a tree, a mound, and an eternal marker. There was just one thing that Kopenkin did not like, that the grave of the bourgeoisie had not been packed down firmly.

"You say you knocked the souls out of the bourgeoisie to boot?" Kopenkin said doubtfully. "But you got yourself annulled for that, so it must be you didn't beat all the bourgeoisie, and not to death either. You didn't even beat the dirt down on top of them!"

Here Kopenkin was sharply mistaken. The bourgeoisie of Chevengur had been beaten solidly, honestly, and in such a way that even their posthumous life would bring them no joy, for after their bodies, their souls had been shot too.

After a short life in Chevengur, the Jap's heart had begun to ache from the thick droves of petty bourgeois in the town. Then he had begun to feel

tormented throughout his body, for the soil in Chevengur seemed too thin for communism, too choked with the weeds of possessions and possessors. Communism had to be defined quickly, on a living basis; for the houses had been inhabited since time immemorial by strange people who smelled of wax. The Jap deliberately went out into the fields and looked at the fresh open spaces to see whether communism might be started out there. He decided against starting it there however, because then the buildings and equipment of Chevengur, all built by the hands of the oppressed, would have been lost to the proletariat and village poor. He knew and saw how expectations of the Second Coming tormented the Chevengur bourgeoisie and personally he had nothing against it. After he had been president of the revolutionary committee two months, the Jap was tortured by the thought that the bourgeoisie was still alive and there was no communism, while, as it was said in the circulars sent from the center, there was a whole array of logically offensive transitional steps leading into the future. The Jap suspected that this was a deception of the masses.

At first he appointed a commission, which then told Chepurny about the necessity of a Second Coming. Then Chepurny had stayed still, for he had secretly decided to leave some bourgeois small fry, so that the world revolution would have something to occupy itself with. Later though Chepurny wanted to be done with suffering, so he called the president of the extraordinary commission, Piyusya.

"Purge the town of the oppressing element for me!" Chepurny ordered.

"Can do," Piyusya said, obediently. He was ready to belt all the citizens of Chevengur with no warning whatever, and the Jap agreed, relieved.

"Understand, it's kinder this way," he tried to convince Piyusya. "Otherwise the entire people will drop dead during the transitional steps. And all the same, your bourgeoisie aren't people. I read how as soon as man was born from the monkey, he turned around and killed the monkey. So you keep in mind then, when we've got a proletariat, what's the bourgeoisie for? Why, it's downright unbecoming!"

Piyusya was personally acquainted with the bourgeoisie. He remembered the streets of Chevengur and could clearly picture the outside of each homeowner, of Shchekotov, Komyagin, Pikhler, Znobilin, Shchapov, Zavyn-Duvailo, Perekrutchenko, Syusyukalov, and all their neighbors. In addition Piyusya knew their modes of life and self-support, and was ready to kill any of them by hand, without so much as using a weapon. Since the day when he had been appointed president of the extraordinary commission he had had no spiritual peace and felt constantly irritated. After all, it was Soviet bread that the petty bourgeoisie ate every day, while they lived in his houses (until then Piyusya had worked twenty years as a hod carrier), and lay crosswise to the revolution like a quiet turd. It was the very middle-aged, gap-toothed personalities of the bourgeoisie that had transformed patient Piyusya into a streetfighter. More than once it had happened when he met

2nd coming  
how you give the sky

Shchapov, Znobilin, and Zavyn-Duvailo, that Piyusya beat them up, while they just wiped themselves off, bearing the affront and hoping for the future. Piyusya never came upon the other bourgeoisie and he didn't feel like going to their houses specially, for his frequent rages had left his soul all stuffy inside.

However the secretary of the district executive committee, Prokofy Dvanov, would not agree to the unannounced, house-by-house destruction of the bourgeoisie. He said it had to be done more theoretically.

"So formulate it then," Chepurny proposed.

Prokofy tossed back his thoughtful SR hairs as he mused.

"We'll do it on the basis of their own prejudice!" Pokofy finally formulated.

"I get it," the Jap said without understanding, but prepared to think.

"On the basis of the Second Coming!" Prokofy expressed his idea precisely. "They want that themselves, so we'll let them have it. And we won't be guilty of it!"

Chepurny, on the other hand, accepted the accusation.

"How so not guilty, I ask you now! Once we're a revolution, then we're completely guilty! And if you're going to be formulating so you can be absolved, then get the hell out of here!"

Like an intelligent man, Prokofy had presence of mind.

"It is absolutely necessary, comrade Chepurny, to announce an official Second Coming and purge the town for proletarian settlement on that basis."

"Well, are we going to do anything here?" the Jap asked.

"In general, yes, only afterwards we have to divide up the domestic property so that it won't oppress us anymore."

"You take the property," Chepurny ordered. "The proletariat has its own good hands, so why are you upset about a bunch of steamer trunks at a time like this? I ask you now! Write out an order!"

Prokofy briefly formulated the future of the bourgeoisie of Chevengur, then passed the paper to Piyusya, who had to add a list of the propertied families from memory.

Chepurny read the paper, which said that the Soviet government was granting the bourgeoisie the entire sky, with all stars and luminaries pertaining thereto, to be used there as the material from which to organize eternal bliss. As for the earth, fundamental structures, and domestic belongings, all such items were to remain below as an exchange for the sky, entirely in the hands of the proletariat and the working peasantry.

The deadline for this Second Coming was indicated at the end of the order, showing when the bourgeoisie would be ushered into the posthumous life in an organized and healthy fashion.

Midnight Wednesday was set as the hour of assembly and the place where the bourgeoisie was to assemble was the church square, and the basis for the order was to be considered the authority of a bulletin from the

provincial weather bureau.

Prokofy had long been attracted by the impressive black complexity of provincial documents and with a smile of voluptuous pleasure he transferred their style to the scale of the district.

Piyusya understood nothing in the order, while the Jap took snuff and wondered about one thing, about why Prokofy had set the Second Coming for early morning Thursday and not for that same day, Monday.

"Because Wednesday is a fast day, and they'll get ready for this with less fuss!" Prokofy explained. "And then too overcast skies are predicted for today and tomorrow. After all, I refer to the weather in the order!"

"It's a useless advantage," the Jap reproached him, but he did not particularly insist upon any hurrying of the Second Coming.

Prokofy though, with Klavdyusha accompanying him, went round to all the homes of propertied citizens and requisitioned all of their noncumbersome manual objects, such as bracelets, silk scarves, gold tsarist medals, woman's powders, and so forth. Klavdyusha put all the things in her little trunk, while Prokofy orally promised the bourgeoisie the greatest possible extension of life, if only the income of the Republic might be increased. The bourgeoisie stood in the fields and thanked him meekly. Prokofy could not break free of this right up until Wednesday night, and he was sorry that he had not set the Second Coming for Friday night.

Chepurmy was not afraid of so much loot winding up in Prokofy's hands, since no loot could cling to a proletarian. Scarves and powders would melt away on the head, leaving no trace upon the consciousness.

Wednesday night the entire church square was filled by the bourgeoisie of Chevengur, who had arrived in the evening. Piyusya closed off the area of the square with a chain of Red soldiers and then turned his thin Chekists into the thick of the bourgeois crowd. According to his list, there were only three bourgeois who had not shown up, two of them because they had been crushed by their own houses and a third because he had died of old age. Piyusya immediately dispatched two Chekists to see why the houses had collapsed, and then he busied himself with arranging the bourgeoisie in neat ranks. The bourgeoisie had brought bundles and suitcases with them, carrying soap, towels, linens, cinnamon rolls, and their family Bibles. At each person Piyusya looked all this over carefully, paying particularly long attention to the Bibles, with their long lists of people to be prayed for.

"Read it," he ordered one Chekist, who read aloud, "Pray for the repose of God's servants: Evdokiya, Marfa, Firs, Polikarp, Vasily, Ignaty, Makary, and all of their brethren.

Pray for the health of these God's servants: Agrippina, Maria, Ignaty, Kosma, Petr, Ioann, Anastia and all her scions, and all of their brethren, as well as ailing Andrey."

"Scions?" Piyusya asked.

"The same," the Chekist affirmed.

The wives of the bourgeoisie stood beyond the line of Red soldiers and sobbed loudly in the night air.

"Get rid of these here abettors of crime!" Piyusya ordered. "We've got no need of no scions here!"

"We ought to finish them off too, comrade Piyusya," a Chekist advised.

"What for, bright boy? Their main member is already cut off!"

The two men who had been checking why the houses had collapsed returned and explained that the ceilings of the two houses had caved in because their attics had been badly overloaded with salt and flour. The bourgeoisie needed extra supplies of salt and flour so they would have something to eat during the Second Coming, which they hoped to wait out successfully and then be left behind to live further.

"Ah-hah, that's just like you!" Piyusya said, then set up the Chekists without waiting for the stroke of midnight. "Let 'em have it, boys!" he yelled, then released a slug from his revolver, placing it in the skull of the nearest bourgeois, Zavyn-Duvailo. A quiet steam came from the bourgeois' head, and then some raw maternal substance that looked like candle wax pushed outside his hair, but Duvailo did not fall.

Rather he sat on his bundle of effects and said, "Woman, wrap a swaddling cloth around my throat," Zavyn-Duvailo enunciated patiently. "My whole soul is running out!" Then he fell from the bundle to the ground, which he embraced with wide-flung arms and legs, as the manor lord does his lady.

The Chekists shot their revolvers into the crowd of silent bourgeoisie, which had the day before taken communion, and the bourgeoisie fell clumsily and askew, twisting their greasy necks about so much it looked as though they might damage their spines. Each of them lost the power of his legs before he felt the wound, which allowed the slug to fall into its spot by chance and there grow over with living meat.

The wounded merchant Shchapov lay on the ground with his sparse body and asked the Chekist who leaned over him, "Kind sir, let me have a breather. Don't torment me. Go get my wife, so we can say goodbye. Or else let me have your hand quick. Don't go far away. It's terrifying to be alone."

The Chekist tried to give him his hand.

"Hang on, you . . . you've had your last chatter!"

Shchapov couldn't wait for the hand, so he grabbed a burdock to help him and so that he might convey to it the remainder of his unlived life. He did not free the plant until he lost his longing for the woman with whom he wished to say goodbye. Then his hands fell back of their own accord, no longer requiring friendship. The Chekist understood and choked up. When a bourgeois has a bullet inside him, he needs friendship and comradeship just like a proletarian, although when he has no bullet inside, then he loves only property.

Piyusya shoved Zavyn-Duvailo.

*cadets hang us by the necks*

"Where's that soul of yours flowing? In your throat? I'll knock it loose for you, just you wait!"

Piyusya grabbed Zavyn's neck with his left hand, readjusted the grip more comfortably, and laid his gun against the base of Zavyn's skull. However Zavyn's neck itched badly, so he was rubbing it on the cloth collar of his jacket.

"Oh, stop scratching you filthy thing! Just you wait and I'll scratch it so it stays scratched!"

Duvailo was still alive and unafraid.

"Hey you! Put my head between your knees and give it a good hard squeeze, so I let out a good yell. My woman's standing over there and can't hear me otherwise."

Piyusya slugged him in the cheek, so as to feel the body of this bourgeois one last time, and Duvailo began shouting in a deliberate, complaining voice, "Mommy! Mommy! They're hitting me!"

Piyusya waited until Duvailo stretched full out and said his last words in full. Then he shot him twice in the neck and unclenched the hot dry gums of his own mouth.

Prokofy watched this solitary murder from afar and criticized Piyusya.

"Comrade Piyusya! Communists don't shoot people in the back!"

"Communists need communism, comrade Dvanov! Not officers' heroics! So there, and shut up, or I'll send you off to heaven too! Every whore wants to get fucked with a red flag so they can say their empty place has healed over with honor! So watch it or I'll shoot you right in the flag. . . ."

Chepurny turned up and put a stop to the conversation.

"What's going on? I ask you now! There's still bourgeoisie on the ground breathing and you two are looking for communism in words!"

The Jap and Piyusya personally went to study the dead bourgeoisie. The dead lay in heaps of three, five, and more, apparently having tried to draw together with at least parts of their bodies in these, their final moments of mutual separation.

Chepurny tested the throats of the bourgeoisie with the back of his hand, just like engineers test the temperature of their bearings. It seemed to him that all the bourgeoisie were still alive.

"I also knocked the soul out of Duvailo's throat, in addition, so to say," Piyusya said.

"And rightly so! That's where the soul is, in the throat," Chepurny recalled. "Why do you think the Cadets hang us by the neck? Same reason . . . so our souls get all tore up with rope burns. Then you really do die completely! Otherwise you just hang around and dawdle. After all, it's a hard thing to kill a man!"

Piyusya and Chepurny pinched all of the bourgeoisie and were not convinced of their decisive deadness. A few seemed still to be breathing, while others had eyes which were only just barely closed, as though they were

pretending, waiting for the night when they would crawl off and continue to live at the expense of Piyusya and the other proletarians. Then the Jap and Piyusya decided to give the bourgeoisie supplementary insurance against any continuation of their lives. They reloaded their revolvers and in strict sequence gave each reclining man of property a shot sideways through the throat, in the region of the glands.

"Now our task will be a little more dead certain," Chepurny sighed, the business finally done. "There's no proletarian on earth that's poorer than a dead man."

"It's for sure now," Piyusya approved. "I've got to go release the Red soldiers."

The soldiers were dismissed, but the Chekists remained to prepare a mass grave for the former bourgeois population of Chevengur. They finished up towards first light, then chucked all the corpses into the pit, along with their bundles. The wives of the murdered men did not dare come close, so they waited for the end of the earthwork from afar. When the Chekists had scattered the left-over dirt on the dawn-lit, empty square so that there would be no dirt for a grave mound, had stuck their spades in the ground and lit up their cigarettes, then the wives of the dead began to advance towards them from all the streets of Chevengur.

"Weep!" the Chekists told them and then went off to sleep away their exhaustion.

The wives lay down on the lumpy clay of the flat, trackless grave and tried to mourn. However they had cooled off during the night and their grief had been outlived, so the wives of the dead could no longer weep.

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After he found out how things had been in Chevengur, Kopenkin decided not to punish anyone for the time being. Rather he would endure the situation until Alexander Dvanov's arrival, particularly since at that very moment the pedestrian Lui was on his way.

During those days Lui had in fact covered much ground. He felt himself whole, full, and happy. Whenever he felt like eating he would drop into some hut and say to the housewife, "Lady, pluck me a little chicken, as I'm a fellow that's grown tired." If the woman was stingy about the chicken, then Lui would bid her farewell and go off on his own way across the steppe, dining on the angelica which grew because of the sun and not because of the pitiful barnyard efforts of man. Lui never begged and never stole, and if it happened that for a long period no opportunity for a bite arose, he knew that all the same he'd have a chance sometime to eat his fill, and he didn't let his hunger bother him.

Now Lui was spending the night in a pit in a brick stable. He had twenty-

five or thirty miles to go to get to the provincial center, and on paved road at that. Lui considered this a trifle, so he cooled off a long time after his sleep. He lay and thought about what he could do to get a smoke. Tobacco he had, but no paper. He had long ago smoked up all his documents and the only paper he had left was Kopenkin's letter to Dvanov. Lui pulled out the letter, smoothed it flat, and read it through two times to memorize it by heart. Then he made ten little empty cigarette tubes out of it.

"I'll tell him the letter in my own voice. It'll come out smoother that way, too!" Lui made a reasonable choice, and then confirmed it to himself.

"Of course! And how else could it be?"

Lui had a smoke and then went out onto the road, setting off for town along the softness of the verge. An ancient town with towers, balconies, temples, and the long buildings of schools, courts, and offices appeared in the high and murky mist of the distance, on the watershed between two clean rivers. Lui knew that people had been living in that town for a long time and that they kept others from living. Four factory chimneys were smoking on one side of the town, in the outskirts. This was the plant for farm machinery and other things that helped grain to grow. Lui liked the distant smoke of the chimneys and the whistle of the locomotives that ran through the silence of the fields that bore the quiet grasses.

Had the provincial capital not stood in the way of his path to Petrograd and the Baltic coast Lui would have gone around the town and not delivered the letter. Ships departed from that shore, from the cold empty plains of revolution, out into the blackness of the seas so as later to conquer the warm bourgeois countries.

Gopner at that time was descending the town hill towards the Polny Aidar river, and he noticed the paved road which had been laid through the steppe to the truck-farming villages. Lui, who was invisible from there, walked along the exact same road and imagined the Baltic fleet out in its cold sea. Gopner crossed the bridge and sat on the far shore to fish. He threaded a live, tormented worm onto his hook, wet his bobber, and peered into the quiet riffles of the flowing river. The cool of the water and the scent of damp grasses evoked breath and thought in Gopner. He listened to the muttering of the river and thought about the peaceful life, about the happiness that lay beyond the earth's horizons, there towards where the rivers swam, but would not take him, and gradually he lowered his dry head into the damp grass, passing from his intellectual calm into sleep. A little fish, a crappie, hooked himself to the pole and spent four hours trying to tear loose and hide in the deep free waters. The blood from where its lip had been pierced by the hook mixed with the bloody pulp of the worm. The crappie grew tired of flopping about and swallowed a piece of the worm for strength, then began again to tug at the cutting, burning iron to pull the hook out of himself, along with the cartilage of its lip.

From the height of the bridge dyke Lui noticed that a thin tired man

"What kind of communism could you make?"

was asleep on the bank, while near his feet a fishing pole was dancing about of its own accord. Lui went up to the man and pulled out the line with the crappie. The crappie fell quiet in the hand of the pedestrian, opening his gills and starting to die of frightened exhaustion.

"Comrade!" Lui said to the sleeper. "Here, take your fish! Sleeping in broad daylight. . . ."

Gopner opened his eyes, which had flooded with nourishing blood, and pondered the man who had appeared. The pedestrian squatted down to have a smoke and look at the construction in the town opposite.

"I was looking something over for a long time in my dream and I didn't get a chance to finish," Gopner said. "I wake up and there you stand, like the fulfillment of my desires. . . ."

Gopner scratched his hungry, stubbly throat and felt depressed. His excellent musings had perished in sleep, and even the river could not remind him of what they were.

"Ah, damn you anyway, you woke me up," Gopner said, growing angry. "Now I'm going to be tired again!"

"The river flows, the wind blows, the fish float," Lui began to drawl calmly, "and here you sit getting all rusty with your sorrow! Move someplace, let the wind air out your soul for a bit, and you'll recognize something."

Gopner did not answer. What can you say to a random passer-by? What would he understand about communism anyway? Stupid product of the peasantry.

"You haven't happened to hear where a comrade Alexander Dvanov lives, have you?" Lui inquired about his errand.

Gopner took his fish from the hand of the new arrival and threw it into the water. "Maybe he'll catch his breath there," he explained.

"It won't come back to life now," Lui doubted. "I'd kind of like to see that comrade face to face. . . ."

"What do you need to see him for, when I'll be seeing him?" Gopner said indefinitely. "You respect him or something?"

"Nobody gets respected just for his name, and I don't know anything about what he's done. Our comrades say he's urgently vital there in Cheven-gur."

"And what kind of a place is that?"

"Comrade Kopenkin wrote that there's communism and return. . . ."

Gopner looked appraisingly at Lui, as though he were a machine that needed an overhaul. He knew that in people like Lui capitalism had caused mental enfeeblement.

"None of you have any qualifications or consciousness, damn you!" Gopner answered. "What kind of communism could you make?"

"We haven't got anything at all," Lui corrected him. "The only thing we have left is people, which is why we've got comradeship."

Within himself Gopner felt a flood of well-rested strength and he spoke up after a short think.

"That's intelligent, damn me, but not solid. It's been made without any spare cross-braces. Understand, or are you running away from communism?"

Lui knew that around Chevengur there was no communism, just transitional stages, and he regarded the city on the hill as a stage.

"You live on a stage," he said to Gopner, "so it seems to you that I'm running. But I'm walking on foot, and then in the navy I'll cruise to the bourgeois countries and get them ready for the future. After all, I've got communism in my body now, so there's no way to get away from it."

Gopner took Lui's hand and examined it in the sunlight. The hand was big, veined, and covered with the unhealed marks of past labor, the birthmarks of all the oppressed.

"Maybe it's true," Gopner thought about Chevengur. "There's airplanes flying, and they're heavier than air, damn them."

Lui asked once more to be allowed to convey Kopenkin's oral letter to Dvanov so that Dvanov could go to Chevengur as quickly as possible, before communism there could weaken. Gopner reassured him and sought out the street where he lived.

"Go on and show yourself to my woman, she'll feed you up and get you watered, and me, I'm going to take my shoes off and go out on that log that's hung up on that sandbar and have a try for some chubs. The damn things rise for the beetles towards evening."

Lui was already used to parting quickly from people because he constantly met other and better people. He saw the light of the high sun above him everywhere, the light which made the earth accumulate plants for food and give birth to people, for comradeship.

Gopner decided after the pedestrian left that he was like some cultivated tree. Lui's body in fact lacked a unified principle of construction and organization. It had some sort of lack of coherence about the members and extremities, which grew from within him with a flourish of branches and tough strong wood.

Lui disappeared on the bridge and Gopner lay down to rest a bit more. He was on vacation and enjoying life as he did once a year. That day however he was not able to catch any chubs, for the wind soon came up, blowing in banks of clouds from behind the towers of the city, and Gopner had to go back to his wife and apartment. However it was boring to just sit in the room with his wife, so Gopner was always drawn to visit his comrades, particularly Sasha and Zakhar Pavlovich. Thus it was that he dropped in at the familiar wooden house on his way home.

Zakhar Pavlovich was lying down and Sasha was reading a book and flexing over it his dry hands which had grown so unused to people.

"You heard yet?" Gopner asked, giving them to understand that he hadn't just dropped in, but rather had come with a purpose. "Total

communism has been organized in Chevengur!”

Zakhar Pavlovich stopped his even snoring, braked his sleep, and listened. Alexander remained silent and looked at Gopner with trusting excitement.

“What are you looking at me for?” Gopner asked. “Those airplanes manage to fly somehow or other, don’t they? And they’re heavier than air, the damn things! So why can’t communism get itself organized?”

“And the goat what is always eating at the revolution from the edges like it was cabbage, what did they do with him?” asked Dvanov’s father.

“That’s objective conditions,” Alexander explained. “Father’s talking about scapegoats.”

“In Chevengur they ate the scapegoat,” Gopner announced as though he had been an eyewitness. “Now they’ll be guilty in life by themselves!”

On the other side of the wall of one-inch boards a man burst into tears, dealing his tears out ever louder and louder. The beer mugs on his tables trembled as he beat his insulted head. It was the lonely Young Communist who lived there and worked as a stoker at the railroad without showing any sign of movement toward higher duties. The Komsomol member sobbed a bit, then calmed down and began snivelling.

“Any swine you like gets to go buzzing around in automobiles, marry chubby little actresses, and me, I’m always living like this!” the Komsomol expressed his melancholy bile. “Tomorrow I’m going to go down to the regional committee and make them take me into an office too. I know all the political literature, I can handle the big picture! And here they made me a stoker, and fourth class to boot! They don’t know a real man when they see one, the swine. . . .”

Zakhar Pavlovich went outside to cool off and have a look at the rain, to see whether it was from a temporary cloud or part of the general background. It turned out to be a background rain that would last all night or maybe a whole day. The trees in the yard rustled as they were worked over by the wind and the rain, and the guard dogs in other yards snarled.

“What a wind, and the rain!” Zakhar Pavlovich muttered. “And soon I won’t have my son, either.”

In the room Gopner was calling Alexander to go to Chevengur.

“You and me,” Gopner was saying, “we’ll measure the entire communism there, and then come back to the center. Then it will be easy to make communism on all six parts of the globe, as soon as they give us the pattern for it in Chevengur.”

Dvanov thought silently about Kopenkin and his oral letter. “Communism and return.”

Zakhar Pavlovich listened and listened, then finally said, “You look close, lads. The working man is a very weak fool, and communism is far from a snap! There’s got to be a whole attitude among the folk in this Chevengur of yours. You don’t mean to tell me they actually got that licked once and

for all?"

"And why not?" Gopner asked, convinced. "The government's accidentally invented something intelligent out in the localities and look what's come of it, damn it! What's so odd about that?"

All the same Zakhar Pavlovich was skeptical to no small degree.

"Maybe so, maybe so . . . only man's not your smooth material. An idiot can't make a steam engine run, but we managed to live even under the Tsar. You understand me now?"

"I understand, I understand," Gopner considered, "But I don't see anything of that sort anywhere about."

"You don't see it, but me, I see it," Zakhar Pavlovich extended his incomprehension. "I can make anything you want out of iron, but there's no way you can make a communist out of a man!"

"Who made them? They made themselves, damn them!" Gopner retorted.

Here Zakhar Pavlovich agreed.

"Now that's something else again. I wanted to say that the local government there has nothing to do with it, because you can get smarter on manufactured things, but the government? You've already got your smartest people there, so they got out of practice about minds. If it wasn't for man being able to endure trouble, instead of cracking like a cast iron pot, then even a government would be an excellent thing!"

"Father, then there wouldn't even be a government," Alexander said.

"Maybe you're right at that." Zakhar Pavlovich affirmed.

They could hear how the Komsomol had fallen into a burdensome sleep, without having completely left his frenzy. "Swine. . ." he muttered, already resigned. He uttered something important as he slept. "They sleep in pairs on beds and I'm alone on a brick shelf . . . let me have just a little lie on that soft mattress, comrade secretary, because I'm killing myself at manual labor . . . how many years have I been paying dues? Come on, let me have my share, huh? What's the story here? . . ."

The night rustled with floods of chilly rains. Alexander heard the falling of the heavy drops beating against the lakes and streams of the street. Only one thing comforted him in this inhospitably damp weather. The memory of the fairy tale about the bubble, the straw, and the bast shoe which as a trio had once managed to overcome a nature just as faithless and impenetrable.

"He's the bubble, of course, and she's not a woman, she's a straw, and their comrade is a discarded bast shoe, and they have passed through the fields and puddles as friends," Dvanov imagined to himself with the happiness of childhood and a sense of his own likeness to the obscure bast shoe. "I also have comrades, bubbles and straws, only I discard them for some reason . . . I'm worse than a bast shoe. . ."

The night smelled of the far grass stands on the steppe. An office building stood on the far side of the street. There the tasks of revolution

languished now, while in the day there was an inventory of the draft pool. Gopner took off his shoes and stayed for the night, even though he knew he'd get it from his wife in the morning. "Where," she would say, "did you spend the night? Found yourself somebody a little younger, huh?!" And then she'd let him have it in the collar bone with a log. And people actually think women understand comradeship! They would saw all of communism up into petty bourgeois chunks with their wood saws!

"Ah, damn you anyway. It's not much a muzhik needs!" Gopner sighed. "But there's no calm regulations here!"

"What are you gurgling about?" Zakhar Pavlovich asked.

"I'm talking about the family. Take my wife now. For every pound of live meat, she's got five pounds of petty bourgeois ideology. That's the kind of counterweight you've got!"

The rain outside was ending. The bubbles fell silent and the earth began to smell of freshly-washed grass, clean cold water, and the novelty of the open road. Dvanov went to bed with regret because it seemed he had lived that day in vain, and he was conscience stricken by this sudden attack of the dreariness of life. The day before had been better, even though Sonya had come in from the country, tied the remnants of her things from her old apartment into a little bundle, and then had gone off heaven knows where. She had knocked at Sasha's window and waved goodbye with her hand. He had gone out into the street but she was no longer in sight. And Sasha had thought about her until evening, which helped him to exist. Today however he had forgotten why he lived and so he could not sleep.

Gopner was already asleep, but his breathing was so weak and pitiful when he was asleep that Dvanov went over to him in fear that life in the man had somehow ceased. Dvanov replaced Gopner's wide-flung hand on his chest and listened anew to the complex and tender life of a sleeping man. It was plain how fragile, defenseless, and trusting this man was, and yet all the same there was probably someone who had beaten, tormented, deceived, and despised him. As it was he was barely alive and in sleep his breathing had all but flickered out. No one looks at sleeping people, but only they have real, beloved faces, for when awake the face of man is disfigured by memory, feeling, and need.

Dvanov soothed Gopner's wide-flung arms, then closely studied Zakhar Pavlovich, who was also deeply oblivious in sleep. Dvanov's was the curiosity of tenderness. Then he listened a bit to the dying wind and lay down until the next day. His father lived sensibly and wisely in sleep, similar to his life in the day, and his face changed little at night. He saw dreams which were useful and close to being awake, and not ones which later make one feel ashamed and depressed.

Dvanov flexed until he achieved complete sensation of his body, and then he grew quiet. Gradually, like exhaustion slipping slowly away, Dvanov's childhood day rose up before him, not in the depths of his overgrown years,

but rather in the depths of his hushed, difficult, self-tormenting body. Rain fell like sparse tears through a gloomy evening autumn onto the village cemetery of his hometown. The wind rocked the rope which the church watchman used to toll the hours so that he would not have to scale the belltower. Emaciated crumpled clouds that looked like country women who had just given birth passed low over the village. Little Sasha stood beneath the last rustling leaves on the grave of his natural father. The rain had melted the grave mound, passers-by had trampled it down to nothing, and leaves just as dead as the father that was buried there fell on it. Sasha stood with an empty sack and a walking staff which Prokhor Abramovich had given him for the long road.

Without understanding why he must part with his father, the boy poked at the dirt of the grave as once he had touched his father's death shirt, and it seemed to him that the rain smelled of sweat and a normal life in his father's warm embrace, on the shores of Lake Mutevo. That life which had been promised as his forever would now return no longer, and the boy did not know whether this was deliberate or whether he ought to cry. Instead of himself, little Sasha left his father the staff. He dug a hole for it in the grave mound and covered it with freshly dead leaves, so that he would know how dreary it was for Sasha to go alone and that Sasha would always return there from wherever he was, to get his staff and his father.

Dvanov felt burdened, and he wept as he slept, for he still had not taken the staff back from his father. However the father himself was now rowing in the rowboat and smiling at the alarm of his son, who was weary with waiting. His death-trap boat trembled at everything, at the wind and even the breathing of the man who rowed, and the particular, always working face of Dvanov's father expressed a meek but passionate compassion for the half of the world, the whole remaining half of the world which he did not know, which he intellectually labored over, and which perhaps he despised. As he got out of the boat Dvanov's father stroked the shallow water, grasped the grass gently and harmlessly by its top, embraced the boy, and looked at the world close by as though it were his friend and boon companion in a battle with his own single enemy, invisible to all.

"Why are you crying, sprout?" his father asked. "Your staff has grown into a tree and now, why it's up to here! There's no way you'll be able to pull it up."

"But how can I go to Chevengur?" the boy asked. "It'll be dreary. . . ."

His father sat down on the grass and looked silently at the far shore of the lake. This time he did not embrace his son.

"Don't be depressed," his father said. "It's also boring for me to be lying here, son. Go do something in Chevengur. Otherwise why are we lying dead?"

Sasha moved closer to his father and lay down in his lap, because he did not want to go to Chevengur. The father also wept at their parting, and

then clasped his son so tightly in his own grief that the boy began to sob, feeling himself alone forever. He held onto his father's shirt a good while longer. The sun had already emerged above the forest, beyond which far away in the distance lived the alien Chevengur. Forest birds came flying out to the lake to drink, while his father still sat, watching the lake and the ascending, unnecessary day. However the boy was asleep on his father's knees. Then the father turned his son's face toward the sun so that his tears would dry, but the light tickled the boy's closed eyes, and he woke up.

Gopner was putting on his tattered foot cloths and Zakhar Pavlovich was pouring tobacco into his pouch, preparing to go to work. The sun rose above the houses as it had done in the forest and its light pressed on Dvanov's tear-streaked face. Zakhar Pavlovich tied up his pouch, took a hunk of bread and two potatoes, and then said, "Well, I'm off. God be with you." Dvanov looked at Zakhar Pavlovich's lap and at the flies which were flying around like forest birds.

"Well, are you going to Chevengur?" Gopner asked.

"I'm going. You?"

"You better than me or something? I'm going too."

"But what about work? You going to quit?"

"Sure, why not? I'll just take my last pay and that's that. Communism now is dearer than labor discipline, damn it. Or maybe you think I'm not a Party member, huh?"

Dvanov asked Gopner about his wife, how she would eat without him. There Gopner grew thoughtful, but only slightly, and not for long.

"Oh, she can eat seeds. She doesn't need much. Me and her, we didn't have love . . . just, well . . . the fact, and that's all. After all the proletariat was born not because of love but by a fact!"

Gopner did not say what really had bucked him up for taking the trip to Chevengur. He really wanted to go not so that his wife would have to eat seeds, but rather so that Chevengur's pattern could be used to organize communism all over the province as quickly as possible. Then communism would guarantee his wife a well-fed, sure old age, just as it would for other unnecessary people. For the time being she would have to get on as best she could. If on the other hand everyone had to continue working forever, then there would be neither end nor improvement in that occupation. Gopner had already been working twenty-five years without a halt, and that had led to no improvement or personal benefit in his life. It was always the same old thing and it just wasted time for nothing. Neither food, nor clothing, nor spiritual happiness was multiplying, which meant that now people needed not so much labor as communism. In addition his wife could come here to Zakhar Pavlovich and he would not refuse a proletarian woman a piece of bread. Submissive working people were also vitally necessary. They worked without a break in that time when communism was still useless, but already they require bread, family misfortunes, and the additional comfort of women.

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Kopenkin lived twenty-four hours confident in Chevengur, and then he grew weary of his stay in the town, for he did not feel any communism in it. It was turning out that in the beginning, after the burial of the bourgeoisie, Chepurny knew nothing about how to live for happiness, so he went out into the far fields to concentrate and there in the solitude of the living grass to have a presentiment of communism. After two days of meadowland desolation and contemplation of the counterrevolutionary blessings of nature, Chepurny grew sadly wistful and turned for a mind to Karl Marx. Chepurny thought that it was an enormous book, so it must have everything written in it. He was even amazed that the world was constructed so sparsely, with much more steppe than houses and people, and yet there were already so many words that had been invented about people and the world.

However he organized readings of the book aloud. Prokofy read to him and Chepurny put down his head and listened with an attentive mind, occasionally pouring out kvas for Prokofy so that his reader's voice would not weaken. After the readings the Jap had understood nothing, but things were easier for him.

"Formulate, Prosh," he said calmly. "I feel something."

Prokofy swelled up with his own intelligence and began to formulate simply. "Comrade Chepurny, I propose one thing. . . ."

"Don't propose, give me a resolution about the liquidation of the class of residual swine."

"I propose," Prokofy addressed him reasonably, "one thing. If Karl Marx didn't say anything about residual classes, then there just shouldn't be any."

"But there are. Go out on the street and you'll find either a widow or a steward or some kind of cancelled foreman to the proletariat. How can that be, I ask you?"

"I propose that inasmuch as according to Karl Marx they do not exist, they therefore should not exist."

"And yet they live and oppress us obliquely. How can that be?"

Prokofy again tensed his familiar head, seeking now at least an organizational form.

The Jap warned him not to try to think according to science, since science was not complete, but just developing. You don't harvest green rye.

"I think and propose, comrade Chepurny, in that strict sequence," Prokofy said, finding his way out.

"So think faster, or else I'm going to get upset!"

"I see the following way out. It is necessary to remove the residue of

population as far from Chevengur as feasible so that they will wander off and get lost.”

“That’s not clear enough. Shepherds can show them the way back.”

Prokofy did not cut off his own speech.

“All those being eliminated from the basis of communism will be given a week’s rations in advance. This will be handled by the liquidation committee of the evacuation point.”

“Remind me tomorrow. I’m going to annul that committee. . . .”

“I’ll make a note of it, comrade Chepurny. Then, the death sentence can be pronounced on the entire middle reserve residue and then they will be immediately pardoned.”

“How’s that?!”

“Pardoned as a sign of permanent exile from Chevengur and other bases of communism. If however such residue appears again in Chevengur, then the death sentence is to be reinvoked within twenty-four hours.”

“That’s entirely acceptable, Prosh. Please write up the decree, and start from the right side of the page.”

Chepurny took a deep sniff of snuff and felt its taste for some time. Now he felt good. The class of residual swine would be led out beyond the boundary of the district and communism would then come to Chevengur, for there was nothing else that could be there. The Jap took Karl Marx’s work in his hands and respectfully touched the thickly-printed pages. “The man had to write all of that,” Chepurny thought compassionately, “and here we did everything first and then read him. It would have been better not to write the thing in the first place.”

So that the book would not turn out to have been read in vain, the Jap left an epistolary mark on it, athwart the title: “Executed in Chevengur as of the evacuation of the class of residual swine. Marx had no mind to write on this, but their danger is inescapable in the future. However, we took our steps.” Then the Jap carefully placed the book on the windowsill, approvingly feeling it to be business of the past.

Prokofy wrote the decree and they parted. Prokofy went to look for Klavdyusha and Chepurny went to look over the town before communism set upon it. Alien people sat warming themselves near the houses, on the footings, fallen oak logs, and other chance seats, old women, forty-year-old valets of shot masters, though they still wore their blue caps, small youths who had been raised on prejudices, civil servants tortured by the end of service, and other adherents of the single estate. As soon as they spotted the wandering Jap those sitting quietly rose and hid themselves in the orchard, taking care not to bang the gate and trying to disappear from sight and mind. All the gates had graveyard crosses drawn on them in chalk. They stayed there almost the entire year. The crosses were redrawn each year on the night before Epiphany. There still had not been a strong lateral rain that year to wash off the chalk crosses. “I’ll have to go around tomorrow with a wet cloth,” Chepurny

noted in his mind. "This is an obvious scandal."

The deep and mighty steppe opened at the edge of town. The thick necessary air reassuringly nourished the still evening grass. Only in the extinguished guttering distance was there some disturbed man who was driving a buckboard, which raised clouds of dust in the emptiness of the horizon. The sun had not yet gone down, but it was now possible to look directly at it. The tireless round heat of its red power had to be sufficient for communism eternal and the full cessation of intestine vanities in people, which means the mortal necessity to eat, when as an entire heavenly luminary the sun works, regardless of people, on the resolution of food. People would have to step back from one another to fill this intensive sun-lit space with the stuff of friendship.

The Jap regarded the sun wordlessly, and then the steppe and Chevengur. He felt the sharp excitement of the nearness of communism. Chepurny feared his rising mood, the thick strength of which would clog up the thoughts in his head and make his internal experience difficult. It would take too long to find Prokofy now, but he could have formulated it in a way that would have made it intelligible to the soul. "So what's so hard for me?! This is communism coming!" Chepurny thought, rummaging quietly in the darkness of his excitement.

The sun departed, releasing the moisture of the air for the grass. Nature became a deeper blue and calm, purged of the noisy solar laboring after the general comradeship of languished life. A grass blade crushed by the Jap's foot laid its dying head upon the leafy shoulder of its living neighbor. The Jap put aside his feet and sniffed deeply. The smell of the sadness of separation and the anguish of the absence of man wafted from the depths of the distant steppe.

Weeds extended in a solid thicket from the last fences of Chevengur out into the fallow ground of the untenanted steppe. The Jap's legs were comfortable in the warmth of the dusty burdocks, which were growing in a fraternal way among the other unauthorized grasses. The weeds lay all around Chevengur as a thick shield against the hidden expanses, where the Jap sensed a crouching humanity. If not for the weeds, if not for the brotherly, patient grasses which so resembled unhappy people, the steppe would have been unacceptable. Instead however the wind carries the seeds of their own reproduction through the weeds and a man walks through the grass with a pounding heart, heading for communism. The Jap wanted to go away and get a rest from his feelings, but he waited for the man who was walking towards Chevengur from afar, up to his waist in weeds. It was immediately obvious that this was no residual swine, but rather one of the oppressed. He was wandering towards Chevengur as though towards an enemy, not believing that he would find lodging there for the night. As he walked he belched. The wanderer's pace was uneven, for his legs kept slithering apart from the exhaustion of an entire life, and the Jap thought, "Now there goes a comrade. I'll wait and

embrace him from my sorrow. After all, it's scary to be alone on the eve of communism!"

The Jap touched a burdock. It too wanted communism. The entire weed patch was a friendship of living plants. By the same token, flowers and perennial beds and gardens were clearly swinish cultivations. He must not forget to have them cut down and trampled on forever in Chevengur. Let the wild grasses grow in the streets of Chevengur, for just like the proletariat, this grass endures the life of heat and the death of deep snow. Not far away the weeds bent and rustled meekly, as though from the movement of an outside body.

"I love you, Klavdyusha, and want to eat you, but you are always too distracted," Prokofy's voice said in torment. He had not expected that Chepurny would have come out of the town.

The Jap heard, but he was not offended. After all, there was the fellow coming through the weeds, and he also did not have Klavdyusha!

The man was already close, his beard black and his eyes dedicated to something. He stepped through the grasses and groves of weeds with burning dusty boots, which must have smelled of sweat.

The Jap leaned complainingly on the fence. With fright he saw that the man with the black beard was extremely dear and precious to him. If he had not shown up at that moment, Chepurny would have burst into tears of sorrow in the empty, lenten Chevengur. The Jap secretly did not believe that Klavdyusha could go outside and have a passion for reproduction, because he respected her too greatly for the comradely comfort she offered all the lonely communists of Chevengur. Here, however, she had gone and lain down in the weeds with Prokofy, and at the same time the entire town had hidden itself in anticipation of communism. Even Chepurny himself needed friendship in his sorrow. If he could have embraced Klavdyusha immediately he could have freely waited another two or three days for communism, but he could no longer live as is, for his sense of comradeship had nothing to hold itself up. Although no one was able to formulate a firm and eternal point to life, this point may be forgotten when one lives in friendship and permanent presence of comrades, when the poverty of life is evenly and minutely distributed among fellow embracing martyrs.

The walker stopped in front of Chepurny.

"You're standing still. Are you waiting for friends?"

"Yes, for friends!" the Jap agreed happily.

"Now everybody's strangers. You'll be waiting forever. But maybe you're looking for relatives?"

"No. Comrades."

"So wait then," the passerby said, and once again he hoisted his grub sack onto his back. "There's no comrades at all, now. All the idiots who used to live God alone knows how, now they've started living normally. I see it for myself when I'm walking."

The blacksmith Sotykh was already accustomed to disappointment. It was all the same to him whether he lived in the village of Kalitva or in another town, and he had indifferently abandoned his smithy in the village for the whole summer to go off and hire out as a fitter during the building season, since armatures looked to him like hurdle fences, and thus were familiar to him.

"You see," Sotykh said, unaware that he was glad of the man he had met, "comrades are good people. It's just that they're idiots and don't live long. Where can you find a comrade now? The very best are murdered and lying in the grave. They really tried to move things for the poor. And those who lasted it out, now they're living pointlessly. Now the superfluous element, they hold governmental peace above everybody and there's no way you'll be able to wait that one out!"

Sotykh straightened out his sack and made a step to go farther, but the Jap carefully pushed up against him and burst into tears of agitation and shame at his defenseless friendship.

At first the blacksmith remained silent, testing to see if the Jap was faking, and then he ceased to hold up his defenses against other people and grew weak with relief.

"That means you've been left behind by good comrades what got themselves killed, since you're crying. Come on, let's embrace and lie down for the night. We'll have a good long think, you and me. And don't cry for nothing. People aren't songs, you know. Now a song always makes me cry. I even cried at my own wedding. . . ."

Chevengur always locked up early, to sleep and feel no danger. And no one, not even the Jap with his attentive feelings, knew that quiet conversations of the inhabitants were going on at several houses. Former stewards and dismissed civil servants lay by the fences in the comfort of the burdocks and whispered to one another of the Reign of the Lord, the Thousand-Year Kingdom of Christ, and about the future peace of a world freshened by suffering. Those conversations were vitally necessary for walking through the pit of communism's hell. Forgotten reserves of accumulated ageless spirituality helped the old Chevengurians to bear the remainder of their lives with the full dignity of endurance and hope. By the same token, this was a misfortune for Chepurny and his rare comrades. Nowhere, neither in books nor in fairytales, was communism written out as a comprehensible song that might be recalled for comfort in a dangerous hour. Karl Marx looked down from the walls like an alien Sabaoth, and his fearsome books could not carry a man off in reassuring daydreams about communism. Posters in Moscow and the provinces depicted a hydra of counterrevolution and trains filled with calico and broadcloth chugging into villages that had cooperatives, but nowhere was there a touching picture of that future, for the sake of which the hydra's head had to be lopped off and the heavy freight trains had to be pulled. Chepurny was forced to rely solely on his own inspired heart and its difficult

strength in order to gain the future, whacking the souls out of the pacified bourgeoisie and embracing the walking blacksmith on the road.

Before the first pure light of dawn, Chepurny and Sotykh lay on the straw in an open stock barn in intellectual pursuit of communism and its spirituality. The Jap was glad of any person who was proletarian, no matter what they said, whether it was correct or not. It felt good not to sleep and to hear the formulations of his own feelings, which were jammed by their own superfluous power. This gave inner peace and finally, sleep. Sotykh too did not sleep, but several times he fell silent and began to doze. The dozing then resurrected his strength and he would wake up, talk for a bit, then tired once again and drop off into semi-oblivion. During the drowsing, the Jap straightened Sotykh's legs for him and put his arms at peace, so that he might rest better.

"Don't stroke me, you're making a fellow feel ashamed," Sotykh called out in the warm, muffled stock barn. "Things are good with you just so, for some reason."

Just before the pair went to sleep, the cracks in the barn door lit up and the cool barnyard began to smell of smoky manure. Sotykh got up and glanced at the new day with eyes dull and glazed from his uneven sleep.

"What's your problem? Lie down on your right side and forget it," Chepurny said, sorry that the time had passed so quickly.

"You just won't let me get to sleep," Sotykh reproached him. "We've got an activist in the village that's like that. He just won't give the muzhiks any peace. You're an activist too, the Devil take you!"

"But what shall I do, since I can't sleep? I ask you now!"

Sotykh smoothed the hair on his head and untangled his beard, as though he were getting slicked up to meet death while asleep.

"You can't sleep because of negligence, and the revolution's slipping away bit by bit. Come lie closer to me and sleep, and then in the morning gather the remnants of the Reds together and try like hell, or else the people will wander off somewhere on foot again."

"I'll do it first thing," Chepurny formulated to himself and snuggled against the peaceful back of the passerby so that he might gather his forces as quickly as possible, in sleep. Sotykh's sleep, however, was already broken and he could not drop off. "Sun's already coming up," Sotykh noticed the morning. "It's almost time for me to go. Later on it'll be better, when it's hot. . . . I can crawl into some hole and lie down. Good lord, what an odd one we've got sleeping here. He wants communism, so he figures the whole people is with him."

Sotykh set Chepurny's flopping head straight, covered his thin body with the greatcoat, and got up to leave forever.

"Farewell, barn," he said to his night's lodging, as he stood in the doors. "Live, and don't be sad!"

The bitch who slept in the depths of the barn with her puppies had

gone off somewhere to feed and her pups wandered all over, worrying about their mother. One fat puppy snuggled up against Chepurny's chin and began to lick him just above the collarbone with his greedy baby's tongue. At first Chepurny only smiled, because the puppy was tickling him, but then he began to wake up from the irritating chill of the evaporating saliva.

The passerby was gone, but Chepurny sighed and did not grieve for him. "We have got to get communism finished up quick," the Jap cheered himself onward, "and then that comrade will come back to Chevengur too."

An hour later the Jap assembled all the Bolsheviks of Chevengur, eleven men, in the district executive committee office and told them the same thing he always told them.

"Lads, we have got to get communism built as quickly as ever we can, or else its historical moment will pass. Prokofy, formulate us up something!"

Prokofy, who had all the works of Karl Marx at his personal command, formulated the entire revolution as he wished to, dependent upon Klavdyusha's moods and the objective circumstances.

For Prokofy the objective circumstances, as well as a brake on his thinking, consisted of the dark, disconnected, and unmistakable feelings of the Jap. Just as soon as Prokofy began to convey the words of Marx by heart, to demonstrate the initial slowness of revolution and the long peace which the Soviet government was to enjoy, the Jap grew sharply thinner from attentiveness, and rejected unequivocally any plans to introduce communism in installments.

"Prosh, don't you go thinking stronger than Karl Marx. He thought that up to be on the safe side, in the worst of cases like, but since we can put up communism right now, then that will be all the better for Marx."

"I can't depart from Marx, Comrade Chepurny," Prokofy said with modest spiritual submissiveness. "As long as it's printed in his book, then we have to proceed theoretically in an absolutely literal way."

Piyusya sighed wordlessly from the weight of his own darkness. The other Bolsheviks too never argued with Prokofy, since for them all words were the delusion of one man, and not a mass affair.

"Prosh, all this you are saying is very nice," Chepurny rejected it softly and tactfully. "Only I ask you now: won't we wear ourselves down with this long march of revolutionariness? And maybe I'll even be the first to go bad and get worn down from preserving the government. After all, you can't be better than everybody else for long!"

"As you wish, Comrade Chepurny," Prokofy agreed, with firm humility.

The Jap understood vaguely and endured within himself his future emotions.

"No, not as I wish, comrade Dvanov, as you all wish, as Lenin wishes, and as Marx thought night and day! Let's have done with it, let's purge Chevengur of the remains of the bourgeoisie."

"Excellent," Prokofy said. "I've already prepared a plan for an obligatory resolution."

"Not a resolution, an order," Chepurny corrected, so that it would be stronger. "Afterwards we can resolve, but for now we have to establish."

"We'll publish it as an order," Prokofy agreed again. "Establish the resolution, comrade Chepurny!"

"No, I won't," the Jap refused. "I said what I had to and that's it."

However, the remnants of the Chevengur bourgeoisie did not obey the literary resolution-order, which was flour-pasted to the gates, shutters, and fences of the town. The native Chevengurians thought that they had just to wait a bit and then everything would pass over. After all, that which had never been before could certainly not last long. Chepurny waited twenty-four hours for the remnant bourgeoisie to leave, and then went with Piyusya to chase the people out of their houses. Piyusya went into houses at random, picking out the most adult bourgeois there and silently socking him in the head. Then he said, "You read the order?"

"I read it, comrade," the bourgeois answered calmly. "Just check my documents. I'm not bourgeois, I'm a former Soviet civil servant and I am liable to be called back into the civil service at the first necessity."

Chepurny took his paper, which read:

"Issued to the bearer, Comrade Prokopenko R.T., to attest that as of the above date he is dismissed from his duty as vice-commander of the reserve grain-foraging base of the evacuation center and because of the Soviet condition and movement of his thought he belongs to the revolutionary and reliable elements.

For the Directorate of the Evacuation Center, P. Dvanov."

"What's he got there?" Piyusya waited.

Chepurny tore the piece of paper to bits.

"Exile him. We've gone and certified the whole damn bourgeoisie."

"But how can you!? How can it be, comrades!?" Prokopenko flung himself at their mercy. "Look, I've got my certificate right here! I'm a Soviet civil servant! I didn't even leave with the Whites, and everybody left with the Whites!"

"Why should you leave?! You've got your own house!" Piyusya explained to Prokopenko the fault of his conduct and then gave him a round-house to the ear, which he admired.

"In general, do it so that the town will be empty for me," Chepurny said to Piyusya with finality, and then left himself, so as not to get upset and so that he would have time enough to get ready for communism. Piyusya, however, was not able to achieve the expulsion of the bourgeoisie immediately. At first he worked alone, beating the remaining possessors by himself, setting the quotas of things and food that the residual bourgeoisie were allowed to take for their trip by himself, and even packing things into bundles himself. However, towards evening Piyusya grew so worn out that he could

no longer beat the residents house to house, but rather just packed up their things in silence. "This way I'll crack up completely!" Piyusya grew alarmed and went to look for assistant communists.

However, even the entire detachment of Bolsheviks could not deal with the residual capitalists within twenty-four hours. Some of the capitalists requested that the Soviet government hire them as tenant farmers, without rations or salary, while others pleaded to be allowed to live in the former churches and at least sympathize with the Soviet government from a distance.

"No and no again!" Piyusya rejected them. "You are not people now, and nature has changed completely."

Many of the half-bourgeois cried on the floor as they said goodbye to their things and leavings. Pillows lay in warm mountains on the beds, voluminous trunks stood like inseparable relatives of the sobbing capitalists, and as they went outside, each half-bourgeois carried out with himself the smell of many years in his own house, which long ago had penetrated through the lungs into the blood and been transformed into a part of the body. Not everyone knew that smell is the dust of one's own things, but each refreshed his blood by breathing this smell. Piyusya did not allow the grief of the semi-bourgeois to linger too long in any one place. He threw their bundles with their quotas of the most necessary things out into the street, and then grabbed the grieving people crossways, with the indifference of a craftsman skilled at doing quality control on people, and silently placed them on their bundles, as though on the island of their final refuge. Once out in the wind the semi-bourgeois ceased mourning and felt their bundles to see if Piyusya had put in everything that they were allowed to have. Piyusya finally managed to expel the entire class of residual swine by late evening, and then he sat down with his comrades to have a smoke. A thin, biting rain began. The wind died powerlessly and lay silently beneath the rain. The semi-bourgeois sat on their bundles in endless unbroken rows and waited for some sort of occurrence.

Chepurny appeared and ordered them in his impatient voice to all disappear from Chevengur forever, as communism had no time to wait and the new class was standing idle while it waited for living space and communal property of its own. The remnants of capitalism heard Chepurny out, but then continued to sit in the quiet and the rain.

"Comrade Piyusya," Chepurny said with control, "I ask you now, what the hell's got into them? Tell them they better get hid before we start killing them. It's on account of them that we've got no place to put the revolution."

"Right now, comrade Chepurny," Piyusya interpreted concretely, then pulled out his revolver.

"Get the hell out there and hide!" he said to the semi-bourgeois nearest at hand, who sank his head into his suddenly-deprived hands and burst into lengthy tears, without any prefatory wistfulness. Piyusya shot a hot cartridge

into the man's bundle, and the semi-bourgeois rose on legs suddenly grown strong and departed through the smoke of the shot. Piyusya grabbed the bundle with his left hand and threw it off into the distance.

"You go as is," he said definitively. "The proletariat gave you things and that means you should have took them and run, because now we're taking them back!"

Piyusya's men hurriedly began to shoot the bundles and baskets of the old population of Chevengur and the semi-bourgeoisie slowly, without fear, moved off into the calm environs of Chevengur.

There remained in the town eleven male inhabitants, ten of whom slept, while the one walked among the silenced streets and tormented himself. The twelfth was Klavdyusha, but she was kept in a special house as the raw material for general happiness, away from the dangers of mass life.

Towards midnight the rain stopped and the sky died away from emaciation. A mournful summery murk covered quiet, empty, and terrible Chevengur. With a careful heart Chepurny closed the wide-flung gates at the house of the former Zavyn-Duvailo. He wondered where all the town dogs had disappeared to. In the yards there were only maimed burdocks and the gentle goosefoot, while in the houses, for the first time in long eons, no one sighed in their sleep. Occasionally Chepurny went into the main room of a hut, sat down in the preserved armchair, and sniffed tobacco, so that at least something would rustle and make noise for him. Heaps of homemade doughnuts lay here and there in the cupboards, and one house held a bottle of sacramental wine. Chepurny pushed the cork deeper into the bottle so that the wine wouldn't lose its flavor before the proletariat arrived, and then he threw a towel over the doughnuts, so they wouldn't get dusty. Everywhere the beds were particularly well-equipped. The linen lay fresh and cold, promising peace to any head it would receive. Chepurny lay down on one bed to test it, but he was immediately ashamed and depressed to be living so comfortably, as though he had received the bed in exchange for his uncomfortable revolutionary soul. In spite of the empty abandoned homes, not one of the ten Bolsheviks of Chevengur had gone to seek out a pleasant place to spend the night. Instead they all lay down together on the floor of the general brick building which back in 1917 had been reserved for the then still unsullied revolution. Even Chepurny himself considered that brick building as his only home, not these warm comfortable peasant living-rooms.

There was a defenseless sadness lying over all of Chevengur, as in the courtyard of a father's house from which not long before has been carried out the mother's coffin and she is mourned equally by the young orphan boy, the fences, the burdocks, and the waste straw. And now the boy leans his head against the fence, strokes the rough-hewn planks with his hand, and weeps in the gloom of the guttering world, while the father wipes away his own tears and says it's nothing, that the boy will get used to it. Chepurny could formulate his feelings only by the grace of memory, and he walked

into the future with a dark expectant heart, feeling with his foot for the edge of the revolution, and only thus did he avoid straying from his path. That night, however, there was not a single memory to help Chepurny define the situation in Chevengur. The houses stood extinguished, abandoned forever not only by the semi-bourgeois, but by the lesser animals as well. There were not even any cows anywhere. Life had renounced Chevengur and gone off to die in the weeds of the steppe, leaving its own dead fate to eleven people, ten of whom slept while one wandered with the sorrow of an unclear danger.

Chepurny sat on the ground near a wattle fence and tenderly felt a growing cocklebur with two fingers. It too was alive and now would live in communism. For some reason the first light was long in coming. Long since it had been time for a new day. Chepurny grew still and began to fear that the sun might not come up in the morning and morning itself might never come. After all, there was nothing left of the old world!

The evening clouds hung flaccidly, powerless in their unmoving spot, all of their tumbling strength used up by the weeds of the steppe for their own growth and multiplication. The wind came down together with the rain and lay for a long time somewhere off in the crush of grasses. Chepurny remembered these kinds of empty, halted nights from his childhood, when he had felt it as dreary and stuffy within his body so that he could not sleep, and the little Jap lay on the stove in the stuffy quiet of the hut, his eyes wide open. Then he felt some sort of dry narrow stream from his stomach to his neck which continually rocked his heart and brought the anguish of life into his child's mind. This itching unease made little Chepurny toss on the stove, rage, and weep, as though a man were tickling him from the center of his body. It was precisely that same stuffy dry alarm which disturbed Chepurny in that Chevengurian night, the night which had perhaps extinguished the world forever.

"Well, anyway, it'll be a nice day tomorrow, if the sun should come up," Chepurny reassured himself. "How is it communism is making me grieve, like I'm some semi-bourgeois?"

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Probably by then the semi-bourgeois had hidden out in the steppe or gone on further from Chevengur in that slow gait of theirs. Like all adults, they were not conscious of the perturbation of uncertainty which lived within children and members of the Party. For the semi-bourgeois, the life of the future was simply unhappy, but not dangerous and puzzling, while Chepurny sat in fear of the coming day, because that first day would be somehow clumsy and awful, as though something that had always been virginal proved now ripe for marriage, and on the morrow everyone must marry.

Chepurny kneaded his face with his hands in his embarrassment, then sat motionless for a long while, enduring his senseless shame.

A cock crowed somewhere in the center of Chevengur and a dog who had quit her master's yard walked quietly past the Jap.

"Zhuchok! Zhuchok!" Chepurny called joyously to the dog. "Come

here, please.”

Zhuchok came over obediently and sniffed the extended human hand, which smelled of goodness and straw.

“Are things all right for Zhuchok? They aren’t for me.”

There were burrs tangled in Zhuchok’s coat and her rear end was matted with horse manure and mud. This was a faithful country dog, the guardian of Russian nights and winters, the inhabitant of all households of the middle possessing class.

Chepurny led the dog into the house and fed it white doughnuts. The dog ate them with a quiver of danger, since she was eating this kind of food for the first time since her birth. The Jap noticed the dog’s fright and found a piece of homemade egg pie to give her, but the dog wouldn’t eat it. She only sniffed at it and circled it attentively, not trusting this gift from life. Chepurny waited until Zhuchok got over her fright and would eat the pie, but she never did, so he took it and ate it himself, to prove to the dog that it was all right. Zhuchok was overjoyed at having been spared being poisoned and she began to sweep the dusty floor with her tail.

“You must be a poor man’s dog, not a bourgeois dog!” the Jap fell in love with Zhuchok. “You haven’t ever eaten white flour, so now you can live in Chevengur.”

Outside two more cocks began crowing.

“That means we have three birds,” the Jap counted, “and one head of livestock.”

When he left the heated room of the house, Chepurny was immediately chilled by the air. He saw a Chevengur that was different, an open, cool town lit by the gray light of the still distant sun, a town in whose houses it was not frightening to live and through whose streets one might walk, because the grass grew as before and the little paths remained whole. The light of morning blossomed in the distance and devoured the wilted derelict clouds.

“That means the sun shall be ours!” thought Chepurny, pointing greedily to the east.

The nameless birds winged low over the Jap and with a shake of their little tails set down on a fence.

“And you’re with us too?” Chepurny greeted the birds by throwing them a handful of trash and tobacco from his pocket. “Please, eat, eat!”

Now the Jap wanted to sleep. He was ashamed of nothing. He walked over towards the brick common building where the ten comrades lay, but he was met by four sparrows who flew off into a fence because of their prejudices about caution.

“I was counting on you,” Chepurny said to the sparrows. “You are our own flesh and blood, birds, so you shouldn’t be afraid of anything now. There’s no bourgeoisie, so please, live!”

A light burned in the brick house. Two men were asleep, while the other eight lay silently and stared into the space above them. Their faces

were haggard and covered in dark thoughtfulness.

"How come you aren't asleep?" the Jap asked the eight. "Tomorrow is our first day, the sun's already up, the birds are flying in to us, and yet here you lie afraid, and for nothing. . . ."

The Jap lay down in the straw, wrapped his overcoat around himself, and subsided into warmth and oblivion. Beyond the window the dew already was rising toward the bare sun, which had not betrayed the Bolsheviks of Chevangur, but rather rose above them. Piyusya, who had not slept all night, got up with a lightened heart and washed and cleaned himself zealously, for the sake of the first day of communism. The lamp burned with a yellow, posthumous light, and Piyusya extinguished it with the pleasure of destruction, remembering that no one guarded Chevangur. The capitalists could move back in secret. They would have to let the lamp burn all night, so that the semi-bourgeois would know that the communists sat there armed and sleepless. Piyusya climbed up on the hut and squatted on the tin roof, away from the savage light of the dew boiling against the sun. Then Piyusya looked at the sun too, with eyes of proud and sympathetic possession.

"Press hard, so that seeds will sprout even on stones," Piyusya whispered with muffled excitement. He didn't have enough words to be able to shout, for he did not trust his own knowledge.

"Press down!" Piyusya again clenched his fists to help the sunlight press down upon the clay, the stones, and Chevangur.

Even without Piyusya, the sun leaned dry and hard into the earth, and the earth was the first to falter in the weakness of its exhaustion, and began oozing the juices of grass, the dampness of loam, and disturbing the entire fibrous expanse of the steppe, while the sun only grew more tempered and strong from its tensed, dry patience.

The causticity of the sun made the gums itch beneath Piyusya's teeth.

"The sun never used to come up like that," Piyusya compared the states and found in their favor. "Now I've got bravery running up and down my spine, like from orchestra music."

Piyusya looked out into the remaining distance, where the sun would go, to see whether there might be anything there to impede its motion, and then he stepped back in mortification. Near the outskirts of Chevangur the semi-bourgeois of yesterday were standing in a herd. They had built bonfires, pastured their goats, and the women were doing their wash in rain puddles. The semi-bourgeois and the terminated were digging something, probably dug-out houses, while three stewards were rigging up a tent out of underwear and sheets, working naked in the fresh air, in order at least to make a dwelling and property for themselves.

Piyusya immediately turned his attention to the matter of where the semi-bourgeois had gotten so much manufacturing material, since he himself had released them with a pretty strict ration.

Piyusya looked at the sun with mournful eyes, as though at property

"yesterday's people"  
ghosting of the semi-bourgeois

which had been revoked, then he scratched the thin veins of his neck with his nails. Then he spoke upwards with the meekness of respect, "Hang on a second, don't waste it all on strangers!"

Unaccustomed to wives and sisters, to cleanliness and nourishing food, the Bolsheviks of Chevengur lived in a homemade sort of way. They washed with sand instead of soap, wiped themselves with their sleeves or burdock leaves, felt the chickens themselves, searching for the eggs in all the nooks and crannies, and in the morning boiled up their basic soup in an iron pot of unknown function. Each who passed by the fire where the pot was kept warming would throw in some of the grasses that grew nearby, the nettles or dill or goosefoot or other such edible plants. They also threw in a few chickens and hindquarters of veal, if a calf happened to turn up in time, and then the soup was boiled until late at night, when the Bolsheviks could tear themselves free of the revolution in order to take food and after, when beetles, moths, and mosquitoes would fall into the soup dishes. Then the Bolsheviks ate their one meal a day and relaxed keenly.

Piyusya went past the vat where the soup was already boiling, but he didn't put anything into it.

He opened the storeroom, grabbed a heavy, dented bucket loaded with machine-gun ammunition belts, and asked comrade Kirei, who was drinking up the last of his chicken eggs, to pull the machine-gun after him. In peaceful days Kirei went to the lake to hunt with the machine-gun and almost always managed to bring back at least a seagull for everybody, or failing that, a heron. He also tried to shoot fish in the water with the machine-gun, but he didn't hit much. Kirei never asked Piyusya where they were going, since he had in advance the desire to shoot at whatever came his way, just so long as it wasn't a live proletarian.

"Piyusya, you want me to blow a sparrow out of the sky for you?" Kirei asked.

"I'll knock you out!" Piyusya refused, offended. "It was you what was blasting chickens out in the garden day before yesterday!"

"What's the difference? All the same you can eat them."

"All the same like hell! You've got to choke the chickens to death with your hands. Every bullet you put in a chicken for nothing, that's one more bourgeois you've got left alive!"

"Well, Piyusya, maybe so . . . I won't let it happen anymore. . . ."

The campfires among the band of semi-bourgeois had already died out, which meant that breakfast was already done and they would not have to get by that day without hot food.

"You see yesterday's people over there?" Piyusya pointed out for Kirei the semi-bourgeois, who were sitting around the dead campfires like little collectives.

"Hurray! They won't get away from me now!"

"And it was you mucking up bullets by shooting chickens! Have at it

with that machine of yours, before the Jap wakes up! These here remnants will make him sick to his soul again. . . .”

Kirei set up the machine-gun with living hands and put his bullet belt in motion. As he held the machine-gun Kirei also had time to free his hands momentarily and slap his cheeks, mouth and knees in time to the rapid stream of bullets, as accompaniment. During those periods the bullets lost their aim and dug in nearby, ripping up the ground and rooting out the grass.

“Don’t lose sight of your enemy! Keep your aim!” Piyusya said, lying nearby and doing nothing. “Don’t hurry, don’t get your barrel all heated up.”

Kirei, however, was unable not to keep time with his hands and feet, if he was to coordinate the work of the machine-gun with that of his body.

The Jap began to toss about on the floor of the brick house. Although he was still not awake, his heart had already lost the exactness of breath, because of the even beating of the nearby machine-gun. Comrade Zheev, who was sleeping alongside him, also heard the sound of the machine-gun and decided not to wake up, because he thought it was Kirei hunting birds close by, for the soup. Zheev covered his arm and the Jap’s head with an overcoat, so as to block out the sound. Chepurmy began to toss even more from the closeness under the overcoat, until finally he chucked off the overcoat completely. When he had freed his breathing completely, he then woke up, since somehow everything seemed too quiet and dangerous.

The sun was already high, and with morning, communism must have come to Chevengur.

Kirei came into the room and put the bucket of spent cartridges down on the floor.

“Drag it into the storeroom,” Piyusya said outside as they rolled the machine-gun into the entrance. “Why go in there making noise and waking people up, huh?”

“Things are easier now, aren’t they, comrade Piyusya?” Kirei said, and carried the bucket back to its usual place in the storeroom.

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The buildings of Chevengur had an eternal sturdiness, as befitted the life of the men who lived there, who were so true to their own feelings and interests that they became totally worn out from serving them and aged from the accumulation of their property.

It was thus hard for the proletarians later to move these sturdy, well-lived-in houses about by hand, since the bottom row of logs, which had been laid down without foundation, had already put roots down into the deep soil.

Thus after the relocation of all the houses under Chepurmy and socialism, the town square resembled a plowed field. The proletarians ripped the houses up by their roots and dragged the roots away, paying no heed. In

"we'll get bored"

those heavy days of voluntary Saturdays even Chepurny regretted that he had exiled the class of residual swine away from exploitation. The swine could have helped move the rooted houses, instead of the proletariat, who had been tormented enough already. Chepurny, though, had not known that during the first days of socialism in Chevengur the proletariat would have need of stoop labor. On the very first day of socialism, Chepurny woke up so reassured by the sun which had arisen before him and by the general view of the entire ready town of Chevengur that he asked Prokofy to go out immediately to wherever was necessary and summon the poor to Chevengur at once.

"Go, Prosh," Chepurny addressed him quietly, "because we're sparse, and soon we'll start getting bored without comradeship."

Prokofy confirmed Chepurny's opinion.

"Obviously, comrade Chepurny, of course we have to summon them. Socialism is a mass affair. Should I summon anybody else, too?"

"Call all the miscellaneous of whatever sort," Chepurny concluded his order. "Take Piyusya with you and go down the road. As soon as you see a poor man, bring him back here as a comrade."

"And the miscellaneous?" Prokofy asked.

"And bring in the miscellaneous too. Socialism is a fact here."

"Every fact without the support of the masses has its own instability, comrade Chepurny."

"Chepurny understood this.

"And that's why I'm telling you that we'll get bored! And that's not socialism! What are you trying to prove things to me for, when I feel it myself?"

Prokofy had no objections to that and went immediately to find some transportation for himself, so he could go fetch the proletariat. Towards noon he found a horse wandering loose in the steppes around Chevengur, and he harnessed it via Piyusya to a phaeton. Towards evening, after he had put two weeks' worth of goods into the rig, Prokofy set off into the remaining land beyond the outskirts of Chevengur. He sat inside the phaeton and studied the survey maps to see where he had to go, while Piyusya handled the horse, who had grown unaccustomed to the harness. Nine Bolsheviks walked behind the phaeton, to see how it rode, since this was its first trip under socialism, and the wheels might not obey.

"Prosh!" Chepurny yelled in farewell. "Look as sharp as you can there, and bring us the exact right element now! We'll be holding the town."

"So, you think maybe I've never seen any proletarians, huh?" Prokofy said, offended.

The aged Bolshevik Zheev, who thanks to the civil war had grown fat, went up to the phaeton and kissed Prokofy on his dry lips.

"Prosha," he said, "don't forget to find some women, either. Beggar women, even. We need them for tenderness, brother, or else look out what happens . . . I kissed you."

women  
the inhuman

the class embrace  
alien natural human - communistic woman

"Leave that be for the time," Chepurny said definitively. "In a woman you don't respect the comrade part, but all the stuff around it instead. Do the thing not by desires, Prosh, but by social signs. If a woman's a comrade, then summon her, by all means. But if it's the other way from that, then chase her the hell out into the steppe."

Zheev did not bother to reaffirm his desires, since all the same socialism had been realized and women would turn up in it, even if only as secret comrades. Chepurny himself, though, could not understand any further in what lay the danger of woman to brand-new socialism, as long as the woman was poor and a comrade. He just knew in general that in the past life there had always been love for women and reproduction out of them, but that was an alien and natural matter, not a human and communistic one. Woman was acceptable for the human life of Chevengur in her drier and more human form, but not in her full beauty, which did not constitute a part of communism, since the beauty of the feminine nature had existed during capitalism as well, just as there had been mountains, stars, and such-like inhuman events. With those sorts of premonitions, Chepurny was ready to welcome any woman to Chevengur so long as her face was darkened by the sadness of poverty and the old age of work. Then such a woman would be fit only for comradeship and would create no differences in the midst of the oppressed masses, and probably would not evoke that dispersive love consciousness among the lonely Bolsheviks. For the time being Chepurny would acknowledge only the class embrace, which was in no way feminine. The class embrace Chepurny sensed as close attraction to a proletarian, homogeneous man, since nature had created the womanly signs of woman, just as it had the bourgeoisie, without the forces of the proletarians and the Bolsheviks. From there Chepurny, who worried so passionately about the integrity and preservation of Soviet Chevengur, also considered useful the tangential fact that the town sat on a dreary even steppe beneath a sky that also resembled a steppe, so that no beautiful natural forces were visible anywhere, to distract people from communism and secluded interest for one another.

The evening of the same day that Prokofy and Piyusya set off to fetch the proletariat, Chepurny and Zheev walked the outskirts of the town, setting straight pickets in fences as they went, since now even the fences had to be preserved. They chatted in the hush of the night about Lenin's mind, and then called it a day. As he settled down to sleep Zheev advised Chepurny to put some sort of symbols around town the next day and also to wash the floors in the houses for the approaching proletariat, so that things would look nice.

Chepurny agreed to wash the floors and to put out symbols on the high trees. He was even glad of that task, for spiritual excitement came to him, together with the night. Probably the whole world and all the bourgeois elements already knew that communism had appeared in Chevengur, and thus the surrounding danger was all the nearer. The thunder of White armies might

the class embrace

LENIN (Chep. my's vanity)

whitec

be heard in the darkness of the steppes and ravines, or maybe it would be the slow rustling of barefoot divisions of bandits, and then Chepurny would never again see the grasses or the empty houses of Chevengur, or the comradely sun above this brand new town, which was ready to greet the unknown, comfortless proletariat with clean floors and fresh air, that same proletariat who now was wandering about without the respect of other people and without significance in their own lives. One thing calmed and inspired Chepurny, that there was a faraway secret place somewhere near Moscow or else in the Valdai Hills, as Prokofy had figured out by the map, and that place was called the Kremlin. There Lenin sat by a lamp, thinking, writing, and never sleeping. What was he writing there at this moment? After all, Chevengur existed, and it was time Lenin stopped writing and poured himself back into the proletariat to live. Chepurny hung back from Zheev and lay down in the comfortable grass of an untravelled Chevengur street. He knew that now Lenin was thinking about Chevengur and the Chevengur Bolsheviks, although he would not know the name of the comrades in Chevengur. Probably Lenin was writing a letter to Chepurny, telling him not to sleep, to guard communism in Chevengur, and to attract to himself the feelings and life of the entire nameless base people, telling Chepurny not to be afraid, for the long side of history was completed, and poverty and misery had so multiplied that apart from that there was nothing left. He was telling Chepurny and all the comrades to expect him, Lenin, as a guest there in communism, so that there in Chevengur he could embrace all the sufferers of earth and put an end to the movement of unhappiness in life. And then finally Lenin sent his regards and ordered that communism in Chevengur be strengthened for good.

Here Chepurny rose, calm and relaxed, regretting only mildly the lack of some bourgeois or even some extra warrior who could have been sent on foot to Lenin in the Kremlin with a dispatch from Chevengur.

“Now there’s a place where communism is probably old already, in the Kremlin there,” Chepurny felt envious. “Lenin is there, after all. And what if they start calling me the Jap there in the Kremlin? It was the bourgeoisie that gave me the nickname, and now I’ve got nobody I could send my real name with.”

The lamp burned in the brick house and the eight Bolsheviks could not sleep, for they expected some sort of disaster. Chepurny came in and said to them, “Comrades, we’ve got to do something on our own now. We’ve got no Prokofy for you now. The town’s sitting open and there’s no ideas written down anywhere. The comrades passing by won’t know who’s living here and why. Same thing with the floors. They’ve got to be cleaned. Zheev noticed that chaos correctly, and let the wind blow through the houses, because now no matter where you walk it smells of bourgeoisie. We have to do our own thinking now, comrades, or else why are we here? I ask you now!”

Every Bolshevik of Chevengur grew embarrassed and tried to think. Kirei began to listen to the noise in his head and waited for an idea to pop

Chevengur program  
comrades, not property

out of there, until finally the effort and the rush of blood boiled the wax in his ears. Then Kirei went to Chepurmy and announced with quiet shame, "Comrade Chepurmy, I'm getting rot coming out of my ears because of my brain, but there's just no way I can get a thought."

Instead of a thought, Chepurmy gave another direct task to Kirei.

"You go out and walk around the town to see if maybe you can't hear something. Maybe somebody is wandering around or just standing still, afraid. Don't knock him off right away, drag him in here alive. We'll examine him here."

"That I can do," Kirei agreed. "The night is huge and they could drag the whole town out into the steppe while we sit here thinking."

"That's how it could be," Chepurmy got worried. "And without the town you and me would have no life, just the idea and war again."

Kirei went outside to guard communism while the other Bolsheviks sat, thought, and listened to the wick sucking kerosene into the lantern. It was so quiet outside that Kirei's wandering, fading footsteps rang out for a long time in the hushed emptiness of the nocturnal murk.

Only Zheev did not sit idle. He thought up a symbol which he had once heard about at an army political meeting in the steppes of war. Zheev told them to bring him clean materials and he would write down something that would make passing proletarians rejoice and not pass Chevengur by. Chepurmy himself went into the former house of a bourgeois and brought back some clean linen. Zheev laid the linen out against the light and approved it.

"It's a shame," Zheev said of the cloth. "There's so much effort and the clean hands of a woman that you need for a thing like this. It would be a good thing to teach the Bolshevik women how to make such nice soft stuff."

Zheev lay down on his stomach and began to write letters on the linen with stove coal. Everybody stood around Zheev and sympathized with him, since Zheev had to come right out and express the revolution so that things would be easier for everybody.

And thus Zheev, hurried by the general endurance and picking his way energetically through his own memory, wrote the program for Chevengur:

"Comrade Poor People! You are the makers of every comfort and thing on earth, and now you have destroyed that and want the best for each other! For that reason, comrades from the passing roads are being acquired in Chevengur."

Chepurmy was the first to approve the program.

"Correct," he said, "and I felt the same thing. After all, property is just ongoing benefit, but comrades are a necessity. Without them you can't conquer a thing and you end up being a shit yourself."

Then all eight men carried the canvas through the empty town to hang it on a staff near the hard-packed road where people were likely to appear. Chepurmy was in no hurry to work, since he was afraid that everybody would go to bed and leave him alone to mourn and worry through this

second communist night. When he was among the comrades his soul was dispersed by worldly cares and this distribution of his inner powers made life less frightening for him. When they had found and cleaned up two poles, the midnight wind began blowing. This cheered Chepurny up, since if there was no bourgeoisie and the wind still blew as it used to, and the poles were rocking, then that meant that the bourgeoisie were definitely not a natural force.

Kirei had to circle the town endlessly, but no one could hear anything of him. The eight Bolsheviks stood blown by the night wind, listening to the hum of the steppe, and they did not part, guarding one another from any sharp danger that might suddenly emerge from the disturbed blackness. Zheev could not wait so long for an enemy without killing him, so he went into the steppe alone, to do some deep reconnaissance, while the seven men remained in reserve and waited for him, so that the whole town would not be left to Kirei alone. The seven Bolsheviks lay on the ground for warmth and listened to the surrounding night which perhaps hid enemies in the comfort of its murk.

Chepurny was the first to hear the noise, some sort of quiet scraping. He couldn't tell if it was near or far. Something was moving, threatening Chevengur, although the movement of that mysterious property was extremely slow, perhaps because of its weight and power, or perhaps because it was ruined and exhausted.

Chepurny got to his feet and the rest rose with him. An angered, compressed flame momentarily illuminated the unknown cloudy expanse, as though the last dusk were extinguished in someone's dream, and then the wind carried the clap of a shot over the bending grass. Chepurny ran forward with the other six in their usual chain. The shot was not repeated. After running enough that his heart reexperienced the war and the revolution before it had swelled up in his throat, Chepurny looked back at the abandoned Chevengur. A flame was burning in Chevengur.

"Comrades, everybody stop at once!" Chepurny yelled. "They went around us. Zheev, Kesha, all of you come over here. Piyusya! Give it to them straight! Where the hell did you go off to? Can't you see, communism's made me weak."

Chepurny was unable to get up off the ground because of the weight of the blood which poured into him, occupying the entire body of his heart. He lay there with his pistol, thin and sick. The six Bolsheviks stood over him with their guns and watched the steppe, Chevengur, and their fallen comrade.

"Don't spread out!" Kesha said. "Pick up the Jap and we'll head back to Chevengur. That's where our power is, so why should we abandon a man with no family. . . ."

The Bolsheviks went back to Chevengur. They did not carry Chepurny for long, because his heart soon subsided and returned to its own little spot. In Chevengur the only thing burning was someone's peaceful domestic fire and nothing was squeaking out in the steppe. The Bolsheviks moved silently

at their own soldierly steppe pace until through a window they saw the grass illuminated by the flame throwing its shadow on the center of the street which passed by. Without a command the Bolsheviks formed ranks, their chests against the iridescent window of the enemy. They raised their weapons and shot a volley through the glass into the house. The house fire died out, and in the ruins of the door frame, from the middle of the suddenly formed darkness, stepped the light face of Kirei. He looked at one of the seven, trying to guess for himself who might be these people who were shooting in Chevengur, that is besides himself, the night watchman of communism.

Chepurny got a grip on himself and addressed Kirei.

"How come you're burning kerosene without so much as a word in an empty town, when there's bandits running wild all over the steppe? How come you leave the town like an orphan, when the proletariat is going to come marching in here tomorrow? I ask you now!"

Kirei thought a bit, then answered. "Comrade Chepurny, I was asleep and I had a dream. I saw all of Chevengur, like from the top of a tree. Absolutely bare all around and not a soul in town. And if you were to be marching, then you wouldn't see a whole lot and then the wind starts whispering in your ear, like a bandit. But even if you shoot at it, then it's still got no body."

"So why burn gas, you backwards chump?" Chepurny asked. "What's the proletariat going to light themselves with once they start in to working? I mean the proletariat loves to read. You say you have the soul of a Party man, and then here you go and set fire to the proletariat's kerosene!"

"I can't fall asleep in the dark without music, comrade Chepurny," Kirei revealed. "I love to sleep where things are jolly, where there's a fire burning. At least give me a fly, so it will buzz."

"Well, step out here and start walking the perimeter without sleeping," Chepurny said, "and we'll go rescue Zheev. We abandoned one whole comrade on account of your signal."

When at last they came to the end of Chevengur the seven comrades lay down on the steppe and listened to see if anything was squeaking in the distance and whether Zheev might be coming back or was already lying dead until morning. Later Kirei came up and said to everyone who was lying down, "You're lying down and there's a man dying out there. Me, I'd run out after him, but I've got to guard the town."

Kesha yelled back at Kirei that it was wrong to exchange the entire proletariat for one Zheev. Bandits might burn the town down if everybody went chasing off to save one personality, that of Zheev.

"I'll put the town out," Kirei promised. "We've got wells. But Zheev now, maybe he's already lying there without a soul. How come you're waiting for the proletariat, when it's not here and Zheev used to be?"

Chepurny and Kesha jumped up and flung themselves into the continuing steppe night with no regrets about Chevengur, and the five remaining

comrades did not lag behind.

Kirei went behind a fence, spread some burdocks under his head, and lay down to listen for the enemy until morning came.

The clouds had settled a bit, to the edges of the earth, and the sky had cleared up in the center. Kirei looked at a star and it looked at him, so that life would not be boring. All the Bolsheviks had left Chevengur, and Kirei lay alone, surrounded by steppe as if by an empire. He was thinking, "I live and I live, but why do I live? Probably so that things will be severely fine for me. The whole revolution has to worry about me, so that whether I want them to or not, things will have to come out all right. Now things are only bad. Proshka says that's because progress isn't through moving yet, but afterwards, happiness will just turn up, out of nothing. What's with that star, burning and burning like that? What does it need? Even if it fell, I'd watch it. But it won't fall, because science keeps it there, not God. Even if it was morning, you'd have to live here alone and support communism by yourself. If I was to leave Chevengur this minute, communism would leave too, or maybe it would stay a bit here and there. It's hard to tell if this is communism at home here, or just a bunch of Bolsheviks."

Something wet dropped onto Kirei's neck and then immediately dried up.

"Something's dripping," Kirei sensed. "But where is it coming from? There's no clouds. I guess something just saves the stuff up and then lets fly whenever it feels like it. Well, better it should drop into my mouth then." Kirei opened his throat but nothing more dropped in. "Well, so drop it near me then," Kirei said, showing the sky the burdock next to him. "Don't touch me, though. Let me be, because somehow life has made me real tired today."

Kirei knew that the enemy had to be somewhere, but he could not sense him in the poor, unplowed steppe, let alone in the purged proletarian town, so he fell asleep with the repose of the firmest of conquerors.

Chepurny, on the other hand, was afraid to sleep in those first proletarian nights, and was happy to go out even against an enemy, just so as not to be tortured by shame and fear in the face of advancing communism, but be acting forward with all the comrades. And Chepurny walked through the nocturnal steppe into the silence of the alienated spaces, his unaware heart making him grow weak as he tried to reach the tired, homeless enemy and depriving his wind-chilled body of its last warmth.

"Shoot, damn it, in this general silence," Chepurny muttered and fumed. "They won't let us get life started, they just won't."

The eyes of the Bolsheviks, used because of the civil war to the dark of midnight, noticed a black unaffiliated body in the distance, looking to be a long dressed stone lying on the ground, or maybe a big slab. There the steppe was as flat as the water in a lake, and the unaffiliated body did not belong to the local earth. Chepurny and the other Bolsheviks formed a procession as

*Duller glow  
end of the world  
rolling drum*

they halted and examined the distance to that unmoving alien thing. The distance, however, was unknown, for the black body lay as though beyond an abyss. The night storm transformed the murk into a beckoning wave and thus destroyed the exactness of an eyeball measure. Then the Bolsheviks ran forward, clutching their constant revolvers in their hands.

The black, regular body creaked, and by the noise they could tell it was close, because the small chalky stones broke and the upper crust of the earth crackled. The Bolsheviks stopped dead in curiosity and lowered their revolvers.

"It's clear now, that's a fallen star!" Chepurny said, not noticing how his heart burned after his long hurried walk. "We'll take it back to Chevengur and sharpen up its five points. That's no enemy, that's science that's come flying here to us in communism."

The joy that communism could attract even stars made Chepurny sit. The body of the falling star stopped crackling and moving.

"Now we can expect any benefit we like," Chepurny explained to the rest. "Here's even the stars come flying to us, and then the comrades from up there will come down and the birds will start talking like children come back to life. Communism is no joke, it's the end of the world!"

Chepurny lay down on the ground, forgot about the night, the danger, and the empty Chevengur, and briefly recalled what he never recalled, his wife. However, beneath him was not his wife, but the steppe, and Chepurny got to his feet.

"But maybe that's some kind of aid or machine from the International," Kesha said. "Maybe it's some kind of iron roller that we can use to wring the bourgeoisie out with. I mean as long as we're fighting here, then the International must remember about us."

Petr Varfolomeevich Vekovoy, the most elderly of all the Bolsheviks, removed the straw hat from his head and saw the unknown body clearly. He just could not remember what it was. Because of the habits of a life as a shepherd he could recognize flying birds at night and knew the types of trees from several miles off. It was as though his senses were in front of his body, allowing him to know about all phenomena without having to have bodily proximity to them.

"Couldn't be nothing except for a drum from the sugar refinery," Vekovoy pronounced, for the time being, though, not quite trusting himself. "Nope, that's what it is, a drum. They use it to crush stones. Must be the muzhiks from Kutevo dragged it off but couldn't get her drug home. Seems like it was heavier than they was greedy. They should have rolled it, and here they went and drug it. . . ."

The earth began to crackle again. The drum began to turn quietly, rolling back towards the Bolsheviks. The deceived Chepurny was the first to run up to the moving drum. He shot into it at ten paces, and the rust flew up in his face. The drum, however, bore down upon Chepurny, and the Bolsheviks

began to give ground before its slow advance. Why the drum was moving was unknown, since its weight made the dry soil creak and would not allow Chepurny's puzzlement to concentrate on it, and night was sloping away toward morning, depriving the steppe of that last weakness of light which earlier had issued from the sparse stars at zenith.

The drum slowed down and began to rock in place, catching on some resisting dirt mound. Then it died in place, completely at rest. Without thinking, Chepurny wanted to say something, but he did not have time to do so before he heard the sad tired voice of a woman begin a song:

*I dreamed of a fish in the lake  
And that fish was myself  
Far did I swim, swimming on  
Living was I, and so small. . . .*

There the song ended, though the Bolsheviks would have been agreeable to listening to more, and in fact they stood a long while in greedy expectation of the voice and its song. The song did not continue and the drum did not budge. Doubtless the being which sang inside the iron had grown tired and had laid down, forgetting the words and the music.

"You listening?" Zheev immediately asked. Because of the drum he still had not shown himself, since otherwise they might kill him as a sudden enemy.

"We're listening," Chepurny answered. "She going to sing again?"

"No," Zheev announced. "She's already sung three times. I've stood herd on them I don't know how many hours already. They're banging around inside there and because of it the drum turns. I shot into the drum once, but that didn't do anything."

"Who's in there then?" Kesha asked.

"I don't know," Zheev explained. "Some kind of half-witted bourgeois girl with her brother. Before you came they were kissing and then her brother up and died for some reason, so she started singing by herself."

"Seems like she wanted to be a fish or something," Chepurny guessed. "She's got a real touching voice, and we've got no art here in Chevengur. What do you think, should we drag her out? So she can sort of liven up a bit?"

"No," Zheev refused. "She's too weak now, and half-witted too. We've got nothing to feed her with. She's a bourgeois girl. Now if she were a woman, all right, but as it is, there's nothing there but the breathing of some throw-back. We need sympathy, not art."

"What'll we do?" Chepurny asked them all. They were all quiet, since taking the bourgeois girl and abandoning her held between them no useful difference.

"Well then, let's push her into the gully and go back and wash floors,"

Chepurny solved the problem. "Because Prokofy will have got himself a long ways away by now. Maybe the proletariat will even show up tomorrow."

The eight Bolsheviks put hands to the drum and rolled it away into the distance the other way off from Chevengur, to where after a half mile or so the ground began to descend, ending at the edge of the gulch. The entire while that they moved the drum some kind of soft stuffing was rolling around in it, but the Bolsheviks were in a hurry, rolling the drum as fast as they could and not listening to the half-witted bourgeois girl, who was now quiet. Soon the drum began to roll by itself, heading down the slope of the steppe toward the ravine, and the Bolsheviks ceased their labor.

"That's a boiler from the sugar refinery," Vekovoy said, justifying his memory. "And here I kept thinking now what kind of machine can this be?"

"Oh-ho!" Chepurny said. "Must be that was a boiler . . . well, let it roll. We'll get by without it."

"Me, I thought there's your dead roller for you," said Kesha, "And here it turns out its a boiler."

"A boiler for sure," said Vekovoy. "It's got rivets, you know."

The boiler was still rolling along the steppe, not only not growing quieter with distance, but creaking and banging even more, since its speed grew faster than did the expanse it was leaving behind itself.

Chepurny squatted down, listening for the boiler's end. The rackets of its revolutions suddenly became inaudible. That was the boiler flying through the air from the edge of the gulch down to its bottom. Then after a half minute or so it came down in the lifeless gully with a dull and peaceful thump, as though the boiler had been caught and preserved in someone's living hands.

The men of Chevengur grew calmer and began to return back through the steppe, which was already gray from the approach of the next day.

Kirei slept as before by the last fence of Chevengur, his head on a burdock and his arms embracing his own neck because of the absence of some second person. The men went past Kirei, but Kirei did not hear them, for sleep had directed him into the depths of his own life, from where the warming light of childhood and peace flowed into his body.

Chepurny and Zhev stayed in the last houses and began to wash the floors with cold well water. The other six Chevengurians went farther on, so as to pick somewhat better houses to clean. It was hard to work in the darkness of the insulated rooms, for the possessions gave off some sort of sleepy air of oblivion, and the returned cats of the bourgeoisie lay in many of the beds. The Bolsheviks threw out the cats and shook the bedding out again. They were amazed at the complex linens, which were unnecessary for a man who was tired.

The Chevengurians had got only eighteen houses squared away by daylight, and there were many more than that in Chevengur. After that they sat down to have a smoke, where they fell asleep as they sat, leaning their heads

against a bed or a commode, or just bending their shaggy heads down to the just-washed floors. For the first time the Bolsheviks were resting in the houses of their dead class enemy and they paid no attention to that fact.

Kirei woke up alone in Chevengur. He did not know that all the comrades had returned in the night. There was no one in the brick house either, which meant either that Chepurny had gone way out after bandits or else he and all his men had died of wounds somewhere off in the unknown grass.

Kirei harnessed himself to the machine-gun and pulled it to the outskirts of town where he had slept. The sun was already high, illuminating the entire empty steppe, where there was no enemy of any sort. Kirei knew, though, that he had been entrusted with preserving Chevengur and all the communism in it as one whole. To that end he hurriedly set up the machine-gun so he could support proletarian rule in the town. Then he lay down alongside it and began to look around. After lying as long he could, Kirei started wanting to eat the chicken that he had seen on the street the day before. It was unthinkable, however, to leave the machine-gun without someone to watch it. That would be the same as passing the armaments of communism over into the hands of the White opponent, so Kirei lay a bit longer, in order to have time to think up some defense for Chevengur which would allow him to go hunt chickens.

“Now if the chicken was to come to me,” Kirei thought. “Just the same I’d eat it, I suppose. What Proshka says is true, that life all around isn’t organized, even though we’ve got communism now. That chicken ought to come out here by itself.”

Kirei looked down the street, to see whether there was a chicken of any sort coming towards him. There was no chicken, but there was a dog wandering around. It was unhappy and did not know who to respect in the deserted Chevengur. People had thought that the dog guarded property, but she had abandoned the property as soon as the people were gone from the house, and now here she was, wandering off into the distance without any concern, but also without a sense of happiness. Kirei called the dog over and picked the burrs out of her hair. The dog waited silently for its further happiness, looking at Kirei with thoroughly mournful eyes. Kirei tied the dog to the machine-gun with his belt and calmly went off to hunt for chickens, since there were no noises in Chevengur and thus Kirei would hear the dog’s voice anywhere, if an enemy or unknown person showed up out in the steppe. The dog sat down by the machine-gun and wagged its tail a bit as a promise of its vigilance and effort.

Kirei hunted for his chicken until noon, and the entire while the dog was silent before the empty steppe. At noon Chepurny came out of a nearby house and spelled the dog at the machine-gun, until Kirei came back from chicken-hunting.

Two more days the Chevengurians washed floors and propped the windows and doors of the houses open so that the floors would dry and the

stagnant bourgeois air would be freshened by the wind of the steppe. On the third day a tidy-looking man with a staff walked into Chevengur, unharmed by Kirei because of his age, and asked Chepurny who he was.

"I'm a member of the Bolshevik party," Chepurny informed him. "And this here is communism."

The man looked at Chevengur, then said, "So I see. I am an instructor of poultry-breeding from the Pochep Directorate of Land Management. We in Pochep district want to start breeding Plymouth Rocks, so I've come here to the owners to see if they will give us a cock and a pair of hens as breeding stock. I have a state paper about the rendering of universal assistance in my task. Our district will never get on its feet without eggs."

Chepurny would have wanted to give this man the rooster and two hens, since it was after all the Soviet government who was asking, but he hadn't noticed that kind of bird in the yards of Chevengur, so he asked Kirei if there were any live chickens in Chevengur.

"There's no more chickens here," Kirei said. "There was one around not long ago, but I ate him. If we did have any, though, I wouldn't be against giving them some."

The man from Pochep thought a bit.

"Well, in that case, pardon the bother. Now write me out a mandate on the other side, saying I've completed my assignment and that there's no chickens in Chevengur."

Chepurny leaned the paper up against a brick and wrote his order on it: "The man came and left. There are no chickens, having been expended as supplies for revolutionary detachments. President of the Chevengur Revolutionary Committee—Chepurny."

"Put the date," asked the man from Pochep. "Such and such month and day. Otherwise the audit will discredit the document, without the date or what time it was."

However, Chepurny did not know the date, since he had forgotten to keep track of the time he had lived in Chevengur, so he wrote, "Summer, 5th comm." since he knew only that it was summer and the fifth day of communism.

"Well, sir, thank you," the chicken breeder was grateful. "That's enough, just so long as there's some sort of sign. Thank you, thank you. . . ."

"Off you go then," Chepurny said. "Kirei, take him out to the edge of town, so he doesn't stay here."

In the evening Chepurny sat down on the skirting and began to wait for sunset. All the Chevengurians were returning to the brick houses, after cleaning up forty houses during the day, for the arrival of the proletariat. In order to get full, the Chevengurians ate the six-month-old meat pies and sauerkraut that the bourgeoisie of Chevengur had prepared beyond the needs of their class in the hopes of an endless life. Not far from Chepurny a cricket, the dweller of peace and the settled life, began to sing his crackly song. The

communism  
proletarian revolution

warmth of evening rose over the Chevengurka River like a tired and lengthy sigh from the laboring earth as it contemplated the advancing dark of rest.

"The masses will be coming here soon now," Chepurny thought quietly. "Almost any minute now and Chevengur will start humming with communism, and then any unhappy soul will be able to find consolation in the general reciprocity. . . ."

During the evening Zheev walked constantly about the gardens and fields of Chevengur watching the spaces between his feet, observing every trifle of life beneath, and feeling sympathy with it. Before going to sleep Zheev loved to pine a bit for the interesting life of the future and mourn a little for his parents, who had died long ago, never having made it to their own happiness and revolution. The steppe became invisible, and only a point of flame burned in the brick house as the sole defense against the enemy and doubt. Zheev walked in that direction along the quiet, darkness-weakened grass. He saw the sleepless Chepurny sitting on the skirting.

"You're sitting?" Zheev said. "Let me sit a bit too. I'll be quiet."

All the Bolsheviks of Chevengur were already lying on straw on the floor, muttering and smiling in unconscious dreams. Only Kesha walked about Chevengur, standing guard and coughing in the steppe.

"For some reason people always dream during war and revolution," Zheev said. "But during peacetime, no. Everybody sleeps like little stumps."

Chepurny himself always dreamed and thus did not know where dreams come from and why they disturbed his mind. Prokofy could have explained but he wasn't there, the one man he needed.

"I've heard how when a bird is moulting it sings in its sleep," Chepurny remembered. "It'll have its head under a wing, nothing but fluff all around, nothing that you can see, and then this peaceable little voice will come out."

"What is communism, comrade Chepurny?" Zheev asked. "Kirei tells me that there used to be communism on an island out in the sea, and Kesha says that communism was invented by smart people."

Chepurny wanted to think a bit about communism, but didn't bother, since he could wait for Prokofy and then ask him himself. Suddenly, however, he remembered that there was already communism in Chevengur, so he said, "When the proletariat lives alone for itself, then communism will come out on its own. How come you've got to know anyhow, I ask you now? I mean when you've got to sense it and uncover it where it is! Communism is the reciprocal feeling of the masses. Now Prokofy will cart the poor in here and our communism here will get stronger, and then you'll notice it right away."

"But it's not known definite and for sure?" Zheev felt for his point.

"What do you think I am, the masses?" Chepurny was offended. "Even Lenin doesn't have to know that about communism, because it's a job for the whole proletariat all at once, and not just one by one. You oughtn't to get used to being smarter than the proletariat."

Kesha was no longer coughing in the steppe, for in the distance he had heard the chesty boom of voices and had hidden in the weeds to discover more precisely who was passing by. Soon, however, the booming died away and only the barely audible agitation of people in one place continued without any sounds of steps, as though the people had soft bare feet. Kesha almost took off through the weed patches of Chevengur, where grew the wheat, goosefoot, and thistle in brotherly fashion, but then he turned back and decided to wait for the next day's light. The weeds exuded the life steam of grass and grain shafts, for there the rye and the fronds of goosefoot lived without harming one another, embracing closely and preserving one another. No one had sown them and no one bothered them, but as soon as fall arrived the proletariat would be able to put nettles in their cabbage soup and the wheat and rye would be collected for winter food. A little farther out in the steppe the sunflowers, buckwheat, and millet grew of their own accord, while the gardens of Chevengur contained every vegetable and potato imaginable. The bourgeoisie of Chevengur had sown and planted nothing for three years now, since they had been counting on the end of the world, but the plants multiplied from their parents and established among themselves a particular balance between wheat and thistle, three thistle roots for every stalk of wheat. When Chepurny looked at the overgrown steppe he always said that it too was an International of grass and flowers, and thus all men were guaranteed abundant food without the interference of labor and exploitation. The Chevengurians saw that it was thanks to that that nature refused to oppress man with work, instead of making the unpropertied consumer a gift of food and other necessities. In its time the Chevengur Revolutionary Committee had taken official note of the submissiveness of conquered nature and decided to erect a monument in its honor at some future point. The monument would take the form of a tree growing from wild soil and embracing a man with its two leafy arms, beneath a general sky.

Kesha plucked a wheat stalk and began to suck the damp stuffing from its unripe grains. Then he threw it from his mouth, the taste of food forgotten, for a cart began to rustle softly along the overgrown Chevengur high road. Then he heard Piyusya's voice giving commands to the horse, and then Proshka's voice sang a song:

*The waves upon the lake do roll  
Beneath them lies the fisherman  
And in his dream on wobbling legs,  
The orphan wanders on. . .*

Kesha ran all the way to Prokofy's phaeton, where he saw that he and Piyusya were hauling empty, without any proletariat.

Chepurny immediately got all of the drowsy Bolsheviks to their feet so as to give the proletariat a grand welcome when they appeared, and then to

organize a rally, but Prokofy told him that the proletariat was tired and had gone to sleep until dawn, out on the lee side of a burial mound in the steppe.

"What, the proletariat's coming here with an orchestra and their own leader, or what?" Chepurny asked.

"Tomorrow you can see everything for yourself, comrade Chepurny," Prokofy informed him. "But don't disturb me. Me and Pashka Piyusya must have driven seven hundred miles. We saw a sea in the steppe and ate Beluga. I'll make my report and formulate everything later."

"All right, Prosh, you go sleep, and I'll run round to the proletariat," Chepurny said timidly.

Prokofy, however, did not agree.

"Don't touch them, they're worn out as it is. The sun will be up soon and they'll come down from the mound into Chevengur."

Chepurny sat up the rest of the night in sleepless anticipation. He put out the lantern so that he would not upset those sleeping on the mound by wasting their kerosene and he dug out the banner of the Chevengur Revolutionary Committee from the storage shed. In addition, Chepurny shined up the star on his headgear and started the unattended wall clock which had stopped long before. Completely prepared, Chepurny lay his head on his arms and began to think, so that the nighttime would pass the quicker. And the time passed quickly, since time is mind and not feeling, and Chepurny thought of nothing in his mind. The straw on which the men of Chevengur were sleeping grew slightly damp from the cool dew that the morning was scattering. Then Chepurny took the banner in his hand and went to that edge of Chevengur across from where the mound was on which the walking proletariat slept.

Chepurny stood about two hours by the fence with his banner, waiting for the sun to rise and the proletariat to wake up. He watched how the light of the sun ate away the misty darkness that lay above the land, illuminating the bare mound that was windblown, rainswept, and made of bare, depressing soil. Then he remembered a forgotten spectacle which resembled this poor mound which nature was grinding away solely because it had distinguished itself from the plain. The people lay on the slope of the mound and warmed their bones in the first light. They resembled ancient black bones from the disintegrating skeleton of someone's enormous perished life. Some of the proletarians sat, some lay and huddled close against their relatives or neighbors so as to warm up as quickly as possible. A thin old man dressed only in pants stood up and scratched his ribs, while a lad sat beneath his feet and motionlessly watched Chevengur, not believing that there had been prepared for him a home in which he might shelter forever. Two brown people lay and looked in each other's heads like women, but not to check their hair, instead to feel for lice. For some reason, not a single proletarian was hurrying into Chevengur, probably because they did not know that communism had been prepared there for them, as well as peace and common property. Half of the people were dressed only as far as their waists, while the other half wore only

a long upper dress, sort of like an overcoat or soldier's cloak, except that beneath this overcoat or cloak there was only a dry, well-worn body, ready to endure any weather, journey, or need.

The proletariat occupied that Chevengur mound indifferently, not casting their eyes upon the man who stood alone at the edge of the town with a banner of brotherhood in his hands. The exhausted sun of the day before rose above the desert-like inhospitability of the steppe. Its light was empty, as though it shone above an alien, forgotten land, where there was no one other than these shards of people on the mound, who were huddling close together not out of love and family feeling, but rather from their insufficiency of clothing. Expecting neither help nor friendship, anticipating torment in the unknown town, the proletariat on the mound did not rise to its feet. Instead they barely budged their exhausted powers. Occasional children leaned against the sleepers and sat among the proletariat like fully ripened people. They thought alone while the adults slept or were ill. The old man stopped scratching his ribs and again lay down on his back, pulling the boy to his side so that the chill wind would not blow on skin and bones. Chepurny noticed that only one man was eating, pouring something from his palm into his mouth, then chewing and hitting himself in the head with his fist, in order to cure a pain of some sort. "Where have I seen all of this before?" Chepurny tried to remember. When Chepurny had seen this for the first time the sun had also been rising through the sleeping mist, the wind had blown through the steppe, and indifferent, nonexistent people had lain on the black, disintegrating elements of the mound. These people had to be helped because they were satisfied with a sole and minute consolation, that aimless sense of attachment one to the other. Thanks to that attachment the proletariat walked the earth and slept in the steppe in entire detachments. In time past Chepurny too had walked with people to hire out and had lived in barns, surrounded by comrades and assured of their sympathy in the unavoidable impoverishments to come, but he had never seen his own advantage to be in that kind of mutually inseparable life. Now he saw the steppe and the sun with his own eyes, and as well the people on the mound between them, but they controlled neither the sun nor the earth. Chepurny sensed how in exchange for the steppe, the houses, the food, and the clothes which the bourgeoisie had acquired for themselves, the proletarians on the mound had each other, because every man has to have something. When property lies between people, then people calmly expend their powers on worrying about that property, but when there is absolutely nothing between people, then they begin not to part and to preserve one another from the cold as they sleep.

In a much earlier time of his life, though it was impossible to recall just when, whether it was last year or when he was a child, Chepurny had seen this mound, these men of the class of poor who had wandered there, and this same chilly sun which did not work for the sparsely populated steppe. It had been exactly thus once, but when? It was impossible to discover in his

no tracks (no historical determination)  
miscellaneous

own weak mind. Only Prokofy might have been able to make sense of Chepurny's recollections, and even that was hardly likely, because all of this, it was now clear, Chepurny had known for a very long time, but none of this could have occurred a very long time ago, since the revolution itself had started not long before. So Chepurny tried in Prokofy's stead to formulate his own recollections. He felt alarm and agitation for the proletariat which was bent low over the mound and by degrees he began to think that the present day would pass, since it had already been once, and then changed. That meant there was no reason for grieving right then, since this day would end just the same, precisely as the previous day had been suffered and forgotten. "But you wouldn't see a mound like that, particularly with troops of proletarians on it that way, but what there's a revolution," Chepurny mused. "Though I did bury my mother twice. I walked behind the coffin and cried and remembered how I already had walked behind this coffin once, kissed those same silent dead woman's lips, and I lived through that. So I'll live through this now. And now its easier for me to grieve a second time about the same grief. Now I ask you, what in the world does it all mean?"

"It just seems like you're remembering, but it actually never happened," Chepurny formulated snugly and sensibly for himself, thanks to Prokofy's absence. "When it's hard for me, then some kind of pious element inside of me helps. Don't worry, it says like, this has already happened once, so you won't die now, just stick in your tracks. But there's no tracks and there can't be any either. You always live forward, heading into the dark. How come there's no one here from our organization? Maybe that's how come the proletariat won't get up off the mound, because it wants some respect and honors?"

Kirei came out of the brick house. Chepurny shouted to him to call the whole organization to come over, since the masses had come and it was time. The organization woke up following Kirei's demands and went out towards Chepurny.

"Who did you bring us?" Chepurny asked Prokofy. "If that's the proletariat sitting on the mound over there, then how come they won't claim their town, I ask you now?!"

"That's proletarians and miscellaneous," Prokofy said.

Chepurny was disturbed.

"What miscellaneous? Again the layer of residual swine?"

"What do you think I am, a reptile or a Party member?" Prokofy was already offended. "The miscellaneous are the miscellaneous. Nobody. They're even worse than the proletariat."

"Well, who are they? They had a class father, didn't they? I ask you now! You didn't pick them up out in the weeds, did you? A social place, wasn't it?"

"They are your basic disinherited," Prokofy explained. "They weren't living anywhere, they were wandering."

"refuse to take the world"  
nature & labor

"Wandering where?" Chepurny asked with respect, since he nourished a sense of the worth of all that was unknown and dangerous. "Wandering where? Maybe we ought to head them off?"

Prokofy was amazed at such an unconscious question. "What wandering where? To communism, obviously! So we've already cut them off, right here."

"Then go yell at them to get down here quick! Tell them the city is theirs and all cleaned up nice, and that the avant-garde is standing here by the fence to wish the proletariat happiness and . . . this here . . . well, tell them the whole world, since it's theirs anyway."

"And supposing they refuse to take the world?" Prokofy asked in advance. "Maybe just Chevengur is more than enough for them now."

"Who gets the world then?" Chepurny said, all tangled up in theory.

"We do, as a base."

"You're a swine. We're the vanguard. That means we belong to them! Not them to us! Look, the vanguard isn't a person, it's the dead shield on a living body. The proletariat, that's your person! Get going, you halvesnake!"

Prokofy was quickly able to organize the proletarians and miscellaneous who were on the mound. It turned out that there were a lot of people on the mound, more than Chepurny had been able to see. A hundred, maybe two hundred people, and all different to look at, although identical of necessity, since they were nothing but proletariat.

The people began to come down from the bare mound into Chevengur. Chepurny had also sensed the proletariat with tenderness and knew that in this world the proletariat took the form of an untiring friendly force which helped the sun to feed the cadres of the bourgeoisie, since the sun sufficed only for repletion and not for greed. He had guessed that the noise which boomed in his ears when he slept alone in the empty places of the steppe was the ringing out of the oppressed labor of the world's workers, who day and night moved onwards to secure food, property, and peace for their own personal enemies, who multiplied from the stuffs of the laboring proletariat. Thanks to Prokofy, Chepurny had within himself a convincing theory about the workers, that they were beasts in relation to unorganized nature and the heroes of the future. Chepurny, however, had discovered one comforting secret for himself, which was that the proletariat does not admire nature, but rather destroys it, with labor. It is the bourgeoisie which lives and multiplies for nature, while the working man lives for his comrades and also fashions revolution. Only one thing was not clear: was work necessary under socialism, or was the simple artesian flow of nature sufficient for nourishment? Here Chepurny agreed more with Prokofy, with the idea that once capitalism was removed the solar system would independently give the power of life to communism, since all work and effort had been invented by the exploiters, so that they would be left with an abnormal surplus, beyond the products of the sun.

Chepurny had been expecting unbroken heroes of the future to arrive in Chevengur, and instead he saw people who came in not marching, but shambling at their own pace. He saw comrades the likes of whom he had never encountered before, people without any understanding or appearance of class and without revolutionary worth. These were instead some sort of nameless miscellania who lived utterly without significance, without pride, and off to one side of the impending world-wide triumph. Even the age of these miscellania was impossible to grasp, for all that could be made out was that they were poor, had bodies that grew unwillingly, and were foreign to all. For that reason the miscellania walked in close ranks and looked more at each other than at Chevengur and its Party vanguard.

One of the miscellaneous caught a fly on the back of the old man in front of him, then stroked the man's back so that no scratches or marks of his touch would remain. Then he savagely killed the fly on the ground and Chepurny vaguely changed in his surprised feelings towards these others. Perhaps these proletarians and miscellaneous served one another as each other's sole possession and worth in life, and thus they looked with such concern at one another, not paying much attention to Chevengur, and carefully kept their comrades free from flies, just as the bourgeoisie had once guarded their homes and livestock.

Those descending from the mound were already at the edge of Chevengur, so Chepurny, who did not know how to formulate his thought expressively, asked Prokofy to do so, and Prokofy willingly spoke to the arriving proletariat.

*Prokofy* "Comrade unpropertied citizens! Although the town of Chevengur is being given to you, this is not for predation of the impoverished, but for the use of all captured property and the organization of a broad brotherly family for the integrity of the town. Now we are inescapably brothers, one family, since our economy is socially united into one household. So live honorably, to the glory of the revolutionary committee!"

Chepurny asked Zheev where he had thought up the inscription which he had written on the canvas hung as a symbol on the far side of town.

"I didn't think about it," Zheev said. "I pictured it from memory. I didn't do it myself, I heard it someplace . . . I mean, you know how your head hangs onto different things. . . ."

"Hold it!" Chepurny said to Prokofy. Then he personally turned to the infantry of the poor people who were standing in a mass about the Chevengurian.

"Comrades . . . Prokofy called you brothers and a family, but that's a direct lie, because all brothers have a father and we are the many who from the beginning of life have had distinct fatherlessness. We're not brothers, we are comrades. After all, you've come here as you are, and we are each other's goods and valuables, since we have no other moveable or unmoveable reserves of property. And then too it's a shame you didn't come in from the other

destroy...  
orphans

side of town, because our symbol is there, where it's all said in the words of some unknown person, but all the same it's written and we desire it . . . that is that it would be better to destroy the entire, well-equipped world if in the naked order that follows we can acquire one another. And so unite first of all, proletarians of all lands, and as fast as you can! I have finished, and I convey greetings to you from the Chevengur revolutionary committee."

The proletariat and miscellaneous from the mound moved off into the depths of the town without expressing anything and without employing Chevengur's speech for the development of their own consciousness. Their strength sufficed only for life at the present moment, for they lived without the slightest surplus, since neither nature nor time contained the slightest reason for their birth or for their happiness. In fact the opposite, for each of their mothers had been impregnated by itinerant, long-lost fathers, and after their births they proved to be miscellaneous and mistaken. Nothing had been prepared for them, even less than had been prepared for the least blade of grass, which has its own little root, its own place, and its own free nourishment in the common soil.

The miscellaneous however had been born without gifts in advance. They could have no mind or abundance of feeling, for their parents had conceived them not in an excess of the flesh, but rather in the anguish of night and the weakness of their mournful powers, in the mutual oblivion of two hidden people who lived secretly on this earth. Had they lived too obviously, too happily, they would have been destroyed by the real people, the people who are counted in government censuses and who sleep at night in their own homes. Mind could not exist in the miscellaneous. Mind could be found only in those people who had a free reserve of body and the warmth of peace above their heads. The parents of the miscellaneous had only bodily remnants which were ground down by labor and deeply etched by acid grief, and hence mind and sensitive, sincere melancholy, the higher signs, disappeared because of insufficient quantities of rest and soft nutritious substances. And so the miscellaneous appeared from the depths of their mothers into surroundings of absolute misfortune, for as quickly as they could regain their feet after the enervation of birth their mothers left them, lest they see the child and perhaps come to love it, forever. The little miscellaneous was left behind to make of himself the future man by himself, relying on no one and feeling nothing apart from his own warm innards. The outer world was all around and the miscellaneous baby lay in it and cried, resisting thus the first grief, which remained unforgotten his entire life, the warmth of a mother lost forever.

Settled, reliably governed people who live in the comfort of class solidarity, habits of the flesh, and the accumulation of tranquility create about themselves replicas of the maternal-womb and are thus able to grow and improve, just as they did in departed childhood. The miscellaneous however immediately sensed the world out in the cold, in grass wet with the traces of

their mother, and in the solitude which lies beyond the absence of caring and nurturing maternal powers.

The miscellaneous recalled their early lives, just as they did the expanse of earth they had travelled, identical to that portion of life they had overcome, as something alien to their vanished mothers, something which once had tormented their mothers. But then what was their life, those sparsely populated roads in the image of which the world stretched through the consciousness of the miscellaneous?

Not one of the miscellaneous had seen his father, and they all remembered their mothers as a vague longing of the body for that lost peace, a longing which in the adult years was transformed into a devastating melancholy. After birth a baby demands nothing of his mother; he simply loves her, and so it is too with orphans. The miscellaneous were not angry with the mothers who had abandoned them immediately and forever. As he grows however a child expects a father, for he is already satiated with the natural forces and feeling of the mother, even if he has been abandoned as soon as he leaves the womb. The baby turns a curious face to the world, wanting to exchange nature for people, and his first comrade and friend after the obsessive warmth of the mother, after life has been sufficiently cramped by her gentle hands, is the father.

On becoming a boy none of the miscellaneous had found his father, his helper, and if his mother could bear but his father would not meet him, he who was already born and living along the road, then the father became an enemy who hated the mother; he became a person always absent, always condemning his powerless son to confront the risks of life without help, and thus without success.

And so the life the miscellaneous led was one of disinheritance, continuing on an empty earth without that first comrade who could have taken the child by the hand and led him out to people, to leave people to his child as a heritage after his death, and as a replacement for himself. The miscellaneous lacked only one thing in this world, a father, and so the old man who had been scratching his ribs up on the mound now sang a song in Chevengur, and from it grew disturbed:

*Oh, who my doors shall open?  
The beasts, the birds unknown?  
My parent, where are you?  
Alas, I know not this . . .*

Almost all of those whose arrival had been greeted by the Bolshevik organization of Chevengur had made a man of himself through his own powers, surrounded as he was by the frenzy of the propertied. They lived like the mortal grasses in the meadow, where there is a lot of grass, which lives as a solid self-defense with a moist spot beneath itself. In that fashion it is possible

hope

MARX

to live and develop without particular passion or compulsion. It is however strange and rare when seeds from some nameless weedpatch fall onto bare clay or by the empty lands of the earth, and are able to find nourishment in bare minerals.

Other people had an entire armament to strengthen and develop their own valued lives, while the miscellaneous had only one weapon with which to cling to this earth, and that was the last traces of a mother's warmth within the baby's body. This alone however was enough to make the child survive, struggle, and arrive in his own future alive. That sort of past life had exhausted the strength of those who had come to Chevengur, and thus to Chepurny they seemed powerless and nonproletarian elements, as though they had spent their entire lives basking beneath not the sun, but the moon. However, after exhausting their strength in preserving the first parental warmth within, fighting against the headwind which wished to uproot them, fighting against inimical life, and after even multiplying that warmth on earnings gleaned from the real people, the people with names, the miscellaneous had made of themselves exercises in endurance, and within the inner substance of the bodies of the miscellaneous had formed minds full of curiosity and doubt, quick feelings capable of exchanging eternal bliss for a brother comrade who also had no father and no property, but who could make one forget both the one and the other. The miscellaneous still carried hopes within themselves, hopes that were sure, successful, and melancholy as loss itself. The precision of this hope was that if one were to succeed at the main task of remaining live and whole, then all the rest and everything which one might desire would succeed as well, even if that required leading the entire world to its final grave. If however this main task were fulfilled and survived and the prime necessity, which is not happiness but indispensability, was not encountered, then there would not be time enough to find it in the rest of life unlived. After all, there is not enough time to catch that which is lost, or perhaps that which is wasted disappears from the earth entirely. Many of the miscellaneous had walked all of the open, ever-changing roads and had found nothing.

The apparent powerlessness of the miscellaneous was actually the indifference of their strength, and the torment of life and labor too large had rendered their faces non-Russian. Chepurny was the first of the Chevengurians to notice this, since he paid no attention to the fact that the arriving proletariat and miscellany wore so little clothing that it seemed they feared neither the women they might encounter nor the chill of the nights. When the arriving class had scattered among the orchards of Chevengur, Chepurny became doubtful.

"I ask you now, what sort of proletariat is this that you're got for us!" he addressed Prokofy. "There's nothing there but doubt, and they aren't even Russian!"

Prokofy took the banner from Chepurny's hand and read Karl Marx's line to himself.

"So, not a proletariat, huh?" he said. "That's a class of the first quality that you've got there. You've just got to lead it forward and it won't so much as squeak. This here is your international proletarians. Just look! They aren't Russian, they aren't Armenian, they aren't Tatars . . . they aren't anybody! I've herded a live International in here for you, and then you pull a long face. . . ."

Chepurny sensed something thoughtfully, then quietly announced, "We require the iron tread of proletarian battalions, just like the provincial committee said in that circular they sent us, and here you come barging in with miscellaneous! What kind of tread can a barefoot man have!?"

"No problem," Prokofy said, soothing Chepurny. "Even if they're barefoot their heels have got so tough we could put screws in them with a screwdriver if we want to. And besides, when the revolution comes they can walk barefoot around the whole world."

The proletarians and miscellaneous finished hiding in the houses of Chevengur and resumed their former lives. Chepurny went off to dig up the skinny old man from among the miscellaneous so as to invite him to an extraordinary session of the revolutionary committee, where a large number of organizational questions had accumulated. Prokofy agreed with this completely and sat down in the brick house to write rough drafts of resolutions.

The skinny old man was lying on the well-scrubbed floor of the former Shchapov house. Another man who looked to be somewhere between twenty and sixty years old sat nearby, letting out a pair of pants that had belonged to some child, so that later on he could get into them himself.

"Comrade," Chepurny said to the old man, "it would be a good thing if you could come round to the brick house. The revolutionary committee is there, and it needs you."

"I'll come," the old man promised. "As soon as I get up I won't pass you by. My innards got sick, and you can expect me as soon as it gets done hurting."

At that time Prokofy was already sitting over his revolutionary papers from the town, the lamp lit despite the bright day. The lamp was always lit before the start of a session of the Chevengur revolutionary committee and always burned until the end of discussion of all questions. In the opinion of Prokofy Dyanov this formed a contemporary symbol, showing that the light of solar life on earth must be replaced by the artificial light of the human mind. LUNACHARSKIY

The whole basic Bolshevik organization of Chevengur attended the ceremonial session, and some of the miscellaneous came as well, standing about in deliberative voices. Chepurny sat next to Prokofy and was basically pleased, since the revolutionary committee had been able all the same to keep the town until the arrival of communism, which now must be strengthened in Chevengur forever. Only the old man was missing. Probably his insides still hurt. Chepurny sent Zhev after the old man, telling him first to hunt up

some sort of soothing herbal extract in the storeroom. He was then to give this to the old man, and then carefully to draw the man himself to the meeting.

A half hour later Zheev showed up, with the old man, who had been greatly bolstered by burdock extract and the good massage which Zheev had given his back and stomach.

"Sit down, comrade," Prokofy said to the old man. "You see, a whole round of social concerns has sprung up on your account, so it won't be soon that you'll die under communism."

"Let's begin," Chepurny said. "Since communism has arrived there shouldn't be any reason to distract the proletariat with meetings. Prosh, read us the circulars from the province, and we'll meet them head on with our formulations."

"On the presentation of combined reports," Prokofy began. "As per the form attached to our circular number 238191 ASCh in re the development of NEP throughout the district and regarding the degree, tempo, and manifestations of forces unleashed by opposition classes in regard to NEP, as well as about the measures taken against them and concerning the introduction of NEP into its cruel course. . ."

"Well, and what do we give them?" Chepurny asked Prokofy.

"I'll draw up a little table for them and lay everything out all right."

"It wasn't us that unleashed the irrelevant classes. It was them that fell away from communism on their own," Chepurny countered, then turned to the old man. "How does it look to you, I ask you?"

"It's bearable that way," the man concluded.

"Then formulate it that way . . . it's bearable without classes," Chepurny ordered Prokofy. "Let's have more important questions."

Prokofy read a directive about the immediate organization of consumers' cooperatives instead of strengthening private trade, since the cooperative is a voluntary open road leading the masses into socialism and beyond.

"That doesn't concern us, that's for the districts that have fallen behind," Chepurny overruled, since he at all times held within himself the main idea, that communism had been achieved in Chevengur. "Well, how would you have formulated it?" Chepurny asked the old man's opinion.

"Bearable," he formulated.

Prokofy, however, thought differently.

"Comrade Chepurny," he said, "maybe instead we ought to stock up on supplies for a cooperative like that. After all, the proletariat has come and we've got to accumulate food for them."

Chepurny was disturbed and amazed.

"Look, the steppe has grown over all by itself, with whatever was at hand. You can go out and just pluck angelica and wheat and eat it! The sun shines, the soil breathes, the rains fall. What more do you need? You want to drive the proletariat to useless effort again? We've got farther than socialism,

you know. We've got better than that here!"

"I am in accord," Prokofy agreed. "I forgot for a moment on purpose that we've got communism organized here. After all, I was driving around a different region, one that's a long ways from communism, and they still have to pass through the torments of cooperative societies. Our last point is a circular about trade unions and about help in paying Party dues on time. . . ."

"Who to?" Zheev asked.

"Them," Kirei answered, without question or idea.

"What them?" Chepurny asked, as he didn't know.

"Doesn't say," Prokofy looked in the circular.

"Write that they should say who the dues go to and why," Chepurny said, growing accustomed to formulation. "Maybe that there is a non-Party paper, or maybe there's rich folks there that will be organizing big loans on the basis of these dues, and a loan, brother, is no worse than property. Then we'll have to fight with them again, with the remnant swine, when here we've got an entire communism in the soul of every man, and every man wants to preserve it."

"I'll make a mental note of this question for the time being, since it lacks class clarity," Prokofy resolved.

"Store it in your mind," Zheev approved. "There's always left-overs lying about a mind, because the living stuff gets used up and there's not enough of it in the mind."

"Excellent," Prokofy agreed and went on. "Now there's a proposal to form a planning commission that would draw up the numbers and dates of all the income and expenditures of lives and property, down to the very end. . . ."

"End of what? The whole world, or just of the bourgeoisie?" Chepurny asked for specificity.

"It doesn't say. It just says, 'of demand, expense, possibility, and subsidy for the entire period of reconstruction, until its end.' And then there is a proposal to 'organize to this end a district plan in which to concentrate all preconditional, coordinative, regulative, and politically conscious work in order from the elements of the cacaphonous capitalist economy to produce the harmonies of a symphony of united higher causes and rational indicators.' It's all written quite succinctly, because this is an assignment."

At this point the revolutionary committee of Chevengur dropped its head as one man. The element of a higher mind wafted from the paper, making the Chevengurians grow weak, for they were more used to suffering the moment than imagining in advance. Chepurny sniffed tobacco to ease his alarm, then asked meekly, "Prosh, give us some sort of help, will you?"

The old man fixed his patient eyes on the entire saddened populace of Chevengur, said something to himself, and spoke no words to aid the men.

"I have a rough draft of a resolution all ready. You can't do the whole thing with just ideas," Prokofy said and began to rummage through his bushel

planning  
for

of papers, where everything that the Bolsheviks of Chevengur had forgotten was made significant.

"Who needs all this? Who's it for then, the locals?" the old man asked. "I'm talking about all this paper reading. Whose concerns are written up in that letter there? Ours or theirs back there in the center?"

"Definitely for us," Prokofy explained. "It's addressed to us for us to fulfill, and not just to read out loud."

Chepurny righted himself after his weakness and raised his head, where a decisive feeling had ripened.

"You see, comrade, they want the smartest people to figure out the current of life once and for all, for all time until every last one of us is lying under the ground and the miscellaneous can't leave the planning and just bear it within the excesses. . . ."

"But who needs all of this?" the old man asked, then closed his eyes apathetically. The world through which he had passed and its impressions had ruined those eyes.

"We do. Who do you think, I ask you now?!" Chepurny became disturbed.

"Hell, we can get by on our own, and a lot better, too," the old man explained. "That paper's not for us, it's for the rich. When the rich were alive we were worried about them, but nobody has to grieve for your poor man, because he grows up on a bare spot for no reason at all. The poor man is his own smartest person, because it was him who made the whole world for others, like a toy, without even wanting to, and he keeps himself safe even while he's asleep, since if it's not for himself, then it's for others, and each person is valuable. . . ."

"What you say is completely bearable, old man," Chepurny concluded. "Formulate it just that way, Prosh. The proletariat and the miscellaneous in its ranks have through their own concern formulated the entire habitable world and thus, so to say, to be concerned with those who were primordially concerned is a scandal and a shame, and Chevengur has no brainy candidates. That's right, isn't it, old man?"

"It's bearable that way," the old man said, evaluating it.

"The scribe doesn't make houses for the carpenter," Zheev said.

"The cowherd best knows when he's to drink milk," Kirei announced for his part.

"Until you do a fellow in, he lives by the spirit," Piyusya put it in his fixed voice.

"Passed practically unanimously," Prokofy tallied the vote. "Let's go to current affairs. There's to be a Party conference in the province center eight days from now and they want us to send a delegate, who's supposed to be the president of the local government."

"Then you go, Chepurny. What's there to discuss?" Zheev asked.

"There's nothing to discuss. These are orders," Prokofy directed.

Prokofy - Follow orders  
Party as concentrated spectacle

The miscellaneous old man squatted down, then, breaking the agenda, asked vaguely, "And who might you all be, anyway?"

"We're the revolutionary committee, the highest revolutionary organ of the district," Prokofy answered with precision. "The revolutionary peoples have conferred certain competencies upon us, within the limits of our revolutionary consciousness."

"So then it also figures that you're the brainy ones what write papers right up to death itself?" the old man said, thinking aloud.

"That's what it figures," Prokofy confirmed with authoritative dignity.

"Ah-ha," the old man said gratefully. "And here I was sitting thinking that you was doing this voluntarily, because you don't have anything more serious to do."

"No, no," Prokofy said. "We have to govern the whole town and the district, without a break even. All concern about safeguarding the revolution falls upon us. You know why you were able to become a citizen of Cheven-gur, old man? Because of us."

"Because of you?" the old man repeated. "Well then, thanks to you, from us."

"Don't mention it," Prokofy said, rejecting the thanks. "Revolution is our job and our duty. All you have to do is listen to our orders, and then you will stay alive and things will go well for you."

"Hold it, comrade Dvanov. Don't exaggerate your own duties instead of me," Chepurny warned him seriously. "The elderly comrade is making remarks on the question of inescapable shame for the government for our benefit, and you are obscuring him. Speak, comrade miscellaneous."

At first the old man was silent, since all miscellanea at first produced not thought but a certain pressure in the dark warmth, and then the warmth somehow spoke its way out, cooling as it flowed.

"I stand and look around," the old man narrated what he saw. "Your job looks weak here, but you talk real important to people, like you were up on a hill and the rest of us was down in the bottom. You should have transplanted sick folks here, folks who are just living out their last days, living on memory alone. After all, you've got sentry duties, easy work . . . but you're still hard people . . . you ought to live with a little more effort. . . ."

"What's with you, you want to become president of the district?" Prokofy asked him straight out.

"God forbid," the old man was abashed. "I haven't been a night watchman or a whistle-blower all my life, not once! I just say that government work's for the clumsy, that you ought to put the people who are least necessary of all to work at government, but all of you here still got some good in you yet."

"But what are the useful to do?" Prokofy led the old man on, trying to lead him into dialectics, where he could shame him.

"To live hungry, seems like. There's no third way to go."

“For what?”

Here the old man stopped. He could not think quickly.

“Let’s say so that the skin and nails will grow.”

“But what are nails for?” Prokofy pressed the old man.

“The nails are dead,” the old man said, finding his way out from the tight spot. “They grow from within, so that the dead stuff won’t stay in the middle of a man. The skin and nails cover the whole man and keep him safe.”

“Who from?” Prokofy labored onwards.

“The bourgeoisie, of course,” Chepurny said, catching the drift of the argument. “The skin and nails are the Soviet government. How come you can’t formulate that for yourself?”

“But then what’s the hair?” Kirei asked, interested.

“It’s the same as wool,” the old man said. “You can cut it with a knife, but it doesn’t hurt the sheep.”

“But it seems to me that it would get cold in the winter and then the sheep will die,” Kirei countered. “When I was a kid I shaved this kitten and buried in in the snow. I wanted to find out if it was a person or not. And then the kitten got a fever and died.”

“I can’t formulate it into a resolution like that,” Prokofy announced. “I mean, we’re the main organ, and the old man here has come out of the regions where nobody settles. He doesn’t know anything, and he says that we’re not the main people, but instead some kind of night watchmen, and of the very lowest qualifications, so that only people of poor quality should be put here, while the good ones walk wherever they want to out in the mounds and the empty regions. That resolution can’t even be written on paper, since even workers can only make paper thanks to the correct management of the government.”

“Just hold up a minute on getting mad there,” the old man put a stop to Prokofy’s anger. “All people live, and most of them are out working in their poverty and their need, but here you all sit in a room thinking, like you know all about them and like they don’t have a feeling in their heads that they can call their own!”

“Hey, old man!” Prokofy finally understood. “So that’s what you’re after! But how is it you can’t understand that we have to have organization and some cohesion of the splintered forces in one defined channel? We’re not just sitting here for thinking, but to gather the proletarian forces and tighten up their organization.”

The elderly proletarian was not convinced.

“Since you’re collecting them, then it must mean they want each other anyhow. But that’s what I’m telling you, that what you’re doing is right, that here anybody, even somebody without any piss or vinegar to him, will figure things out and be able to rule. At night, and then too they won’t steal your work. . . .”

“You mean you want us to do our work at night?” Chepurny asked

conscientiously.

"As long as you feel like it, then it's better to do it at night," the miscellaneous old man allowed. "In the daytime some fellow might pass by on foot, and he won't need anything, because he's got his own road. But you all will be shamed. Here we sit, you'd say like, and we're thinking on other people's lives, instead of letting the other fellow do it for himself, and here the other fellow will go past and maybe he won't ever come back. . . ."

Chepurny hung his head and felt a buzzing of shame within.

C "How is it I never knew that it's my duty what makes me smarter than the whole proletariat?" Chepurny thought, vaguely tormented. "But what kind of brain am I when I'm ashamed and I'm frightened of the proletariat out of respect?"

"Formulate it that way," Chepurny said to Prokofy after the entire revolutionary committee had fallen silent. "In the future all sessions of the revolutionary committee are to take place at night, and the brick house is to be liberated for the proletariat!"

Prokofy sought an out.

"But on what bases, comrade Chepurny? I need to have them for the justification."

"You need bases? So put down that it's because of shame and disgrace before the proletariat and miscellaneous, who live during the day. Say that just like with unseemly matters it is better to finish up unimportant matters at some invisible time of day."

"That's clear," Prokofy agreed. "At night a man receives more attention. But where are we to put the revolutionary committee then?"

"Just pick a barn somewhere," Chepurny said. "Try to choose the worst one you can."

"I'd move that it be in the church," Prokofy introduced his amendment. "That way the contradiction will be bigger and anyway you look at it, that building isn't fit for proletarians."

"Not a bad formulation," Chepurny concluded. "Just firm it up a bit. What else do you have there in your papers? Finish it up fast as possible, will you?"

Prokofy put off the rest of the business for his own decision and reported only about the most insignificant issue of all, and thus the quickest to discuss.

"There's still the stuff about the organization of mass productive labor in the form of voluntary Saturdays to liquidate the ruin and the needs of the working class, which must of needs inspire the masses to advance, and in and of itself signifies an enormous beginning."

"Enormous beginning of what?" Zheev had not heard properly.

"Beginning of communism, of course," Chepurny explained. "The regions what are lagging behind are just starting out towards communism from all sorts of directions, but we're already finished."

"As long as we're finished, then we're probably better off not starting, aren't we?" Kirei asked immediately.

"Kiryusha!" Prokofy said, taking note of him. "You've been co-opted, so just sit quiet there, hear!?"

All the while the miscellaneous old man looked at the heap of papers on the table, which probably had been written by many people, since the letters of the alphabet only take shape slowly and each of them requires a brain, so that it's not a case of one thinking for everybody, but an entire few, so that it was probably better to buy them off at a cheap price and to respect them, for the time being.

"We'll set that work up for you for nothing," the old man said, already displeased. "We'll hire on cheap to move it out, only don't talk about it anymore, because this is nothing but insulting."

"Comrade Chepurny, looks like we've got the will of the proletariat right in front of our eyes," Prokofy said, drawing out the consequences of the old man's words.

Chepurny, however, was only surprised.

"What kind of consequence is that, when the sun can get by without a Bolshevik? I mean inside of us we have our awareness of the correct attitude toward the sun, but we don't have need for labor. First we have to organize the need."

"Nothing to be done. We'll find one," the old man promised. "We have few people and a lot of houses here. Maybe we ought to move the houses closer together, so that we can live closer together."

"The orchards could be moved too. They're even lighter," Kirei said. "When you've got orchards the air gets thicker, and they're nourishing, too."

Prokofy found evidence of the old man's thought in his papers. Everything, it seemed, had already been thought out in advance by the greatest minds, who were unknown because they signed these papers with illegible scrawls, and thus there remained only the fulfillment of one's life according to the recorded thoughts of someone else.

"We have here a memorandum," Prokofy said as he shuffled through his papers, "on the basis of which Chevengur is subject to complete replanning and improvement of municipal services. And it follows from that that the houses must be moved and the movement of fresh air be guaranteed by means of orchards, so it is definitely fitting."

"Could do it with municipal services as well," the old man agreed.

The entire revolutionary committee of Chevengur had come to a halt, as if dead. Often the Chevengurians did not know what they should think further about, and they sat in anticipation, while life flowed through them as if fed by a spring.

"Wherever there's a beginning, there's an end too," Chepurny said, not knowing what he would say after that. "The enemy used to live among us head-on, but we got him split out of the revolutionary committee and now in

\* *Bolshevism needs enemies*

! 5 In place of the enemy we've got the proletariat, so either they've got to be spit out too, or else the revolutionary committee is unnecessary."

In the revolutionary committee of Chevengur words were spoken without any orientation towards people, as if the words were a natural personal necessity for the speaker, and often speeches contained neither questions nor proposals, instead consisting of nothing but surprised doubt, which served not as the stuff of resolutions, but as the stuff of the suffering of the members of the revolutionary committee.

"Who are we, anyway?" Chepurny thought about this out loud for the first time. "We are nothing more than comrades of the oppressed people of all the countries of the world, that's what! And we shouldn't tear ourselves away from the warm onward flow of the entire class, nor stand in a bunch either like he wants, since that class was what made the whole world, and why should we drive ourselves crazy doing their thinking for them, I ask you now!? It's such an insult to them that they could put us in with the remnant swine easy. That's the end of the session right there, because now everything is clear, and everybody must feel quiet and at ease with their soul."

From time to time the miscellaneous old man suffered from wind and gas, which had come about in him because of the uneven flow of his nourishment. Sometimes he went without food for a long time and then had to stuff himself at the first chance he got to stock up, and because of this his stomach had been ruined and it started to suffer from ordure. On days when that happened the old man detached himself from all other people and went off to live in some uninhabited spot. He had eaten greedily in Chevengur, so the old man was only just able to make it to the end of the meeting of the revolutionary committee before he had to head immediately for the weeds, where he lay down on his stomach and began to suffer, everything that in normal times was near or dear to him now forgotten.

Chepurny left for the provincial center that same evening, with the same horse that had been sent to fetch the proletariat. He drove alone into the murk of that world which in Chevengur he had long ago forgotten, just as night was dawning. However, as soon as he had passed just beyond the outskirts of the town Chepurny heard the sounds of the old man's disease, and he was forced to find the old man so as to find out the reason for such signalling out in the steppe. As soon as he had checked it out, Chepurny rode on, convinced now that the sick man was an indifferent counterrevolutionary. What was worse, they also had to decide what to do with the afflicted during communism, but then he remembered that now the whole proletariat had to do the thinking, and not just him. Thus liberated from the torments of the mind and guaranteed of the future truth, he dozed off in the lone rumbling cart, with a light sensation of his own life, and grieving only slightly for the proletariat which now slept in Chevengur.

"Now what are we to do with the horses and the cows and the sparrows?" Chepurny began to think, already asleep, but then he immediately

the proletariat  
Kopenkin → Chevengur  
Pashintsev → Chevengur

rejected these puzzlements, so that he might freely rely upon the strength of mind of an entire class, a class which had been sufficiently clever to be able to invent not only all the property and artifacts on earth, but had also thought up the bourgeoisie to preserve that property, and had thought up not only the revolution, but also had invented the Party as a preservative for the revolution until communism arrived.

Grasses passed the buckboard in the other direction, as though they were returning to Chevengur, while the half-asleep man drove forward. He did not see the stars shining above him from the thickened heights, from the eternal and already achieved future, from that quiet system in which the stars moved as comrades, not so far apart that they might forget one another and not so close together that they would flow into one and lose their differences and useless mutual attractions.

\* \* \* \* \*

On the way back from the provincial center Kopenkin caught up with Pashintsev and they arrived in Chevengur side by side on their horses.

Kopenkin plunged into Chevengur as though into sleep, feeling its quiet communism as a warm comfort all over his body, but not, however, as that personal higher idea isolated in the small alarmed place of his chest. Thus Kopenkin wanted to conduct a complete test for communism in order that it might evoke immediate enthusiasm within him, since Rosa Luxemburg had loved communism and he respected Rosa.

“Now there was a woman, comrade Luxemburg!” Kopenkin explained to Pashintsev. “Here we’ve got people living all sprawled out and flat on their backs, the threads of their bellies pulled tight, and some of them wearing earrings. I think that is unseemly for comrade Luxemburg. She would have got ashamed and doubtful here, same as me. How about you?”

Pashintsev did not trust Chevengur at all. He already knew the whole reason for it.

“Why should she shame herself?” he said. “She was also a lady with a revolver. This is just a revolutionary national park, like I had and like you saw when you spent the night with me.”

Kopenkin remembered Pashintsev’s village, the silent barefoot wanderers who spent the night in the manor house, and his own friend and comrade, Alexander Dvanov, who by Kopenkin’s side had sought communism among the simplest and best of people.

“All you had was a shelter for the man lost in exploitation. You didn’t turn up any communism there. But here it’s grown up out of neglect. It went around the people without life and came here, and now it’s living without moving.”

It was all the same to Pashintsev. He liked Chevengur and would live

Pashintsev plots return. (Trotsky?)  
summer

there while he gathered strength and a division so that he could then storm back into his revolutionary national park and seize back the revolution from the general organizers who had been sent there. Most of all Pashintsev lay out in the fresh air, relaxing and listening to the rare sounds of the forgotten Chevengur steppe.

Kopenkin walked alone through Chevengur, passing the time by observing the proletarians and miscellania to determine whether Rosa Luxemburg was even the slightest bit dear to them, but they had never heard of her at all. It was as though Rosa Luxemburg had died for nothing, and not for their sake at all.

Once they had arrived in Chevengur the proletarians and miscellania had quickly eaten up the remnants of the bourgeoisie's food, and by the time Kopenkin got there they were already eating nothing but plants picked up from the steppe. In Chepurny's absence Prokofy had organized a Saturday of voluntary labor in Chevengur, assigning the entire proletariat to reposition the entire town and its gardens. The miscellaneous, however, moved the houses and carried the carried not out of love of labor, but for their wages of peace and a night's lodging in Chevengur, as well as at the same time to buy themselves free of the government and Proshka. When Chepurny returned from the center, he let Prokofy's instructions stand until reviewed by the proletariat, hoping that as the end of their labors the proletariat would take the houses apart into unnecessary pieces, as the traces of their oppression, and that then they would live in the world without any covering at all, warming one another with nothing more than their own living bodies. Besides, no one knew whether winter would come under communism, or whether it would always remain balmy summer, since the sun had after all risen on the first day of communism, which meant that all of nature was on the side of Chevengur.

The Chevengur summer went on, and time passed hopelessly back out of life, but Chepurny, the proletariat, and the miscellaneous had stopped in the middle of summer, time, and all the turbulent elements, living in the calm of their joy, anticipating equitably that the final happiness of life would be worked out among the proletariat, now that they were troubled by no one. This happiness exists already on earth, but it is hidden within the miscellaneous. Since, however, it is to be found within, it is all the same a substance and a fact and a necessity.

Kopenkin alone walked through Chevengur without happiness and without dead hopes. If he had not been waiting for Alexander Dvanov and his evaluation of Chevengur as a whole he would long ago have smashed the public order of Chevengur with his armed hand. However, the farther his time of patience went, the greater Kopenkin's solitary emotions were touched by the class of Chevengur. Sometimes it seemed to Kopenkin that the Chevengur proletariat was worse off than him, but all the same they were calmer than he was, perhaps because secretly they were also stronger. Kopenkin had his

communism = poverty  
TITYCH

consolation in Rosa Luxemburg, while the new Chevengurians had no joys before them and none that they expected, and thus they remained satisfied with that which all unpropertied people possess, a life shared with people identical to them, companions and comrades for the roads through which they pass.

Once Kopenkin remembered his older brother, who used to leave home each evening to go visit his sweetheart, while the younger brothers stayed alone in the house and missed him. Then Kopenkin used to comfort them, and they too gradually comforted one another, for they had to. Now Kopenkin was also indifferent to Chevengur and wanted to go visit his sweetheart, Rosa Luxemburg, but the Chevengurians had no sweethearts and would have to stay home alone, finding their comfort among themselves.

The miscellaneous acted as though they knew in advance that they would have to stay home alone in Chevengur, and so they demanded nothing of Kopenkin or of the revolutionary committee. The latter had ideas and directives, while they had only the need to exist. In the daytime the men of Chevengur wandered about the steppes picking plants and grubbing roots, stuffing themselves on raw vegetables. At night they lay in the grass of the streets and went silently to sleep. Kopenkin too lay among the people in order to grieve less and pass the time quickly. Occasionally he talked with the skinny old man, Yakov Titych by name, who turned out to know everything that other people only thought about or didn't even know how to think about. Kopenkin knew nothing precisely because he had suffered through his life without preserving it with vigilant and mnemonic consciousness.

Yakov Titych loved to spend evenings lying on the grass watching the stars and consoling himself with musings about the distant, alienated luminaries on which, perhaps, had originated nonhuman, untested life which was for him unattainable and unintended. Yakov Titych turned his head about, looked at his sleeping neighbors, and mourned for them. "You couldn't live there, either," he thought. Then he got up and loudly congratulated everyone, "And so what if you can't? It's the same sort of being, if it's a star or if it's me. Man's no lout. He takes things because he has to, not because he's greedy."

Kopenkin also lay and listened to discussions like those Yakov Titych held with his own soul.

"You always feel sorry for others," Yakov said, bringing this to his own attention. "You look at some man's pitiful body and you feel sorry for him. That body is going to be tormented and die, and then pretty soon you have to part from it. You're never sorry for yourself though. You just remember how you're going to die and that people will cry over you and then you feel sorry for the people, for having to leave them to cry alone."

"Hey old man, where did you get such muddled words?" Kopenkin asked. "You don't know the man of class, and yet here you lie, talking to yourself."

The old man fell silent. It was quiet in Chevengur as well.

People lay on their backs, the difficult muddled night slowly opening above them, so quietly that it seemed as though words were being spoken in that direction, and the sleepers sighed at them in answer.

"How come you're so quiet, like you were in the dark?" Kopenkin asked again. "Upset about the star? The stars are like silver and gold. Not our coins."

Yakov Titych was not ashamed of his words.

"I wasn't talking. I was thinking," he said. "Until you say something you can't be smart, which is how come there's no brains in silence, but just torment for the emotions."

"Then it must be you're smart, I guess, since you're talking like you were at a rally?" Kopenkin asked.

"That isn't what made me smart. . . ."

"What then, huh? Teach me how, comrade-like," Kopenkin asked.

"I got smart because I had no parents, no people, and I had to make a man out of myself. Good Lord, the living and other stuff I had to get for myself and then let go of again! Just picture it with your brains. Aloud."

"A good bit, probably," Kopenkin thought out loud.

At first Yakov Titych just sighed from his hidden conscience, but then he opened up to Kopenkin.

"A good bit for sure. In your old age you lie there and think, how can it be that the people and the earth are still in one piece after me? How many things did I do, how much food did I eat, how many burdens did I live through and thoughts think over? It's like the entire world ran through my fingers and all that's left for the others is the stuff I've already chewed. Later on, though, I noticed that other people are like me, that they carry their own tough bodies from the time they're little, and everyone just has to put up with that."

"Why from the time they're little?" Kopenkin did not understand. "Did you grow up an orphan or something, or your father renounced you?"

"Without a single parent," the old man said. "I had to get used to strangers instead of folks and I had to do all my own growing in my life, without any comforting. . . ."

"But if you had no father, then how come you're valuing people like stars?" Kopenkin asked, surprised. "People should be more precious to you. Besides people, you've got no place to put yourself, and your place is among them on the road, walking with them. If you was a real Bolshevik, you'd know all of this, but you're just an old orphan."

A baby began to cry somewhere in the middle of town, in the primordial hush, and all those not sleeping heard it, so quiet was that night above the world, while beneath it the earth seemed almost to be absent. After the sound of the child's suffering two more voices rang out, that of the baby's mother and the disturbed knickering of Proletarian Strength. Kopenkin

immediately got to his feet, his desire to sleep vanished. The old man whom misfortune had hardened said, "There's a little one crying, but I can't tell if it's a boy or a girl."

"Little ones cry while old ones lie," Kopenkin accused him heatedly, then went off to water his horse and comfort the baby.

A wandering beggar woman who had showed up in Chevengur independently of the miscellanea was sitting in a dark entranceway and holding her child with her hands and knees, repeatedly blowing on the baby to warm it, trying to aid the baby with her own strength.

The baby lay quiet and peaceful, unfrightened by the torments of disease, which had squeezed him into a pitiful lonely crush. He moaned but rarely, more mourning than complaining.

"Hush-a-bye, my darling," the mother was saying. "Tell me where it hurts and I'll blow on it, to warm you up . . . and I'll kiss you there . . ."

The boy grew quiet, looking at his mother through half-closed eyes that had forgotten her. Isolated within the darkness of his body, the boy's heart beat so stubbornly, passionately, and hopefully that it seemed to be a creature apart, the baby's friend, who blotted up the streams of rotting death with the swiftness of its own burning life. Even the mother stroked the baby's chest, trying to help his hidden and lonely heart and thus, as it were, put some slack into the string on which the fine life of her baby was now playing, so that the string would not fall silent and rest.

The mother herself was not only feeling and tender now, she was also intelligent, cool, and calculating, afraid of forgetting something or producing too late the help she knew her child needed and which she could provide.

She vividly recalled all of life, her own and that of others that she had seen, and she tried to pluck from within herself all that she needed now to ease the child's lot. And thus without people, plates, medicines, and linens, in this nameless town upon which she had chanced, this poor mother knew how to help her baby with not only tenderness, but with healing as well. In the evening she had washed his stomach with warm water, warmed his body with poultices, fed him syrup for nourishment, and then decided not to sleep as long as the child remained alive.

This, however, did not stop his torment. The mother's arms grew sweaty from the warming body of her boy. He wrinkled up his face and moaned his indignation, as if to say that he felt awful and there his mother sat, bending over him but not giving him anything. Then his mother gave him her breast to suckle, although the boy was already almost five. He greedily began to suckle, sucking the thin sparse milk from the breast which had long ago collapsed.

"Well, say something, then," the mother asked. "Tell me what you'd like."

The boy opened his white, aged eyes, waited a bit while he finished up the milk, and then said what he could.

"I want to sleep and float in the water. I was sick before, remember, and now I'm weak. Wake me up tomorrow so I won't die, because otherwise I'll forget and die."

"No you won't, my boy," the mother said. "I'll always guard you and take care of you. Tomorrow I'll get some beef for you."

"Hold me tight, so the beggars won't steal me," the boy said, growing weak. "They don't get anything when they beg now, so they steal. I'm kind of tired of you . . . it'd be better if you was to wander off somewhere. . . ."

The mother looked at her son, who was already oblivious, and she felt sorry for him.

"My darling, if you weren't meant to live, then better that you should die in your sleep," she whispered. "Just don't torment yourself. I don't want you to suffer . . . I want things to always be easy and cool for you. . . ."

At first the boy lost himself in the cool of easy sleep, but then he screamed, opened his eyes, and saw that his mother was pulling him head first from the sack where he had been so warm lying in the soft bread, and then she began distributing the crumbly chunks of his weakened body, which now was all furry from sweat and disease, handing them out to naked beggar-women.

"Mother," he said to his mother, "You're a beggar and a fool. Who'll feed you when you're old? As it is I'm so skinny, and here you are handing me out to others!"

His mother, however, did not hear him, for she was looking into his eyes, which already resembled dead river pebbles. She cried in so mournful a voice that it quickly grew indifferent, forgetting that already the boy was less tormented.

"I nursed him, I cared for him! It's not my fault!" the mother said, trying to protect herself from the coming years of melancholia.

Chepurny and Kopenkin were the first of the Chevengurians to arrive.

"What's the problem?" Chepurny asked the beggar-woman.

"I want him to have another minute," the mother said.

Kopenkin bent over and touched the boy. He loved the dead, for Rosa Luxemburg was among their number.

"What do you need a minute for?" Kopenkin asked. "It'll pass and then he'll just die again, and you'll start bawling again."

"No," the mother promised. "I won't cry then. I just didn't have time to remember him like he was when he was alive."

"That can be done," Chepurny said. "I was sick for a long time, so I came out of the capitalist war a medic."

"But he's dead. Why bother him?" Kopenkin asked.

"I ask you now, what is all this?" Chepurny said with stern hope. "He can figure out a way to live another minute if his mother wants him to! He was alive for a long time and now he tries to say he's forgotten how to live! It'd be one thing if he was already stiff and cold, or the worms was already

dead child = no communism  
"won't get him organized"

at him, but here the boy lies, still warm. His insides are still alive. It's only the outsides that are a little dead."

While Chepurny was trying to help the boy to live another minute longer, Kopenkin guessed that there was no communism in Chevengur whatsoever. This woman had only just brought her baby into town, and now here he was dead already.

"Quit poking around, you won't get him organized anymore," Kopenkin said to Chepurny. "If you can't feel his heart, that means the person inside has gone off and hid."

Chepurny, however, did not abandon his medic's task. He massaged the boy's chest, touched his throat below the ears, sucked air from the child's mouth into his own, and waited for the return of the dead boy's life.

"What's the heart got to do with anything?" Chepurny asked, forgetting for a moment his zeal and medicinal faith. "What has the heart to do with anything, I ask you! The soul is in the throat, just like I proved to you!"

"All right, let's say it's in the throat," Kopenkin agreed. "It's an idea still, and it doesn't protect your life. It even wastes it, that's what! But you live in Chevengur and you don't do any work, and because of that you say the heart's got nothing to do with it. The heart is nothing more than a hired hand for the body. It's a working man, and you are all exploiters! There's no communism here!"

The mother brought hot water, to help realize Chepurny's hopes.

"Don't get all upset," Chepurny said to her. "All of Chevengur will suffer for him now, so that you'll have to do just a little tiny bit of the mourning. . . ."

"But when's he going to breathe?" the mother asked, listening.

Chepurny picked the child up, drew him close to himself, then stood him up between his knees, so that the boy would stand as though he were alive.

"How can you do all this without any brains at all?" the mother scolded Chepurny heatedly.

Prokofy, Zheev, and Yakov Titych came into the entranceway. They stood to one side and asked no questions, so as not to interfere.

"My mind is not involved here," Chepurny explained. "I'm acting according to my memory. Even without me the boy ought to live that moment for you, since we've got communism to working here, and all of nature is pulling together now. In any other place he'd have died on you way last night. I tell you, it's because of Chevengur that he even lived that extra day."

"Now that's possible, that could be," Kopenkin thought, looking outside to see whether the air held any visible sympathy for the dead, or if any might be found in Chevengur or in the heavens above them. Up there the weather was changing and a wind whistled through the weeds. The proletariat began to get up off the rapidly chilling earth and to go into the houses to sleep.

"It's just the same here as it was under imperialism," Kopenkin thought again. "The weather carries on the same way, and not a shred of communism anywhere . . . maybe by chance the boy will breathe again, and then things will be all right. . . ."

"Don't bother him anymore," the mother said to Chepurny when he tried to pour four drops of cooking oil down the boy's throat. "Let him rest. I don't want him to be touched. He told me he was all tired out."

Chepurny combed the boy's hair; it was plastered to his forehead and already turning darker, for the dead boy's early childhood was already ending. A swift, comforting rain dripped onto the roof of the entranceway, but then a sudden wind flapped in across the steppe, seized the rain from the ground, and carried it off into the distant dark. Once again it grew quiet outside, where it smelled of damp and clay.

"Now he'll breathe and have a look at us," Chepurny said.

The five Chevengurians leaned over the alienated body of the boy so that they could notice immediately when he began his second life in Chevengur, since it would be so short. The boy sat silently in Chepurny's lap while his mother removed his warm socks to smell the sweat of his feet. However, that moment in which the boy might have lived while his mother memorized him passed again. The boy had no wish to die of disease twice, so he rested in his first death in Chepurny's arms, and his mother understood.

"I don't want him to have to live even for a minute," she said. "He'd only have to live again and suffer. Let him stay the way he is."

"What kind of communism is this?" Kopenkin thought, definitely doubtful now. He went outside, wrapped in the damp of the night. "They couldn't make the boy inhale even once, and the boy up and died right in the middle of it! Maybe it's a plague, but it isn't communism. Comrade Kopenkin, it's time you rode out of here, time you went off into the distance."

Kopenkin sensed vigor within himself, the companion of distance and hope. He looked at Chevengur almost sadly, since he soon would have to part with it forever. Kopenkin always said goodbye to all the people he met and to all the towns and villages he left behind. His unwavering hopes redeemed themselves at parting. In the nights Kopenkin lost patience, for the blackness and the defenseless sleep of the people tugged at him to do some deep reconnaissance in the most important bourgeois country, since the blackness lay as well above that land, and the capitalists at that time were lying naked and unconscious. They could meet their end where they lay, and then communism could be declared before sun-up.

Kopenkin went over to his horse and inspected and felt it, in order to know for sure that it was ready for him to leave at any moment. Proletarian Strength was just as sturdy and ready to be ridden off into the distance and the future as he had been when pacing off the roads of the past.

There was a concertina playing out on the edge of town. One of the miscellaneous had some music, could not sleep, and so was comforting his

own sleepless solitude.

Kopenkin had never heard music like that. It almost spoke, falling just slightly short of getting out the words, and remaining thus an unrealized melancholy.

“It would be better if the music could get out what it wants to say,” Kopenkin thought, disturbed. “By the sound it seems like it’s calling me to come, but if I was to go, all the same it wouldn’t stop playing.”

Nevertheless Kopenkin went over towards the night music to have a look at his last Chevengurians and to see if he could find out what made up the communism in them which he could simply not feel. Kopenkin felt better even out in the open fields, where no organization at all was possible, than he did in Chevengur. Out there he had been riding beside Sasha Dvanov, and when he felt melancholy, so did Dvanov, and their senses of melancholy had rushed towards one another, met head on, and stopped each other dead in their tracks.

In Chevengur, though, Kopenkin had no comrade to come towards his melancholy and stop it, so Kopenkin’s sadness continued out into the steppe, into the emptiness of the black air, finally halting in the lonely world. “The man is playing,” Kopenkin listened, “and yet there isn’t any communism here. He can’t sleep because he’s offended. If this was under communism he could make his music say whatever it wants to say, then the music would be finished up and the man would come over and see me. But since the music won’t speak up, the man feels ashamed.”

It was hard to enter Chevengur and just as hard to leave. The houses stood around without any streets, disordered and crowded, as though the people had huddled together while in their buildings, and weeds grew up in the spaces between the buildings, for the people could not trample them down, since they were always barefoot.

Four human heads popped up from the weeds and said to Kopenkin, “Wait a second.”

It was Chepurny and with him were those who had stood around the dead child.

“Wait a bit,” Chepurny asked. “Maybe he’ll come back to life while we’re gone.”

Kopenkin too squatted down in the weeds. The music stopped, and now he could hear the winds and gases gurgling about in Yakov Titych’s stomach. These made Yakov Titych simply sigh and endure his life farther.

“Why did he die? I mean he was born after the revolution, wasn’t he?” Kopenkin asked.

“That’s true, isn’t it? How come he died then, Prosh?” Chepurny asked, surprised.

Prokofy knew the answer.

“Comrades, all people get born, live, and die because of social conditions and not because of some other law.”

Right bourgeoisie while they sleep

Here Kopenkin stood, for everything had become clear to him. Chepurny stood also, although he did not yet know what the matter was. Still he was sad and ashamed in advance.

"So that means the child died because of your communism, doesn't it?" Kopenkin asked sternly. "I mean, your communism is a social condition here, right? Which means there isn't any communism! You all have the souls of capitalists and you're going to answer for it to me right now!" Kopenkin yelled at the Chevengurians around him.

"Hey!" Pashintsev answered him from his hiding place.

"Where are you?"

"There he is!"

"Come over here, and be ready."

"For what? I can get by as is."

Chepurny stood unafraid. His conscience tormented him, for the very smallest child in Chevengur had died of communism, and he could not formulate any justification for it.

"Is he right, Prosh?" he asked quietly.

"He's correct, comrade Chepurny," Prokofy answered.

"What shall we do now? Does that mean that all we have here is capitalism? Maybe the child has come back to live his minute by now? Where could communism have gone to? I just saw it myself not long ago. We even cleared a special space for it."

"You ought to travel by night until you come to the bourgeoisie," Kopenkin advised him. "Then under cover of dark you could fight them while they're asleep."

"They've got an electric current burning there, comrade Kopenkin," said the knowledgeable Prokofy indifferently. "The bourgeoisie live in shifts day and night, because they are always in a hurry. . . ."

Chepurny went over to the woman passerby to see if perhaps the social conditions had perked the boy up a bit. The mother had laid her son on a bed in the heated room, then had laid down beside him, embraced him, and gone off to sleep. Chepurny stood above them both and felt his own regret, trying to decide whether or not to wake the woman. Once Prokofy had said to Chepurny that in the face of great grief within one's breast, one must either sleep or eat something tasty. There was nothing tasty in Chevengur, so the woman had chosen sleep as her consolation.

"You asleep?" Chepurny asked the woman quietly. "You want us to find you something good to eat? There's still food down in the cellar, left over from the bourgeoisie."

The woman slept silently. Her boy had rolled up against her and his mouth was open, as though his nose were stuffed up and he was breathing through his mouth. Chepurny noticed that the boy was already gap-toothed. He had had time to outlive, eat through his baby teeth, and now his new teeth were a little slow emerging.

“You asleep?” Chepurny leaned over her. “Why are you always asleep?”

“No, I’m not,” the woman transient opened her eyes. “I lay down and I guess I dozed off.”

“On account of sadness, or just so?”

“Just so,” the woman said listlessly and sleepily. She kept her right arm under the boy and did not look at him, because out of habit she sensed him as warm and sleeping. Then the beggar-woman sat up and covered her exposed legs, which still carried reserves of plumpness in case future children were to be born.

“Seems she’s a good woman,” Chepurny thought. “Someone misses her and fussed over her sometime. . . .”

The child left his mother’s arms and lay like a victim of the civil war: supine, his face mournful and hence elderly and aware, clothed only in the single poor shirt of his class, a class which roamed the earth in search of a gratuitous life. The mother knew that her son had fully experienced death, and this sense of death which he possessed was more tormenting to her than the pain of parting. The child, however, complained to no one and lay alone, patient and peaceful, resigned to long chill winters in the grave. An unknown man stood by their bed, desiring something for himself.

“So he never breathed, huh? It can’t be . . . this isn’t your olden times, you know!”

“No,” the mother said. “I saw him in my dream. He’s alive there and we walked hand in hand through a bare field. It was warm and we felt full. I wanted to carry him but he says, no mommy, I can get there faster on my feet. Let’s you and me think, or else we’ll stay beggars forever. But there was no place we could get to, so we sat down in a gravel pit and we both started to cry.”

“This doesn’t accomplish anything,” Chepurny consoled her. “We would have given your boy Chevengur as an inheritance, but he refused and died.”

“We sat in the field and cried. Why are we alive, we wondered, if no one will let us live? But the boy said to me, mommy, better let me die by myself. I’m tired of walking this long road with you. Everything is the same, he said, and just like everything else. So I said to him, all right, go ahead and die, and maybe I’ll drift off after you. So he lay down next to me, closed his eyes, but then he couldn’t stop breathing. He just lay there alive and couldn’t die. Mommy, he says, I can’t. Well, I said, then you don’t have to, if you can’t. Let’s go on and walk a bit, and maybe we’ll find someplace to stay.”

“This was just now he was alive with you? Here on the bed?”

“Right here. He was lying on my lap and breathing, and he just could not die.”

Chepurny felt a little bit better.

“I ask you, how could he die in Chevengur? We’ve conquered the conditions for him . . . I knew it! I knew he’d breathe a bit, and you were sleeping

for nothing.”

The mother looked at Chepurny with lonely eyes.

“What else do you want, muzhik? As soon as my little fellow was through, he died.”

“I don’t want anything,” Chepurny answered hastily. “It’s a lot to me that you just even dreamed he was alive . . . that means he lived a little longer for you here in Chevengur. . . .”

The woman was silent in her grief and her thoughts.

“No,” she said at last. “It wasn’t my boy that meant anything to you, it was your own soul that you needed. You go outside and leave me alone. I’m used to being left alone. There’s a long time until morning that I can lie here with him, so don’t waste my time with him!”

Chepurny left the beggar-woman’s house, satisfied that, albeit only in sleep, albeit only in the mind of the mother, nevertheless the boy had lived a bit longer on what remained of his soul, and that he had not died once and for all as soon as he set foot in Chevengur.

That meant that there was communism in Chevengur, and it acted independently of people. But where then was it kept? Even Chepurny, as he left the family circle of the transient woman could not clearly sense or see the communism in nocturnal Chevengur, even though communism now existed officially. But the ways people live unofficially! Chepurny was amazed; they lie in the dark with corpses and feel fine! And there’s no point to it. . . .

“Well, what was it? How are things?” the comrades who had remained outside asked Chepurny.

“He breathed in her sleep, but then he said he wanted to die by himself, but when he was out in the field he couldn’t,” Chepurny answered.

“So that’s why he died as soon as he got to Chevengur,” Zheev said, understanding. “He felt freer here with us, like life, death, what’s the difference. . . .”

“Absolutely clear,” Prokofy said. “If he couldn’t die but at the same time he wanted to be done with himself, can you really say you’ve got a free society?”

“Yes! I ask you. . . .” Chepurny nodded questioningly, flinging aside all doubt. At first he could not understand what all this implied, but he saw the general satisfaction with the event of the former child, so he too rejoiced. Only Kopenkin had yet to see the dawn break over this affair.

“So how come the lady didn’t come out to be with you and instead hid herself away with the kid?” Kopenkin asked, condemning all of the Chevengurians. “That means she felt better there than here inside of our communism!”

Yakov Titych was accustomed to living with his mouth shut, suffering his thoughts in the still of his feelings, but when he was offended he could also speak correctly, and in fact, he now spoke.

“She stayed with her little one because between them they’ve got

nothing but their one blood and your communism. If she was to leave the dead boy, then you'd have nothing to stand on."

Kopenkin had begun to respect the miscellaneous old man, so he even more strongly affirmed these correct words.

"Your whole communism here in Chevengur is a dark place near the lady and that boy of hers. How come the communism inside of me never moves forward? Because Rosa and I have a profound task to do, even if all one hundred percent of her is dead!"

Prokofy considered this occurrence with death a formality and was at the same time telling Zheev how many women he had known who had university, elementary, and secondary school educations, giving separate accounts of each group. Zheev listened and felt envious. He had known nothing but illiterate, uncultured, submissive women.

"She was enchanting!" Prokofy said, finishing up some story or other. "There was a particular art of personality within her. She was a woman, understand, not one of your broads. Sort of like, well . . . you know, sort of like. . . ."

"Sort of like communism, probably," Zheev prompted timidly.

"Approximately. I was taking a loss on it, but I wanted to, you know? She asked me for bread and cloth. That year was chewed to the bone, but I was bringing home a little bit to my family. I had a father, mother, and little brothers sitting back in the village and so I figured, the hell with you, lady! My mother gave me birth, and you're going to betray me! So I rode peaceably home, right up to the house, and then I start missing her, so I took some stuff to her and fed her family too."

"What kind of education did she have?" Zheev asked.

"Oh, the very highest. She showed me some documents. She was seven years in the pedagogical institute alone, rearing the children of civil servants."

Kopenkin heard somebody rattling through the steppe in a buckboard. Perhaps it was Sasha Dvanov.

"Chepurny," he said, "as soon as Sasha arrives, Proshka goes. He's nothing but a snake that's done well."

Chepurny agreed, as he had done before.

"I'll trade anything good for something better. So please, take him."

The buckboard rattled past Chevengur somewhere nearby but it didn't stop in. That meant that there were people living elsewhere besides communism, and that they even went for rides somewhere.

An hour later even the most tireless, most vigilant Chevengurians had given themselves over to peace until the new fresh morning. Kirei was the first to awake, for he had slept since noon of the previous day, so he saw a woman carrying her heavy child out of Chevengur. Kirei himself wanted to leave because he was getting bored of living without war, making do instead with just conquest. If there was no war, then a man ought to live with his relatives, and Kirei's relatives were far away, out in the Far East, on the

Pacific Coast, almost at the edge of the earth where the sky began, vaulting upward to cover both communism and capitalism with total indifference. Kirei had walked on foot from Vladivostok to Petrograd, purging the earth for the sake of the Soviet government and its idea, and now he had walked as far as Chevengur, where he was sleeping until he grew rested and bored. At night Kirei looked at the sky and thought about it, as he did about the Pacific Ocean and the stars, as well as he did about the lights of the ships which were making for the faraway west, passing as they did so his coastal motherland. Yakov Titych was also still. He had found bast shoes for himself in Chevengur and had sewed some felt boots to them. Then he sang doleful songs in a chapped voice. He had intended the songs for himself alone, using them to replace the now-absent movement into the distance for the peace of his soul, but all the same he had gotten the bast shoes ready for departure. Just songs alone really aren't enough for a life.

Kirei listened to the old man's songs and asked what he was keening about. "You've had your share of living, old man!"

Yakov Titych denied his own old age. He felt that he was not fifty, but rather twenty-five, since he had slept or been ill through half his life, which thus was a loss and did not count.

"Where are you going, old man?" Kirei asked. "You may be bored here, but there things are going to be tough. You're between the devil and the deep blue sea."

"I'll go down the middle and come out on the road, and my soul will get the hell out of me. You walk along, a stranger to all and useless to yourself. Wherever life comes from as it goes into me, that's where it will go heading back."

"But things are all right in Chevengur, aren't they?"

"It's an empty town. Things are peaceful for a man passing through, but they've got houses standing around without any need, the sun doesn't burn very well, and men live ruthlessly there. They don't care who comes or goes and they don't spare the people, because food and property are cheap."

Kirei wasn't listening, for he could see the other was lying.

"Chepurny respects people and loves his comrades totally."

"He loves them because he's got too many feelings, and not because there's a need. His job is a bird's job . . . here today, off tomorrow. . . ."

Kirei, however, did not know at all where to find the best place for himself, whether in the calm and empty freedom of Chevengur or in some other distant and more difficult town.

Just as they had from the very beginning of communism, the days that followed stood uniformly sunny above Chevengur, while at night a new moon was waxing in the skies. No one noticed it or took account of it. Only Chepurny rejoiced at its growth as though at communism itself, since even the moon was necessary. Mornings Chepurny swam and in the afternoons he sat in the streets on a tree that someone had misplaced and he watched the town

and the people in it as though this were the dawn of the future, the object of universal desire, and the liberation of the self from the bonds of the mind. It was a shame that Chepurny could not express himself.

The proletarians and miscellaneous wandered around and about Chepurny, seeking nourishment in nature and the former gardens of the bourgeoisie, and since they were still alive, it seemed they found it. Occasionally one of the miscellaneous came up to Chepurny and asked, "What are we to do?"

This question astonished Chepurny.

"What are you asking me for? Your thoughts have to come out of you on their own. This isn't a kingdom here, you know. It's communism."

Then the miscellaneous would stand and think about what he ought to do.

"Nothing comes out," he said. "I'm already all puffed up."

"So just keep on living and stocking up," Chepurny advised him. "Something will come out of you."

"There's no more place inside of me for anything to go," the miscellaneous said meekly. "I was asking you why there's nothing on the outside. You ought to get up some fuss or other for us, you know!"

Another miscellaneous came over to ask about the Soviet star and why it was now the main mark of a man, instead of a cross or a circle. That sort of person Chepurny sent to Prokofy for explanations.

Prokofy said that the red star signifies the five continents of earth united into one management unit, decorated with the blood of life. The miscellaneous listened and then went back to Chepurny to check the accuracy of the explanation. Chepurny took the star in his hands and noticed immediately that it was a man, his arms and legs flung wide in order to embrace another man and that dried up old continents had nothing to do with it. The miscellaneous did not see why a man would want to embrace anybody, so Chepurny observed precisely that it wasn't the fault of man, it was simply that his body was built for embracing, and that without it there was nowhere to put your hands and feet.

"The cross is a man too," the miscellaneous remembered. "But how come there he's standing on one leg, if a man really has two?"

Chepurny took a stab at this too.

"Used to be people tried to support each other just with their hands, but they couldn't, so they untied their legs as well and got them ready as well."

That satisfied the miscellaneous. "That could be, seems like," he said, then went back to live.

It rained in the evening, winding the moon round with clouds. The clouds made dusk fall early, so Chepurny went into a house and lay down in the dark to rest and concentrate. A little later a miscellaneous showed up and said that the man who had the town's only concertina had taken off Lord

concertina - some  
music - some  
Dvanov & Gopner | no art

knows where with it, and those who remained behind were used to the music and couldn't wait for his return. Chepurny answered that it was the musician's affair, not his. Soon a peal of church bells rang out above Chevengur. The pouring rain softened the sound of the bells so that it sounded like the human voice of a man who could sing without stopping to breathe. Another man came to Chepurny through the rain and tolling. The silence of the advancing dusk made him already indistinct.

"What do you want?" Chepurny drowsily asked the man who came in.

"Who was it thought up the communism here?" asked the old voice of the man who had just arrived. "Give us some kind of solid example of it, will you?"

"Go holler for Prokofy Dvanov or some miscellaneous fellow. Anybody here can show you communism."

The man left and Chepurny fell asleep. Of late he slept well in Chevengur.

"He said to go find that Proshka of yours, that he knows everything," the man said to his comrade, who was waiting outside for him, his head bared to the rain.

"Let's go look for him. I haven't seen him in twenty years. He's grown now."

The old man walked a dozen steps and then changed his mind.

"Tomorrow would be better, Sash. We can find him then. Let's get some food and a bed first."

"All right, we'll do it that way, comrade Gopner," Sasha said.

However, when they began to look for food and shelter they found nothing, for it turned out that there was no need to search for such things. Alexander Dvanov and Gopner were in the middle of communism in Chevengur, where all doors stood open because the houses were empty, and where all people rejoiced at the appearance of new people, since instead of property the Chevengurians were able to acquire only friends.

\* \* \* \* \*

The bellringer tolled the Easter matins on the bells of the Chevengur church; he was unable to play the Internationale even though he was by birth a proletarian and a bellringer only by one of his former professions. The rain had ceased falling, quiet had risen up in the air, and the earth smelled of the tormenting life accumulated within itself. Just as the night air, the music of the bells challenged the man of Chevengur to renounce his own situation and to go forward, and since in place of property and ideals that man had only an empty body, with nothing before him but the revolution, even the song of the bells called them to alarm and desire, and not to mercy and peace. Chevengur had no art, a fact which Chepurny had already mourned

It's melancholy  
It seizes ch.  
after a desk

arrived Prokofy

once, so that any melodic sound, even one directed at the summit of the un-answering stars, was freely transformed into a reminder of the revolution and a feeling of conscience about the unerring triumph of one's self and one's class.

The bellringer grew tired and lay down on the floor of the tower to sleep. Within Kopenkin, however, feelings were retained for a long time, even entire years. He could convey nothing of his own feelings to other people and was able to expend the life which was taking place within him only on melancholy, which he could dispel only in just causes. After the bell music there was nothing more for Kopenkin to expect. He mounted Proletarian Strength and occupied the Chevengur revolutionary committee building, encountering no opposition. The committee was quartered in the same church where the bells had been ringing. Which was even better. Kopenkin waited in the church until sunrise and then confiscated all the files and papers of the committee. To do so he tied all of the means of production into one bundle and wrote on the top paper: "All future action to cease. Circulate to arrived proletarian people to read. Kopenkin."

No one showed up in the committee building before noon and Kopenkin's horse whinnied with thirst, but Kopenkin made it suffer for the sake of the seizure of Chevengur. Prokofy turned up in the church at noon. He pulled a briefcase from under his belt as soon as he reached the parvis, then crossed the institution with it on his way to work at the altar. Kopenkin stood waiting for him at the ambo.

"You've come?" he asked Prokofy. "Stop right there. Wait for me."

Prokofy submitted. He knew that correct government was lacking in Chevengur and that the reasonable and intelligent elements had to live within a retarded class in order to raise it up gradually, under their own authority.

Kopenkin seized Prokofy's briefcase and his two lady's pistols, then led him behind the altar screen, where he put him under arrest.

"Comrade Kopenkin, you really think you can make a revolution?" Prokofy asked.

"I do. As you can see, I am making it."

"But have you paid your Party dues? Show me your Party card!"

"No. You were given the power, but you didn't provide the poor people with communism. Go behind the screen, sit down, and wait."

Kopenkin's horse whinnied with thirst and Prokofy stepped back from Kopenkin, going behind the screen. In a closet Kopenkin found a communion plate filled with Easter pudding and shoved it to Prokofy so that he could eat. Then he locked his prisoner up by sticking a cross through the handles of the doors.

Prokofy watched Kopenkin through the grillwork designs of the door and said nothing.

"Sasha's arrived. He's walking around town looking for you," Prokofy said suddenly.

Sun = basis  
revolution passed by

Kopenkin sensed how joy made him want to eat, but he forcibly maintained his calm in the face of his enemy.

"If Sasha has come then you go outside right now. He knows what to do with the likes of you. You're not dangerous now."

Kopenkin removed the cross from the doorknobs, got up on Proletarian Strength, and immediately spurred the horse to a gallop. He dashed through the church, out the parvis, and into Chevengur.

Alexander Dvanov walked through the streets, as yet understanding nothing. He saw only that things were good in Chevengur. The sun shone above the town and steppe, the only blossom in the entire fruitless sky, the quivering pressure of its overripe strength plunging the luminous heat of its blossoming deep into the earth. Chepurny accompanied Dvanov, trying unsuccessfully to explain communism to him. Finally, noticing the sun, he pointed it out to Dvanov.

"There's your basis, which burns and never consumes itself."

"Where's your basis?" Dvanov looked at him.

"Up there. We don't torment people. Instead we live off the surplus power of the sun."

"Why surplus?"

"Because if it wasn't surplus then the sun would never throw it down to us and it would turn black instead. But since it's surplus, it might just as well give it to us, and we'll take care of life among ourselves. Understand?"

"I want to see it for myself," Dvanov said. He walked along exhausted and trusting. He wished to see Chevengur not in order to test, but rather to sense better this thing which was his realized local fraternity.

The revolution was passing like the day. Shooting died slowly in the steppes, the districts, and the whole Russian hinterlands, while the roads used by the army, horses, and entire infantry of Russian Bolsheviks gradually grew over with grass. The expanses of plains and fields lay in emptiness and silence, exhaling vapors like new-mown hay, while the late sun toiled alone in the slumbering heights above Chevengur. Now no one appeared in the steppe on a war horse, for some were killed, their corpses not found and their names forgotten, while others had demobilized their horses and were leading the poor of their home villages forward, not into the steppes, but into a better future. And if someone did appear out in the steppe, no one took a second look at him, since it would have to be a safe and peaceful man who was riding past on the business of his own concerns.

When he and Gopner arrived in Chevengur, Dvanov noticed that nature lacked its former alarm, while the villages along the road were filled with danger and poverty. The revolution had passed these places by, freeing the fields for peaceful despond, while it went off Lord knows where, as though it had hidden in the inner darkness of man, exhausted by the paths it had traversed. It was as though it was evening in the world, and Dvanov sensed that evening was gathering within him as well, a time of maturity, a time of

sun down  
Chepurny / Dvanov's relation to communism.  
Comrade

happiness or regret. It was in precisely this sort of sundown of life that Dvanov's father had hidden permanently in the depths of Lake Mutevo, wishing before his time to see the future morning. Now another evening was beginning. Perhaps that day whose morning the fisherman Dvanov had wished to see was already passed, his son once again suffering evening. Alexander Dvanov did not love himself too deeply to achieve communism for his own personal life, but he went forward with everyone else because everyone was going and it was frightening to remain behind alone. He wanted to be with people because he had no father or family of his own. On the other hand, communism tormented Chepurny the way the secret of life after death had tormented Dvanov's father. Chepurny could not bear the mystery of time, so he cut short the length of history by the rapid construction of communism in Chevengur, just as the fisherman Dvanov could not bear his own life and so had transformed it into death, in order to experience the beauty of that world. However, Dvanov loved his father not because of his curiosity and he liked Chepurny not because of his passion for immediate communism. In and of himself his father had been vital to Dvanov as the first friend he was ever to lose, while Chepurny was essential as a homeless comrade whom no one would clasp to themselves if there were communism. Dvanov loved Kopenkin, Chepurny, and many others because all of them, just as his father, would perish of impatience with life while he would stay alone among strangers.

Dvanov recalled old, barely alive Zakhar Pavlovich. "Sash," he used to say, "do something in this world. You can see people are living and dying. We have to have something, even if it's just a little."

So Dvanov decided to go as far as Chevengur to see communism and then he would return to Zakhar Pavlovich to help him and the other people who were just barely alive. However, the communism in Chevengur was not obvious on the surface. Probably it was hidden within people, for Dvanov saw it nowhere. The steppe was sparse and lonely, while nearer the houses occasional miscellanea sat drowsily. "My youth is ending," Dvanov thought. "Within me it is quiet and dusk is gathering above all of history." It was empty and spent in the Russia where Dvanov lived and walked. The revolution had passed, its harvest was gathered in, and now people were silently eating its ripe grain in order to make communism the eternal flesh of their bodies.

"History is melancholy because it is time, and it knows that it will be forgotten," Dvanov said to Chepurny.

"That's true," Chepurny said, surprised. "How come I didn't notice? That's why it's evening and the birds aren't singing, just the crickets. And what sort of song can they manage! Same thing with us really . . . all the time crickets singing and damn few birds. That's because history has ended here! I ask you . . . and we didn't even know the signs!"

Kopenkin came up on Dvanov from the back. He looked at Dvanov with all the greed of his friendship for him, then forgot to get off his horse.

chep.  
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Pr. to  
Dvanov  
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Dvanov & Kop.  
Gopner

Proletarian Strength was the first to whinny at Dvanov, and then Kopenkin also got down. Dvanov stood frowning. He was ashamed of his excessive love for Kopenkin and was afraid to express it, for he might make some mistake.

Kopenkin too had scruples about secret relations between comrades, but he was emboldened by his happy, nickering horse.

"Sasha," Kopenkin said, "you've come now? . . . Let me kiss you a bit, so the torture will stop in me as soon as possible. . . ."

Kopenkin kissed Dvanov, then turned to his horse and began to talk quietly with the animal. Proletarian Strength looked at Kopenkin slyly and without trust, for it knew that it was being talked with out of time, and did not believe in Kopenkin.

"Don't look at me, you can see I'm all upset," Kopenkin said quietly. The horse did not remove his serious gaze from Kopenkin and remained quiet. "You may be a horse, but you're still a fool," Kopenkin told it. "You're thirsty, so how come you're still quiet?"

The horse sighed. "I'm done for now," Kopenkin thought. "Now I've even gone and made this beast sigh!"

"Sasha," Kopenkin said, turning around, "how many years is it that Rosa Luxemburg is dead? I'm standing here thinking about her now . . . it's a long time she's dead. . . ."

"A long time," Dvanov said quietly. Kopenkin could barely hear his voice and he turned away in fright. Dvanov cried silently, not touching his face with his hands. The tears dropped to the ground only occasionally, for there was no place in which he could turn away from Chepurny and Kopenkin.

"Now this horse here could be forgiven," Kopenkin scolded Chepurny. "But you're a man and you can't leave us alone!"

Kopenkin offended Chepurny pointlessly, for the entire time Chepurny stood like a guilty man, trying to guess ways he might help these two people. "Can it really be that communism's not enough for them, that even under communism they grieve?" Chepurny thought sadly.

"So you're just going to stand there?" Kopenkin asked. "I seized your revolutionary committee today and here you are staring at me!"

"Keep it," Chepurny answered with respect. "I wanted to close it myself, because with people like this what do we want a government for?"

Fyodor Fyodorovich Gopner woke up, walked all around Chevengur, and managed because of the absence of streets to get lost in the district town. No one knew the address of Revolutionary Committee President Chepurny, but then they did know where the man was, so Gopner was led to Chepurny and Dvanov.

"Sasha," Gopner said, "I don't see any trades at all here. There's no sense in a working man living here."

At first Chepurny was angry and found himself confused, but then he remembered that by which people ought to live in Chevengur, so he tried to

Dictatorship  
slay, not goods  
sun

amine

reassure Gopner.

"Comrade Gopner, everyone here has one profession and that is their soul. Instead of trade we've set up life. So how can you say that there's nothing?"

"It's not that there's nothing, but that it's completely smooth," Kopenkin answered right off.

"There's nothing, nothing at all," Gopner said. "But what keeps people near one another then? Who knows? You stick them together with spit, or just slapped them together with a dictatorship?"

Because he was an honest man, Chepurny had already begun to doubt the fullness of communism in Chevengur although it ought to have been correct, for he had done everything according to his mind and in agreement with the collective sense of all the Chevengurians.

"Don't bother a stupid man," Gopner said to Kopenkin. "He's set up glory in the place of goods here, and a child died because of his general conditions."

"Who's your working class here?" Gopner asked Chepurny.

"We've got the sun shining above our heads, comrade Gopner," Chepurny announced in a quiet voice. "Earlier the shadow of exploitation covered it over, but not with us here now, so the sun does the work."

"So you figure you've got communism set up?" Gopner asked again.

"That and no other," Chepurny explained sadly, thinking forcibly so he would not make a mistake.

"For now I don't feel a thing," Gopner said.

Dvanov watched Chepurny with so much sympathy that he felt pain within his own body during Chepurny's sad tense answers. "It's difficult and obscure for him," Dvanov thought, "but he's headed where he ought to be and he's getting there the best way he knows how."

"Remember that we don't know communism," Dvanov said aloud. "So we can't see it immediately. And we shouldn't torment comrade Chepurny. We don't know anything any better than he does."

Yakov Titych came over to listen. Everyone looked at him and absent-mindedly fell silent in order not to offend Yakov Titych. It seemed to all of them that Yakov Titych might get offended since they were talking without him. Yakov Titych stood about a long while and then said, "The people can't cook any buckwheat kasha for themselves because there's no grain anywhere . . . but I used to be a blacksmith. I want to move the smithy further out along the highway and work for the passersby. Maybe I can earn enough to buy grain."

"Farther out in the steppe you'll find buckwheat growing on its own. Tear up some and eat it," Chepurny advised.

"No matter where you go and how much you tear up, you still want more," Yakov Titych said doubtfully. "I'd be better suited to working up something on the forge."

NBP

"Let him drag the smithy out . . . don't keep a man from his business," Gopner said, and then Yakov Titych went between the houses to the smithy. Burdocks had long ago overgrown the furnace and a chicken egg lay beneath the burdocks. Probably the last chicken had hidden from Kirei there in order to lay in quiet, while the last rooster had died somewhere in the darkness of a barn from masculine torment.

\* \* \* \* \*

The sun already bent low, far past noon. The earth smelled of burning and in the evening melancholy fell, the melancholy which causes every single man to want to visit or simply to go out in the fields to think and walk among the quiet grasses and thus console himself for the quantity of his life which had been destroyed by the day. The miscellaneous of Chevengur however had nowhere to go and no one who might be expected to drop in. They lived indistinguishably and had time during the day to go all around the surrounding steppes in search of nourishing plants, so they had no one who might find them in their loneliness. In the smithy Yakov Titych was seized by some kind of torment. The roof was hot and spider webs hung everywhere. Many spiders were already dead; their light little corpses were visible everywhere, eventually falling to the ground and becoming unrecognizable dust. Yakov Titych loved to pick up little bits from the streets and backyards and examine them, wondering what they used to be. Whose emotions had cherished and kept them? Perhaps these were pieces of people or of spiders or of some nameless mosquitoes of the earth. And nothing remained whole. All creatures which once were alive and loved by their children were crushed into unmatchable parts which left nothing over which those left behind to live and suffer further might weep.

"It's all right if everything has to die," though Yakov Titych, "but if the dead body would at least stay whole there'd be something to hang on to and remember, but the wind is always blowing and the water is always flowing and everything comes apart and falls into dust. You can't find anybody now who lived way back when because all of them are nothing but lost."

In the evening the proletarians and miscellaneous got together to make merry and occupy one another until sleep came. None of the miscellaneous had family because in the past they had lived in such toil and concentration of all available powers that no one had left the slightest surplus of the flesh to use in reproduction. To have a family one must have seed and the power of possession, but these people were exhausted simply by keeping their souls within their bodies, and the time which love requires they spent in sleep. However in Chevengur they felt peace and sufficient food, and yet their comrades made them feel not pleasure but melancholy. Earlier each had held his comrades dear because of grief, necessary to provide warmth during sleep and

the chill of the steppe, and mutual insurance in foraging for food. If one did not find anything, then surely the other would. Finally, comrades are good too simply to have beside you, if you have neither wife nor property nor anyone with whom to satisfy and disperse the ever-accumulating soul. In Chevengur there was property, wild grain in the steppes and vegetables in the gardens, all through germination of the fruits of former years in the soil. The torment of sleeping on the ground, the misery of food, these things were absent in Chevengur, and the miscellaneous missed them. Each paled for the other and they looked at each other without interest. They grew useless to themselves, for there was between them now no substance of use. That evening a miscellaneous man named Karpy said to everyone in Chevengur, "I want a family. A snake can sit on his seeds and keep quiet, but I've got nothing to live on, and it's not my fault. What is this pit beneath me?"

The old beggar woman Agapka also began to mourn.

"Take me, Karpy," she said. "I'd have your children, do your wash, make cabbage soup for you . . . even though it's strange, it's nice to be a woman. You can live inside your troubles like in a turnip patch and there's not much misery, so after a spell you don't even notice yourself anymore! Otherwise you live here and you're always about under your own feet, seems like."

"You're a joker," Karpy said, refusing Agapka. "I love women that are far away."

"But remember how I kept you warm that one time?" Agapka reminded him. "Seems like I was far away from you then, so you could get closer inside, where it hurts!"

Karpy did not reject the truth. He merely corrected the time of the event.

"That was before the revolution."

Then Yakov Titych said, "Chevengur has communism now, so the itch is given to all. Earlier the simple people had nothing inside their trunks and now they can eat everything that grows on the earth. What else could they want? It's time to live and ponder this or that. Many Red soldiers died of the war out there in the steppe, and they agreed to die so that the people of the future would be better than them. Us though, we're the future people, but bad ones. Already we want wives, already we have a craving for something. It's time we started up work and trades in Chevengur. Tomorrow we've got to carry the smithy outside of town, since nobody ever rides through here."

The miscellaneous did not listen. They wandered about disjointedly, knowing that each desired something, but no one knew what. Some of the newly-arrived Chevengurians had been married for a time, and they remembered this, telling others that a family is a pleasant bit of work because you don't lack for anything when there's a family and you get less riled up in your soul, because all you want is some peace for yourself and happiness in the future, for the children. Besides, you get to feeling sorry for the children

and you get nicer because of them, more patient and indifferent to everything that goes on in life.

The sun grew enormous and red, then hid behind the outskirts of the world, leaving behind in the sky its slowly gelling heat. In childhood each of the miscellaneous had thought that the sun was his father who had departed from him into the distance and who now was baking himself some potatoes on his log campfire. The only worker in Chevengur was taking his ease for the night, and in place of the sun there were the luminaries of communism, warmth and comradeship, while the moon began gradually to glisten in the sky, the luminary of the lonely and the wanderers who wander in vain. The moonlight timidly illuminated the steppe, and all about the expanses presented themselves to the eye as though they already lay in the next world, where life is contemplative, pale, and unfeeling, where in the glimmering silence a man's shadow rustles in the grass. Several people left communism for the depths of the advancing night and obscurity. Some went to seek wives for themselves and would then return to Chevengur, while others had grown thin on the vegetable fare of Chevengur and went off to other places to eat meat, and one of those who left, only a boy in age, wanted to find his parents no matter where in the world they might be, so he too left.

Yakov Titych saw how many people were silently hiding from Chevengur and then went to Prokofy.

"Get some wives for the people," Yakov Titych said. "The people decided they want them. You brought us, now bring us women. The people are all rested up and they say they can't go any longer without women."

Prokofy wanted to say that wives are also workers and that there was no ban on them living in Chevengur and so the proletariat ought to get wives for themselves in other settlements, but then he remembered that Chepurny wanted to have only thin, exhausted women, so that they would not distract people from their mutual communism, so Prokofy answered Yakov Titych by saying, "You start breeding families here and you'll raise up a petty bourgeois before you know it."

"Why are you afraid of it then, if it's petty?" Yakov Titych asked, a little startled. "If it's petty, that means it's a puny kind of business."

Kopenkin and Dvanov came in, while Gopner and Chepurny remained outside. Gopner wanted to study the town to determine of what it was made and what was to be found within it.

"Sasha!" Prokofy said. He wanted to rejoice, but at first he couldn't. "You've come to live with us? I remembered you for a long time, but then I started to forget you. I'd start to remember you, but then I'd think, no, he's already dead, and I'd forget you again."

"I remembered you though," Dvanov answered. "The more I lived the more I remembered you and Prokhor Abramovich and I remember Petr Fedorovich Kondaev and the whole village. Is everyone in one piece there?"

Prokofy loved his hometown, but now all his relatives were dead and

there was no one to love anymore. He lowered his head, which labored for the many but was loved almost by no one.

"They're all dead, Sasha. And now the future is coming on. . . ."

Dvanov grabbed Prokofy by his solid, feverish hand, then noticed within the man a conscience-stricken shame for their childish past, so he kissed Prokofy's dry, pained lips.

"We're going to live together, Prosh. Don't you worry. This is Kopenkin standing here and soon Gopner will come in with Chepurny . . . seems like things are good with you here . . . quiet, far from everywhere, grass growing all over . . . I've never been here. . . ."

Kopenkin sighed to himself, not knowing what he ought to say or think. Yakov Titych felt superfluous, so once again he reminded them of the general cause.

"What do you say? They got to look for their own wives or are you going to herd them in here for us? Some had already gone off looking."

"Go gather the people together," Prokofy said. "I'll come over and think there."

Yakov Titych left, and there Kopenkin knew what he had to say.

"There's nothing that you have to think for the proletariat. It's got a mind of its own. . . ."

"I'll go with Sasha," Prokofy said.

"If it's with Sasha, then you can go think," Kopenkin agreed. "I thought you was going alone."

Outside it was light. In the wasteland of the heavens above the emptiness of earth's steppe the moon radiated its forsaken, intimate light, which all but sang with sleep and silence. The light pierced the smithy of Chevengur through the ancient cracks in the door. These still held soot, scattered there in more industrious times. People came into the smithy, for Yakov Titych was gathering everybody into one place, himself walking behind them all, tall and distressed, like a shepherd after strays. When he lifted his head to heaven he sensed how the breath grew weak within his chest, as though the radiant luminous heights above him were sucking the air from him, trying to make him lighter so that he could fly upwards. "It would be a good thing to be an angel," thought Yakov Titych, "if there was such a thing. Sometimes a man gets bored with nothing but people." V

The smithy doors opened and the people went inside, although many remained without.

"Sasha," Prokofy said quietly to Alexander, "I don't have a house of my own in the village and I want to stay in Chevengur, where you have to live with everybody or else the Party throws you out, so support me now, please. You don't have any place to live either, so let's organize everybody into one humble family and make the whole town into one house. What do you say?"

Dvanov saw that Prokofy felt tormented, and he promised to help him.

"Bring us wives!" a number of the miscellaneous yelled at Prokofy.

n collect us some women 6

"You brought us here and now you abandon us, alone! You get us some women here or maybe it's that you think we're not people? It's terrible here for us alone . . . you don't live, all you do is think! You're always talking about comradeship, but a woman is man's blood comrade, right? So why aren't you settling any of them here in town?"

Prokofy looked at Dvanov and began to say that communism was not just his worry, but that of all proletarians in existence, which meant that all the proletariat had to live by their wits now, just as had been established at the last session of the Chevengur Revolutionary Committee. Communism will occur on its own if there is no one in Chevengur except proletarians, and there is nothing else there can be.

Chepurny stood off in the distance and completely approved of Prokofy's words, for it was a precise formulation of his own private feelings.

"What do we need wits for?" one of the miscellaneous yelled. "We want to live by desire."

"So live, please," Chepurny agreed immediately. "Prokofy, tomorrow you go out and collect us some women."

Prokofy talked a bit more about communism, about how in the end it would come completely despite everything, and that it was better to get it all organized ahead of time so they wouldn't have to torment themselves later. However when the women arrived in Chevengur they would set up many households instead of just the one Chevengur, where they now lived as one orphaned family, where people wandered at their will, changing lodgings and growing used to one another from not being separated.

"You say that communism will come around in the end anyhow," Yakov Titych said deliberately. "Probably at the short end, then, because wherever the end is nearer, it's always short. So that means the whole side of life will go by without communism, so why then should we desire communism with our whole bodies? Better to live a mistake, since it's so long, and the truth is short. I mean take a man into account!"

Lunar oblivion stretched from lone Chevengur right up to the deepest heights, where there was nothing, so that the moonlight disappeared into a void. Dvanov looked in that direction and wanted immediately to close his eyes, so he might open them only the next day, when the sun would be up and the world would once again be close and warm.

"A proletarian thought," Chepurny said suddenly, defining Yakov Titych's words. Chepurny was happy that the proletariat was now thinking for itself, using its own head, and that no one had to think in its stead or worry about it.

"Sasha," Prokofy said distractedly, and everyone began to listen to him. "The old man is speaking correctly. You remember, me and you we had to beg. You asked for food and no one gave it to you, but me, I never asked. I lied and nagged and I always had something salty to eat and cigarettes to smoke."

Prokofy was going to stop because of his own cautiousness, but then he noticed that the miscellania had opened their mouths in sincere attention, so he was not sufficiently afraid of Chepurny to say further, "Why are things so good for us, but still uncomfortable? Because, as one of the comrades here has said correctly, because every truth should be true only a bit and that just at the very end, but here we used it to build communism immediately, and so it's because of truth that things aren't so pleasant for us. How is it that every-thing is correct here, no bourgeoisie, solidarity and justice everywhere, and still the proletariat is lonesome and wants to get married?"

At this point Prokofy frightened himself with the further development of his thoughts and so fell quiet. Dvanov finished speaking for him.

"You want to advise the comrades to sacrifice truth, because all the same it won't live for long and that only at the end, so you want them to take up some other happiness which will live for a long time, until the truest truth of all."

"I guess you know it all, huh? . . ." Prokofy muttered sadly, then suddenly became all excited. "You know how I loved my family and house in our village. It was because of love for that household that I chased you out like a bourgeois so you'd die, but now here I want to get used to living. I want to build something for the poor just like it was for family, and then find my own peace among them . . . and I can't. . ."

Gopner heard but he understood nothing. He asked Kopenkin, but he too knew nothing about who needed what, except for the wives. "See," Gopner figured, "when people don't act they get too many brains and then they're worse than idiots."

"I'll go see to your horse for you, Prosh," Chepurny promised. "You set out at first light tomorrow please, because the proletariat wants love. That means they want to tame all the elements in Chevengur, which is an excellent cause."

The miscellaneous scattered to wait for their wives, since now they had not long to wait. Dvanov and Prokofy went out beyond the edge of town together. Above them, as though in the next world, the moon was drawn immaterially along, and was dipping already towards moonset. Its existence was in vain, for the moon did not make plants grow and man slept beneath it silently. The sunlight which lit earth's sister of the night from afar had within it a churning, burning, living substance, but this light reached the moon already filtered through the dead length of space, so that everything churning and alive scattered from it along the way, so all that remained was the true dead light.

Dvanov and Prokofy went far off, and their voices died almost entirely silent from the distance and the fact that they spoke softly. Kopenkin watched the two leaving, but he was too embarrassed to follow them. It seemed to him that both men spoke sadly and that it would be embarrassing to go over to them now.

Chepurny / Prokofy  
Bukharin / Stalin

Peaceful weeds hid the road beneath Dvanov's and Prokofy's feet. Weeds had seized the land around Chevengur not through greed but rather through the requirements of their own life. The two men walked unevenly along the ruts of a highway long fallen into disuse. Each of them wanted to feel the other, in order to help his own unclear, wandering life, but they had grown unused to one another, so that they felt awkward and were unable to talk right away without embarrassment. Prokofy regretted having to give up ownership of Chevengur, to hand it over to the wives of the proletarians and the miscellaneous. It was only Klavdyusha to whom he did not regret giving things, although he did not know why. He was doubtful about whether it was necessary to squander the whole town and all the property in it right then, bringing it all into decay and ruin, simply so that sometimes in the end, and that for a short time only, some profitable truth could arrive. Would it not be better to hold all of communism and the happiness it would bring inside of some protective reserve, with the idea of occasionally and following class needs doling it out to the masses in partial doses, and thus protect the inexhaustibility of both property and happiness?

"They'd be satisfied," Prokofy said with conviction, almost rejoicing. "They're used to misery. It's simple for them. For the time being we'll give them very little, and they'll love us. If we give away everything all at once, like Chepurny did, then they'll just squander all the property and then want more, and there won't be anything more to give, so they'll remove us and kill us. They don't know much of what the revolution has, because I've got the only complete list in the whole town. Chepurny wants there to be nothing left right away so that the end will come, as long as the end is communism. But we won't ever let things come to an end. We'll give out happiness just a bit at a time, and then it can build itself up again, so we'll have enough forever. Speak to us, Sasha . . . is that the way it ought to be?"

Dvanov still did not know how right this was, but he wanted to sense Prokofy's wishes in their totality, to imagine for himself Prokofy's body and life, so that he might immediately see for himself why Prokofy felt this was right. Dvanov touched Prokofy and said, "Tell me more. I want to live here too."

Prokofy looked out over the illuminated but inanimate steppe and back behind them at Chevengur, where the moon glittered on the windowpanes, beyond which slept the lonely miscellaneous, within each of whom lay a life about which it was essential now to worry, so it would not depart from the closeness of the body nor turn into a subsidiary action. Dvanov however did not know what is preserved and guarded within the body of each man, while Prokofy knew almost exactly, and so was extremely suspicious of a silent man.

Dvanov recalled many towns and villages and the many people who lived within them, while Prokofy pointed out along the route of Alexander's memory that in the Russian village misery is not torment but a habit. The son

Prokofy - "the Great man"  
Prokofy / Dvanov

who has taken his legacy from his father's house will not return to his father again, nor will he miss him, for son and father are joined not so much by feeling as by property. It was only a rare and strange woman who in her time had not purposely smothered at least one of her children, and not because of poverty either, but so that she could live a bit longer in freedom, making love with her muzhik.

"You can see it yourself, Sasha," Prokofy continued convincingly, "That the satisfaction of their desires will make them repeat again and make them even start wanting something anew. And each citizen will want to realize his own feelings as quickly as possible so as to feel himself and his suffering at little as he can. But even so you'd never get everything ready for them. Today it's give them property, tomorrow it's a wife, then round the clock happiness, and history just won't be able to manage it. It would be better to reduce man gradually so he'll get used to it and endure it, since all the same he'll have to put up with it."

"But what do you want to accomplish, Prosh?"

"I want to organize the miscellaneous. I've noticed already that wherever you've got an organization there's never more than one man doing the thinking, while the others live like empty pots, following along behind the first man. Organization is the smartest thing of all. Everybody knows himself but no one possesses himself. And things are great for everyone and only bad for the first man, because he's doing the thinking. When there's an organization you can take a lot of the superfluous from a man."

"Why is this necessary, Prosh? I mean, things will be hard for you. You'll be the most unhappy and unlucky of all. It'll be terrifying for you to live alone and apart up there, higher than the rest. The proletariat lives one by another, but what would you live by?"

Prokofy looked at Dvanov in a practical way. A man like that, he thought, is a pointless being. He's not a Bolshevik, he's a beggar boy with an empty sack. He's a miscellaneous himself. It would even be better to talk with Yakov Titych, since he at least knows that a man can endure anything as long as he is given new and unknown torments. It won't hurt him. Man feels misery only out of social habit, not because he suddenly dreams it up on his own. Yakov Titych would have understood that Prokofy's task was totally safe, but Dvanov sensed another man too much and thus was unable to take an accurate measure of him.

The voices of the two men fell quiet in the distance away from Chevengur, in the enormous lunar steppe. Kopenkin waited for Dvanov there on the outskirts for a long while, but all the same he did not wait until Dvanov returned. Exhaustion made him lie down in a nearby weed patch, where he fell asleep.

He awoke when it was already first light. He heard a buckboard rumbling. Because of the quiet of Chevengur all sounds were transformed into thunder and alarm. It was Chepurny driving out in the readied wagon to look

Чепурный / Klavdyusha  
Gopner - Anglo-Indian telegraph

for Prokofy, so that he could go out to fetch the women. Prokofy however was not far off, for he and Dvanov had long ago returned to town.

"What kind should I drive back in?" Prokofy asked Chepurny as he got into the wagon.

"Not any special ones!" Chepurny ordered. "Women, of course, but please . . . you know . . . just barely. Just so there's a tiny bit of difference between them and a muzhik. No attractiveness though! Just the raw material and that's all."

"Got it," Prokofy said and prodded the horse to set out.

"You know what?" Chepurny asked.

Prokofy looked back with his dependable intelligent face.

"What a marvel! I'll drive in whoever you want. I'll join up whoever you want into one mass and won't leave anybody alone with hurt feelings."

And Chepurny was reassured. The proletariat would now be comforted. Then suddenly he threw himself after the departing Prokofy, grabbed the end of the buckboard, and said, "And bring me one too, Prosh. For some reason I've started needing some charms too! I forgot that I'm a proletarian too . . . and I don't get to see any of Klavdyusha!"

"She went to see her aunt, over in the district seat," Prokofy informed him. "I'll pick her up on my way back."

"Oh, I didn't know that," Chepurny said, sticking some snuff into his nose in order to feel the tobacco rather than the pain of being separated from Klavdyusha.

Fyodor Fyodorovich Gopner had gone after finishing his sleep to observe the town and the space around it from the belltower of the Chevengur church. It was there in Chevengur, he was told, that the future had arrived, that communism was absolutely and totally complete, so that all that was left to do was simply live and be located there. At some point in the youth of his years Gopner had worked on the overhauling of the Anglo-Indian telegraph line, and the country out there had also resembled the Chevengur steppe.

That had been long ago and there would have been no way of guessing from back there that Gopner one day would live in communism, there in one courageous town through which perhaps Gopner had even passed on his way home from the Anglo-Indian telegraph line, although it had not impressed itself upon him at that time, on that trip. Which was a shame, for it would have been better to have stopped in Chevengur forever back then, although who knows? People simply said that the simple man lived well in Chevengur, but so far Gopner did not get that feeling.

Dvanov and Kopenkin were walking around down below, not knowing where they might rest. Finally they sat by the cemetery fence.

"Hey Sasha!" Gopner yelled from up above. "It looks just like the Anglo-Indian telegraph line here! You can see a long ways off and it's bare!"

"Anglo-Indian?" Dvanov asked and pictured the vastness and mystery of the places through which it passed.

"The line hangs on iron uprights and they've got markers on them and the wire goes just as slick as you please clear across the steppe, the mountains, and the burning hot places out there!"

Dvanov's stomach began to hurt. This always happened to him when he thought about far-away inaccessible regions which bore attractive and melodious names, like India, Oceania, Tahiti, and the Solitude Islands, which stood alone amid the bright blue sea, resting on its coral depths.

Yakov Titych was also up and about that morning. He came to the cemetery every day, for it was the closest thing there was to a grove, and Yakov Titych loved to hear the mournful sounds of trees suffering in the wind. Gopner liked Yakov Titych, the thin aged man whose skin had turned blue on his ears from the pressure, just as it had on Gopner.

"Things are good for you here, or just so-so?" Gopner asked. He had already come down from the belltower and was sitting in the knot of people by the fence.

"It's bearable," Yakov Titych said.

"Don't lack for anything?"

"I'll get by as it is."

A fresh sunny day was coming on, long like all the days of Chevengur. This length made life more noticeable, so Chepurny presumed that the revolution had won time for the miscellaneous man.

"What shall we do today?" Gopner asked everybody, and each got a little upset. Only Yakov Titych stood calm.

"Got nothing here what'll keep your mind off it," he said. "Better to wait for something else."

Yakov Titych went off into a clearing and lay down across from the sun in order to warm up. He had slept the last few nights in the house of the former Zyuzin, falling in love with the house because a lone cockroach lived in it and Yakov Titych fed it with whatever came to hand. The cockroach lived obscurely and without hopes, but also patiently and stubbornly, not displaying its torments outside itself. Because of this Yakov Titych treated him carefully, in secret even identifying with it. However the roof and ceiling of the house had grown rickety and were falling apart, so the night dew dripped through onto Yakov Titych's body, which made him freeze. However he could not change his lodgings, for he pitied the cockroach as much as he did himself. Yakov Titych in the past had lived in bare places where there was nothing to which he could become accustomed or attached, except for another companion of the road entirely like himself. It was essential for Yakov Titych to become attached to some living thing, in order in caring for and condescending to it to find his own patience for life and to discover among his observations ways he might live better and more easily. Besides, contemplation of another's life diluted the life within Yakov Titych in sympathy, for otherwise it had nowhere to go, since he existed on the crumbs and leftovers of earth's population. As soon as the miscellaneous arrived in

starting  
not a steam engine

Chevengur they lost their comradeship one for the other as they acquired property and a long list of domestic inventory. This they touched often with their hands and did not know from where it had come. After all such things cost too much simply to give to someone. The miscellaneous felt the things with timid hands, as though these things were the dead sacrificed lives of their perished fathers and of their brothers wandering lost somewhere in other steppes. The new Chevengurians had at times built huts and dug wells, but not there. In fact far away from there, in the colonized lands of Siberia, where at one time their circular path of existence had taken them.

In Chevengur Yakov Titych was left almost as alone as he had been at birth, and where earlier he had been accustomed to people he had now a cockroach, for whose sake he now lived in a poor house, waking up in the nights as the freshness of the dew dripped through the roof.

Fyodor Fyodorovich Gopner had noticed Yakov Titych among the whole mass of miscellaneous, for he seemed to be the most decrepit man of all, living onwards into the distance only because of the inertia of having been born. Yakov Titych's dereliction though was already dead within him. He did not feel it as a discomfort to his condition and lived as he might, in order to care. He had come as far as Chevengur with the people by inventing various thoughts for himself, such as that his mother and father were alive and he was going quietly toward them and that when he arrived then everything would be fine and that the man walking beside him was his own personal man who held within him all the most important things which for the time were lacking in Yakov Titych, and it was thus that he could take heart and walk further with firm powers. Now however, Yakov Titych lived because of his cockroach. When Gopner arrived in Chevengur he did not know what he ought to do. The first two days he just walked around and looked. The voluntary Saturdays had swept the town into a heap, but the life within it had been shattered into tiny bits and none of the bits knew what they ought to become a part of or join up with in order to stand firm. For the time Gopner could not himself make out what ought to be screwed into what in Chevengur in order to get life and progress to working. So Gopner asked Dvanov.

"Sasha, it's about time we started getting this squared around, isn't it?"

"Getting what squared around?" Dvanov asked.

"What do you mean what? What did we come here for? Communism in all its parts."

Dvanov stood a bit, not hurrying.

"See Fyodor Fyodorovich, what we have here isn't a mechanism, it's people living here. You can't get them squared around until they get themselves arranged. I used to think of the revolution as a steam engine, but now I see that's not it."

Gopner wanted to picture all of this with precision. He scratched his ear, from which the blue of his skin had already disappeared, because he was rested. He thought about how if there was no steam locomotive every man

then ought to have his own steam traction engine for life.

"How come it's like that?" Gopner asked, almost surprised.

"So it'll be stronger, probably," Dvanov said at the end. "Otherwise you'd never budge."

A dark blue leaf fell lightly near Dvanov. It was already yellowed at the edges. It had lived its day, died, and was now returning to the peace of the earth. Late summer was ending and fall was coming on, a time of heavy dew and empty roads out in the steppe. Dvanov and Gopner looked up at the sky, which looked to them to be higher because it already had lost that hazy power of the sun, which makes the sky misty and low. Dvanov felt a pang of loss for the time which had passed, for time comes ever into being and disappears, while man stays in one place with his hopes for the future, and then Dvanov guessed why Chepurny and the Bolsheviks of Chevengur so wanted communism. Communism is the end of history and the end of time, for time runs only within nature, while within man there stands only melancholy.

An alarmed miscellaneous ran barefoot past Dvanov, followed by Kirei, who dashed by carrying a small dog in his arms, since it could not keep up with Kirei's pace. Somewhat behind him there were five more miscellaneous running without yet knowing where they were running to. These five people were already on in years, but they pressed forward with the happiness of youth while the oncoming wind blew the trash of their beds and the fluff of milkweed from their long matted hair. Last of all Kopenkin galloped resoundingly past on Proletarian Strength, who had stood about too long. Kopenkin waved his arm at Dvanov, pointing out into the steppe. A tall, far away man was walking along the horizon of the steppe as though it were a hill. His entire torso was surrounded by air and only his soles touched the outlines of the earth. The men of Chevengur dashed towards him, but the man kept on walking and began to disappear on the far side of visibility, even as the Chevengurians rushed across half the steppe. They began to return to the town, alone. Afterwards Chepurny came running over, worked up and alarmed.

"What's out there? I ask you now!" he addressed the miscellaneous who wandered mournfully past.

"A man was walking out there," the miscellaneous answered. "We thought he was coming to see us, but he disappeared."

Chepurny stood unable to see the necessity of one far-off man when there was a multitude of people and comrades nearby. When Kopenkin rode up Chepurny spoke of his inability to understand the situation.

"You think I know?" Kopenkin said from the elevation of his horse. "The whole time I was yelling at them, 'Citizens, comrades, fools! Where are you galloping to? Stop!' But off they run. Probably got a craving for the International, like me. What's one town to them, when there's the whole world?"

Kopenkin waited a bit while Chepurny thought, then he added, "I'm

Grief  
Tumbleweeds

also going to be shoving off from here soon. That man was headed some place he wanted to go out in the steppe, while you sit here existing. If at least there was that communism of yours, but there's not a whole hell of a lot of it here. And Sasha, he's grieving too."

Now Chepurny sensed clearly that the Chevengur proletariat desired the International, which is to say distant, foreign, and outlandish people, in order to unite with them so that the entire motley life of earth could grow together in one tree. In the olden days gypsies and freaks of some kind or another and blackmoors used to pass through Chevengur, and they could have been enticed to come to Chevengur now if they had appeared anywhere, but nowadays and for quite a long time there were simply none to be seen. That meant that after he got the women Prokofy would then have to go to the southern slave countries and fetch the oppressed there back to Chevengur. As for those proletarians whom age or infirmity prevented from walking as far as Chevengur, they would have to be sent the aid of property, or perhaps even the entire town would have to be sent to them wholesale, if the International needed it, while the Chevengurians could live in burrows and the warm gulches.

After the miscellaneous returned to the town they occasionally climbed up on the roofs of the houses and looked out in the steppe to see if perhaps a man of some kind might be coming towards them from somewhere, or perhaps Proshka was coming with the wives, or whether there might be something rattling about out in the steppe. However above the weeds hung only the quiet and empty air, while the road to Chevengur was used only by wind-blown, homeless, tumbleweeds, that solitary, peripatetic plant. Yakov Titych's house had been placed directly across the former highway, so the southeast wind drove an entire drift of tumbleweeds up against one side. From time to time Yakov Titych cleared his house of the heaps of tumbleweed so that the light could come through the window, so that he could count the passing days. Apart from that necessity Yakov Titych did not go outside at all during the day, gathering his nourishing plants in the steppe by night. The winds and gasses had started up within him again and he lived alone with just the cockroach. Every morning the cockroach climbed up to the window pane and looked out at the illuminated warm field, his whiskers trembling with excitement and loneliness. He saw the hot soil and the rich mounds of food lying on top of it, around which insignificant creatures grew fat, each unable to sense itself because of their own multitudes.

One day Chepurny dropped in on Yakov Titych. Prokofy still had not showed up. Chepurny already felt grief for his spent and vital friend and he did not know what to do with himself in order to escape the long period of waiting. As before the cockroach sat near the window. It was dry, warm and huge above the vast expanses, but already the air stood lighter than in summer. It resembled dead air. The cockroach suffered and watched.

"Titych," Chepurny said, "let him go out into the sun. Maybe he needs

*de Reche*  
*depressed*

a little communism too and he's sitting there thinking that it's a long ways off."

"But what about me when he's gone?" Yakov Titych asked.

"You go outside to the people. See, I came inside to you."

"I can't go outside to the people," Yakov Titych said. "I am a defective man, and my defect will pass itself around."

Chepurny was always unable to judge a man of class because he resembled one himself and could feel no more.

"What's a defect to you, I ask you. Communism itself came out of the defects of capitalism, and something will come out of your suffering too. Why don't you have a think about Prokofy? The lad's up and disappeared."

"He'll turn up," Yakov Titych said, then lay down on his stomach, weak from enduring the pains within. "Six days have gone, but a woman loves time, so she avoids it."

Chepurny left Yakov Titych and went farther, wanting to find some sort of light food for the sick man. Gopner was sitting on the blacksmith's stone that used to be used to bend iron rims for wagon wheels, while Dvanov was lying prone nearby, resting in an afternoon nap. Gopner was holding a potato in his hands, poking and squeezing it in all its details, as though studying how it had been made. In actual fact Gopner was depressed and during his depressions he always picked up the first objects that he came upon and started expending his attentions on them in order to forget whatever he lacked of whatever he needed. Chepurny told Gopner about Yakov Titych and how he was sick and suffering alone with just a cockroach.

"So how come you left him then?" Gopner asked. "We ought to boil him up some mush. I'll go find him myself in a minute, damn him!"

Chepurny also had wanted to boil up a bit of something for Yakov Titych but he had discovered that not too long before Chevengur had run out of matches and he did not know what to do. Gopner however knew what to do. Which was to start the wooden pump that stood over the little well in one of the displaced gardens, but not let any water in. In times past the pump had brought up water to wet the soil beneath the apple trees, and it was turned by a windmill. Gopner had noticed the power structure once and now he designated the water pump a means of obtaining fire, through the friction of a dry plunger. Gopner ordered Chepurny to lay straw all around the wooden pump cylinder and then set the wind vanes in motion. Then he had but to wait until the cylinder began smoldering and the straw would catch from it.

Chepurny rejoiced and left. Gopner began to wake Dvanov.

"Sasha, quick! Get up! We've got some fussing to do. The skinny old man is dying and the town needs fire . . . Sasha! It's miserable like this and yet there you sleep."

Dvanov moved with effort and spoke as if from afar, from within his dream.

"I'll wake up soon, father . . . sleeping is tiresome too . . . I want to live

on the outside, I feel cramped in here. . . .”

Gopner turned Dvanov on his back so that he would draw his breath from the air, not the ground, and then he checked Dvanov's heart, to see how it beat while Dvanov slept. The heart beat deeply, rapidly, and precisely. Gopner grew frightened that it would not survive its own speed and precision, and that it would cease to be the cut-off valve for the life that passed through Dvanov, the life which in sleep was almost soundless. Gopner grew thoughtful over the sleeping man, wondering what measured, sustaining force it was that sounded within his heart, as though Dvanov's perished father had wound his heart well with his own hopes. Hope however cannot be realized and still beat within a man, for if it is realized the man dies, and if it is not, the man remains, but in torment, and the heart beats on in the middle of the man, in its place from which there is no escape. “Better to let it live, probably,” Gopner thought, looking at Dvanov's breathing, “and we'll work it out somehow so we won't have to suffer.”

Dvanov lay in the grass of Chevengur and no matter in which direction his life pressed, its goals had still to be among houses and people, for beyond that there was nothing but grass bending in the desolate expanses and the sky, the indifference of which signified the lonely orphanhood of the people of the earth. Perhaps that was even why the heart beats, afraid to remain alone in a world which is open and everywhere identical, and thus the heart by its own beating was joined to the depths of the human race, who had wound it tight with life and meaning, but whose meaning could not be distant or incomprehensible. Otherwise it would lose feeling and die.

Gopner examined Chevengur with parsimonious eyes, thinking that even if things were bad, even if the houses of the town stood together in one impenetrable clump, and even if the people lived without making a sound, even so he felt more like living in Chevengur than in some distant and empty place.

Dvanov stretched the body which sleep and rest had warmed, then opened his eyes. Gopner looked at Dvanov with serious concern. He smiled rarely, and in moments of sympathy he became even gloomier, for he feared losing the person for whom he felt sympathy, and his horror was visible as glumness.

Chepurny by that time already had the mill and the pump going. The pump's shaft began to squeal so that it could be heard throughout Chevengur as it ran along the dry wooden cylinder, announcing to all that it was producing a flame for Yakov Titych. Gopner listened to the squeal of the dying machine with the economical passion of labor, and saliva began to accumulate in his mouth as he anticipated the blessings which would accrue to Yakov Titych when finally they had boiled up hot and useful food for the old man's stomach.

It was already whole months which had passed in total silence in Chevengur, and now for the first time a working machine had begun to

screech in the town.

All Chevengur gathered around the machine and looked at the efforts it made for the sake of one suffering man. They were astounded by the industrious fuss it made over the weak old fellow.

"Lord but you're a beggarly bunch of soldiers," Kopenkin said, the first to arrive and have a look at the alarming sound. "I mean it's a proletarian that dreamt this up and a proletarian that set it here, no one else, and for another proletarian to use, too! There was nothing to give some comrade, so he made this wind-chaser, this self-sucker thing over here."

"Ahhhh-ha!" the miscellania all said. "Now we see."

Chepurny stood by the pump, not leaving for a moment, constantly checking its heat. The cylinder grew hotter and hotter, but slowly. Then Chepurny ordered the Chevengurians to lie on top of the machine so that no cold air could blow on it from anywhere. They lay there until evening, when the wind died down completely and the cylinder cooled off, not ever having caught fire.

"Never got hotter than what you could touch it," Chepurny said of the pump. "Maybe there'll be a storm tomorrow morning, and then I can pump up some heat fast."

In the evening Kopenkin found Dvanov. He had long wanted to ask whether Chevengur had communism or return, whether he ought to stay there or if he could leave, so he asked Dvanov.

"Communism," Dvanov answered.

"Why can't I see it then? Or maybe it's just not filled out yet? I ought to be feeling sad and happy, since I've got a heart what gets soft quick. I'm even afraid of music. Used to be a fellow'd play on the concertina and there I sit all blue and weepy."

"You're a communist yourself," Dvanov said. "After the bourgeoisie is gone communism comes out of the communists and lives among them. Comrade Kopenkin, where were you looking for it, when it's kept inside of you? There's nothing in Chevengur to prevent communism, so it appears of its own accord."

Kopenkin went over to his horse and turned it loose in the steppe to graze for the night. He had never done that before, for he kept the horse near him every minute.

Day ended like when a man with whom one had been talking walks out of the room, and Dvanov's legs felt cold. He stood alone in the wasteland and longed to see someone, but there was no one to see. The miscellaneous went to bed early because they could not bear to wait any longer for the wives and they wished to squander the time more quickly in sleep. Dvanov went out beyond the town line, where the stars burned most distant and quiet, for they stood not above the town, but above the steppe which lay already emptied by the approaching autumn. There were some people talking in the last house, a house covered on one side with weeds, as though the wind had like the sun



begun to work for Chevengur, herding in weeds now to cover the houses for winter and thus make them a warm cover.

Dvanov entered the house. Yakov Titych lay prone on the floor enduring his illness. Gopner sat on a stool apologizing for the weak wind which had blown that day, preventing them from getting fire, for which they would have to wait until the next day, when there would be a storm. The sun had hidden in distant clouds, where flickered the lightning of summer's last thunderhead. Chepurny stood silently worrying.

Yakov Titych did not so much suffer as pine for life, which now was no longer good to him, although mentally he knew life was good, and so he longed for it. He was embarrassed because of the people who had come, since he could not immediately sense his own disposition towards them. Now he was indifferent toward them and did not even care if they existed in the world. His cockroach had left the window and was living somewhere in the haven of objects, for he held it better to choose oblivion in the closeness of warm things than to have the sun-warmed but altogether too spacious, terrifying world beyond the glass.

"Yakov Titych, you shouldn't have fallen in love with that cockroach," said Chepurny. "That's how come you got sick. If you lived right on the border of people then they could have made the social conditions of communism work on you, since it's clear that on your own you got exhausted. The entire microbe filth has flung itself at just you, and otherwise it would have attacked everybody and you'd only have got a little bit."

"Why can't he love a cockroach, comrade Chepurny?" Dvanov asked uncertainly. "Maybe he can. Maybe the fellow who doesn't want to have a cockroach will never want a comrade for himself either."

Chepurny immediately fell deeply thoughtful, during which it seemed as though all his senses stopped, so that he understood everything even less.

"In that case, then please, he can get attached to a cockroach," Chepurny said, trusting Dvanov. "His cockroach can live as he likes in Chevengur too," Chepurny concluded with that consolation.

Some sort of membrane in Yakov Titych's stomach had become stretched so tight that he was in terror the membrane would burst, so he began moaning in advance. However the membrane slacked up a bit. Yakov Titych sighed, sorry for his body and the people who were around him. He saw how when he was so down and aching his torso lay alone on the floor with people standing near him. Each of them had a torso of his own, and yet none of them knew where to direct his body during Yakov Titych's misery. Chepurny felt more ashamed than the rest, for he was already used to knowing that in Chevengur property had lost its value and that the proletariat was firmly united, and yet here were separate torsos living apart, racked helplessly by torments, so that people here were in no way united. It was for that reason that Kopenkin and Gopner could not see the communism, for it had not yet become an intermediary substance between the bodies of the

proletariat. Here Chepurny sighed too. Dvanov might at least help, but instead he came to Chevengur and just keeps his mouth shut all the time. Or else the proletariat itself ought to get up to full strength now, since now it had no one to rely on.

The sun outside was extinguished completely and night began to deepen. Yakov Titych waited, expecting that any moment everyone would leave him and let him go to sleep, so he could suffer alone.

Dvanov however could not leave this thin exhausted old man. He wanted to lie beside him the whole night through, the whole disease through, just as in childhood he had lain with his father. But he could not lie down, for he felt shy, understanding how embarrassed he would have been had someone lain down next to him to share his disease and lonely night. The longer Dvanov thought about what he should do and how he ought to act, the more unnoticeably he forgot his desires to stay the night with Yakov Titych, as though his mind was gnawing at Dvanov's feeling, sensitive life.

"Yakov Titych, you live in a disorganized way," Chepurny said, thinking up reasons for the disease.

"How come you tell such vicious lies?" Yakov Titych asked, offended. "If it's like that, then you try to get my torso organized. You've got the houses and furniture all shoved together, but the torso is just how it was, all tortured like . . . oh, go have a rest. The dew will start dripping soon."

"I'll drip it, damn it!" Gopner said gloomily and went outside. He climbed up on the roof to look at the holes through which the dew was getting in and freezing the ailing Yakov Titych.

Dvanov also got up on the roof and held onto the stovepipe. The moon already glittered with cold, the damp roof shone with desolate dew, and out in the steppe it was gloomy and terrible, especially for anyone who had to remain there alone. Gopner dug up a hammer in the storage shed, brought tin shears from the blacksmith's, as well as two old sheets of tin, and he began to fix the roof. Down below Dvanov cut the tin and straightened the nails, then hacked the material up, while Gopner sat on the roof and hammered away for all Chevengur to hear. This was the first time since communism had come that a hammer had rung out in Chevengur, the first time that man began to work in addition to the sun. Chepurny, who had walked out into the steppe to see whether Prokofy might be returning, returned quickly at the sound of the hammer. The other Chevengurians also could not stand it and came out in amazement to have a look at the way a man had suddenly begun to work, and also to find out why.

"Please, don't be afraid," Chepurny said to all, "he didn't start hammering to get rich or to be useful. He just didn't have anything to give Yakov Titych, so he began patching the holes in the roof over his head. That's permissible."

"That's permissible," the men answered. Then they stood around until midnight, when Gopner came down from the roof and said, "Now it won't

"deprived of families and work"  
Rosa

soak through." Then all the miscellaneous sighed with satisfaction, knowing that now nothing could soak through onto Yakov Titych and so he now could be ill as freely as he pleased. The Chevengurians immediately felt a miserly feeling towards Yakov Titych, since an entire roof had had to be patched in order to keep him in one piece.

The Chevengurians slept the remaining night. Their sleep was calm and filled with consolation, for at the end of Chevengur stood a house buried beneath drifts of tumbleweed, and within it lay a man who that day had grown even dearer, and they missed him while they slept. A child's toy can in the same way be dear to the child, who sleeps and waits for the morning, when he can wake up and be with his toy, the toy which has fastened him to the happiness of life.

Only two people, Kirei and Chepurny, did not sleep that night in Chevengur. Both thought greedily of the next day, when all would get up. Gopner would get fire from the water pump, the smokers would light up cigarettes of crushed burdock, and everything would be good again. Deprived of families and work, Kirei, Chepurny and all the sleeping Chevengurians were forced to animate nearby people and things in order that they might reproduce and lessen the life which accumulated in their stuffy bodies. Today they animated Yakov Titych, and everyone felt easier, falling into peaceful sleep because of their miserly sympathy for Yakov Titych, just as though this sympathy were exhaustion.

"Yakov Titych is sleeping already, I'm not," Chepurny thought, then also laid his weakened head to the earth.

The following day began with a drizzle and the sun did not appear above Chevengur. People woke up but they did not come out of their houses. The irresolution of autumn had descended upon nature, and now the soil drowsed long beneath the enveloping, patient rain.

Gopner made a box over the water pump to keep it covered against the rainy drizzle and thus be able all the same to get fire. A quartet of miscellaneous stood around Gopner pretending that they too were taking part in this work.

Kopenkin had unstitched the portrait of Rosa Luxemburg from his cap and was now sitting, trying to draw a copy from it, because he had decided to give Dvanov a picture of Rosa Luxemburg in order that he too, perhaps, might fall in love with her. Kopenkin found a cardboard box and began to draw on it with a piece of charcoal from the stove. He sat at the kitchen table, poked out his squirming tongue, and felt a particular calm pleasure which he had never known in his past life. Each glance at Rosa Luxemburg's portrait brought excitement and Kopenkin's whispered words, "my gentle comrade woman," and then a sigh in the silence of the communism of Chevengur. Rain drops swam down the window pane, and occasionally the wind came up and dried the glass, and the nearby wattle fence stood like a fading, dreary spectacle. Kopenkin sighed further, wet his palm with his tongue in

order to bring skill, and then set to sketching Rosa's mouth. Kopenkin was thoroughly moved by the time he got to her eyes, although this misery was not tormenting; it was but the weakness of a barely hopeful heart, and weakness because Kopenkin's powers had passed into the painstaking art of drawing. He could not now have leapt up on Proletarian Strength and galloped through the steppe mud to Germany and Rosa Luxemburg's grave in order to see her earthen mound before the autumn rains washed it away. Now Kopenkin could only wipe his eyes from time to time on the sleeve of his greatcoat, eyes which had grown tired from the winds of war and the open fields. He squandered his outrage on the zeal of work, wanting subtly to attract Dvanov to the beauty of Rosa Luxemburg and so to make some happiness for him, since it was awkward immediately to embrace and love Dvanov.

Two miscellaneous and Pashintsev were cutting red willow along the sandy deposits at the edge of Chevengur. They did not let up despite the rain, and had already piled up a goodly heap of trembling branches. Chepurny had already taken note of this alien occupation from afar, and all the more so since the people were getting chilled and soaked for the sake of scrubwood, so he went over to find out what was going on.

"What are you doing this for?" he asked. "How come you're doing the shrubbery in and getting froze besides?"

However the three workers were self-absorbed and continued greedily to cut short the scanty life of the scrub with their hatchets.

Chepurny sat down in the damp sand.

"You, you . . ." he said under his hand to Pashintsev. "Cuts and chops, cuts and chops, but what for? I ask you now. . . ."

"Firewood," Pashintsev said. "Got to get ready for winter in good time."

"Oh-ho! So you've got to get ready for winter, have you!" Chepurny said with a certain slyness of wit. "But you aren't figuring that there'll be snow this winter, are you?"

"When it falls, there'll be snow," Pashintsev agreed.

"And when it doesn't fall? I ask you now . . ." Chepurny reproached him even more slyly, then switched to direct demonstration. "What I mean is that Chevengur will get all covered over with snow and then we can all live warm under the snow. So how come you need brushwood and kindling, huh? Convince me of it, since I don't get it."

"We aren't cutting for ourselves," Pashintsev said, convincing him. "We're doing this for whoever needs it. Now me, ever since I was little I've had no need of heat. I'll make me a house out of snow and live there."

"For whoever needs it?" Chepurny said doubtfully, then approved. "In that case, cut more! I thought you were cutting for yourself, but if it's for just anybody, then that's correct, that's not work, it's free help. Cut! Cut! But how come you're barefoot? You should at least take my half-boots here, because otherwise you'll freeze."

“Me? Freeze?” Pashintsev said, offended. “If I was ever to get sick, then you’d have died a long time before that.”

Chepurny by mistake walked around keeping an eye on things, for he frequently forgot that there no longer was a Revolutionary Committee in Chevengur and that he was not the president. Now Chepurny remembered that he was not the Soviet government and so he left the fellers of firewood in shame. He was afraid of what Pashintsev and the two miscellaneous might be thinking of him, like that there goes the smartest and best man, and now he wants to become a rich boss over the poor people of communism! So Chepurny squatted down behind a fence which lay on his road, so that they would forget about him immediately, and have no time to think anything about him. Tiny, hurried taps on stone sounded from the nearest barn, so Chepurny pulled a stake from the fence and went over there, holding the stake in his hand and wishing to use it to help the labor of those who were working. Inside the barn Kirei and Zheev were sitting on a millstone, chiseling furrows along its face. It turned out that Kirei and Zheev wanted to start the windmill, in order to grind up some soft flour from the various ripe grains, and with this soft flour they thought to bake some soft buns for the ailing Yakov Titych. After each furrow the two men grew thoughtful, pondering whether or not to score the stone further, and each time they cut farther, not having reached the end of their reflections. They were both seized by the same misgivings, for the millstones had to have a feed hopper, and in all of Chevengur only Yakov Titych could make one, for he had in the olden days worked as a blacksmith. But when he could make the hopper he would already be well and thus could get along without the sweet buns, which meant that there must not be any reason to score the stones now, but rather they ought to wait until Yakov Titych was up and about. But if he got well then he would have no need of buns, windmills, or feed hoppers. So from time to time their misgivings brought Kirei and Zheev to a halt, and each time they began working again just in case, in order that they might feel within themselves the satisfaction of caring for Yakov Titych.

Chepurny watched them for quite a time, then also had misgivings.

“You’re scoring it for nothing,” he said, expressing his opinion carefully. “Now you’re feeling the stone and not your own comrades. Pretty soon Prokofy will arrive and read to everybody about how labor gives birth to that slut contradiction, just like with capitalism . . . it’s raining outside, the steppe is filled with damp, and still the lad isn’t back. I keep walking around thinking about him. . . .”

“Is that right, that it’s for nothing?” Kirei asked, trusting Chepurny. “Even as it is he’ll get better. Communism is stronger than sticky buns. It’d be better for me to go give comrade Gopner the powder out of my cartridges so he can make the fire faster.”

“He’ll make it without powder,” Chepurny said, pulling Kirei up short. “The forces of nature are sufficient for everything. There’s entire luminaries

Dvanov - thought (PLATONOV)  
secondary idea

burning up there in the sky, so how can it be that straw won't catch fire? Just as soon as the sun goes behind the clouds even for a moment you start working in its place! You've got to live in a more fitting way! It's not capitalism now, is it?"

Kirei and Zheev however had no idea why they were working now, and sensed only that a dull time stood outside when they got up from their stone, upon which they had left the traces of their concern for Yakov Titych.

At first Dvanov and Piyusya also did not know why they had gone out to the Chevengurka river. The rain over the steppe and the river bed created within nature a particular mourning silence, as though the damp solitary fields wished to draw closer to the people in Chevengur. Dvanov thought with reticent happiness about Kopenkin, Chepurny, Yakov Titych, and all the miscellanea who were now living as they pleased in Chevengur. Dvanov thought of these people as parts of an integral socialism, surrounded by rain, steppe, and the gray light of an entire alien world.

"Piyusya, are you thinking anything?" Dvanov asked.

"Of course I'm thinking," Piyusya said immediately, and then grew somewhat embarrassed. He often forgot to think and was at the moment thinking nothing.

"I'm thinking too," Dvanov confided approvingly. By thought Dvanov intended not idea, but rather the pleasure of continually imagining beloved objects. For him now the people of Chevengur were objects of that sort. He imagined their pitiful naked bodies as the stuff of socialism which he and Kopenkin had sought in the steppe and had now found. Dvanov sensed complete satisfaction within his soul, and he had not even wanted to eat since the morning before, and he did not remember about food. Now he feared the expansion of his calm spiritual sufficiency and wished to find another, secondary idea by which he might live and which he might spend and use, leaving his main idea as an untouched reserve, dipping into it but rarely for his happiness.

"Piyus?" Dvanov addressed him. "It's true isn't it, that Chevengur is our spiritual property, I mean yours and mine? We ought to keep as tight a fist on it as we can, and not be at it every minute!"

"That's possible!" Piyusya affirmed savagely. "Just let somebody try touching it and I'll smack him so his body and soul will part company!"

"There are also people living in Chevengur, and they have to live and eat," Dvanov thought farther, even more reassured.

"Of course they have," Piyusya said affirmatively. "Even more so since we've got communism here and the people are still thin! How can you tell me that Yakov Titych has communism within him, when he's so damn skinny! He's barely got room inside him for his own body!"

They came up to a wild gully which long ago had sodded over. The mouth of the gully pointed towards the flood meadows of the Chevengurka, and the gully itself died out in the valley. A little stream festered along the

# Food security Aire

broad bottom of the gully, fed by living springs in the depths of the upper reaches of the gulch. The stream held solid water which remained intact even in the driest years, and fresh grass always grew along the banks of the stream.

More than anything Dvanov wanted now to guarantee food for all Chevengurians so that they would live long in the world without harm to themselves, and so with their presence they could acquire for the soul and mind of Dvanov the calm of untouchable happiness. Each body in Chevengur must live solidly, for it was only in those bodies that there lived a substantive sense of communism. Dvanov stopped, preoccupied.

"Piyus," he said, "let's put a dam somewhere across this stream. Why should we let this water here flow on past people for nothing?"

"Let's do it," Piyusya agreed. "But who's going to drink the water?"

"The earth, in summertime," Dvanov explained. He had decided to build an irrigation dam in the valley of the gulch so that the following summer, depending on droughts and their needs, he could cover the valley with moisture and help the nourishing grains and grasses to grow.

"The gardens will be good here," Piyusya pointed out. "These are rich lands. In the spring the black soil gets carried in here from the steppe, but in the summer there's just cracks and dried up spiders, on account of the heat."

An hour later Dvanov and Piyusya had already fetched shovels and had begun to dig a canal for diverting water from the stream so that they could build a dam in a dry spot. The rain did not let up at all and it was difficult to push the spades through the damp thick sod.

"But on account of that though the people will always have enough," Dvanov said, working his shovel with the zeal of greed.

"I'll say!" Piyusya answered. "Liquid is a mighty business!"

Now Dvanov ceased worrying about any loss of or threat to his main idea, about how to preserve the people of Chevengur. He had found a second, additional idea, the irrigation system in the gulch, with which he could distract himself and aid the integrity of his first idea, keeping it whole within himself. For the time Dvanov still feared to use the people of communism. He wanted to live quietly and save communism without damage, in the form of its primordial people.

At midday Gopner achieved fire with the water pump, and a cry of joy arose in Chevengur. Dvanov and Piyusya dashed toward it. Chepurny had already had time to get a bonfire going and was now boiling up a kettle of soup for Yakov Titych. He was transfixed by his task, as well as by the pride of knowing that on an untouched spot, right there in Chevengur, the proletariat had figured out how to make fire.

Dvanov spoke to Gopner about his intention of making an irrigation dam on the stream so that the gardens and grains would grow better. Gopner replied that they wouldn't get by without rabetting the joints, and so they had to find some dry wood in Chevengur so they could start to make rabetted pilings. Dvanov and Gopner hunted for wood until evening, until at last

Oak crosses?

women

they came to the old bourgeois cemetery, which had by now turned out to be outside of Chevengur, due to the compression of the town into a more compact mass following the moving about of the houses on the voluntary Saturdays. At the cemetery the wealthy families had set up tall oak crosses to the memory of their departed relatives, and these crosses had stood decades above the graves, like wooden immortality for the dead. Gopner thought that these crosses would do for piling if the cross bars and the little Christ heads were removed.

Late that evening Gopner, Dvanov, Piyusya, and five miscellaneous began to dig up the crosses. Chepurny came late, after he had fed Yakov Titych, and he too got down to digging up crosses, for the sake of aiding those who labored for the future plenty of Chevengur.

Two gypsy girls climbed down off the wall into the cemetery, their steps inaudible in the clamor of labor. No one noticed them until they went over to Chepurny and stood right in front of him. Chepurny was digging up the base of a cross when suddenly he sensed a warm sweet fragrance which the wind had been wafting for some time from the direction of Chevengur. He stopped digging and silently hid, waiting for the unknown somehow to reveal itself, but all remained quiet and aromatic.

"What do you want here?" Chepurny said, jumping out without looking the gypsies over.

"The young fellow met us and sent us here," one of the gypsy women said. "We've come to hire out as wives."

"Prosha!" Chepurny smiled, remembering. "Where is he at?"

"Out thataways," the gypsies answered. "He felt us over for disease and then rounded us up. And we walked and walked and it looks like we made it, but here you are digging graves, not a decent groom in the bunch. . . ."

Chepurny looked over the newly-arrived women in confusion. One was young and obviously not talkative. Her little black eyes reflected the patience of a tormented life, while the rest of her face was covered with tired, liquid skin. On her body this gypsy wore the greatcoat of a Red soldier and, on her head, a cavalry officer's cap. Her fresh black hair showed that she was still young and could have been pretty, except that the time allotted her life so far had passed with difficulty and in vain. The other gypsy was old and gap-toothed, though she looked jollier than the young one, because her long acclimatization to misery made it seem to her that her life was getting ever easier and more happy. The old woman no longer felt the recurrence of misery, for the very repetition had created its own relief.

The tender appearance of the half-forgotten women made Chepurny grow emotional. He looked at Dvanov in order that he would begin to talk with the arriving wives, but Dvanov had tears of emotion in his eyes, and stood almost petrified.

"But do you think you can bear communism?" Chepurny asked the gypsies, weakening and growing tense from the effect of the women. "I

mean this is Chevengur here, ladies! Just have a look!"

"Listen handsome, don't try to scare us," the old gypsy said quickly, accustomed to people. "We've never seen the like, but we haven't used up any of our womanly parts. We brought them here with us. And what do you want from us? That little one of yours said that any woman what's alive could be a bride here. And already you're saying that we can't bear it! What we've put up with already we won't have to bear here, so it'll be easier anyhow, sweetie."

Chepurny heard her out, then formulated his apology.

"Of course you can bear it! I just said that to test you. Whoever's endured capitalism on his own stomach will find communism a weakness."

Gopner was tirelessly digging up crosses, precisely as though the two women had not come to Chevengur, and Dvanov too bent to his work, so that Gopner would not think he was interested in women.

"Go on into town," Chepurny said to the gypsies. "Preserve the people there with your care . . . see how we're sweating for them?"

The gypsies went into Chevengur, to their husbands.

The miscellaneous sat in the houses, the hay ricks, and the barns, making what they could with their hands. One was planing planks, others with calm in their souls were mending sacks that they could use to gather grain from the stalks out in the steppe, while a third group went from house to house asking where the holes were, for they were seeking bedbugs in the holes of the walls and stoves, where they crushed them. Each of the miscellaneous was working not for his own good, for the miscellaneous had seen Gopner mending the roof above Yakov Titych. Each wanted some little comfort for his own life and so had begun to consider as his own welfare the welfare of some other Chevengurian, so for that other he went out to gather grain or to plane lumber in order maybe to use the boards to knock together a gift of some kind. Those who were crushing bedbugs still had not found for themselves the one definite person in whom was the single good which brings spiritual peace and makes one want to work solely to preserve the chosen man from the poverty of need. The members of this group simply felt the freshness of their bodied growing tired in dispersing strength. However they also found a certain satisfaction in knowing that bedbugs would no longer bite the people. Even the water pump had rushed to work, in order to warm up a fire for Yakov Titych, although wind and the machine were not people.

A miscellaneous by the name of Karchuk finished a long box and lay down to sleep completely satisfied, although he did not know why Kirei might need the box, but still it was Kirei whom he had begin to feel as his own spiritual necessity.

Kirei finished making his millstones and then set out to crush bedbugs for a bit, then afterwards he also went off to rest, having decided that now things had become much better for a poor man, since now parasites would stop making his thin body even thinner. Besides, Kirei had noticed that the

miscellaneous often looked at the sun, admiring it because it fed them, and that day they had all gone round the water pump which the wind was turning in order to admire the wind and wood machine. There Kirei had felt the jealous question form, why under communism do people love the sun and nature, but no one notices me? So that evening he had gone out an extra time to get bedbugs in the dwellings and thus work no worse than nature and the wooden machine.

Just as soon as Karchuk drifted off to sleep, his box not yet thought entirely through, the two gypsy women walked into his house. Karchuk opened his eyes and was silently startled.

"Hello, handsome!" the old gypsy woman said. "Feed us, then put us to bed. Bread together and love fifty-fifty."

"What?" Karchuk asked, half-deaf. "I don't need it . . . I'm fine as is . . . I'm thinking about my comrade. . . ."

"What do you need a comrade for?" the elderly gypsy began to argue while the young one stood silent and embarrassed. "You share your body with me and you won't regret it, you'll forget this comrade of yours. I'm telling you true!"

The gypsy took off her scarf and tried to sit on the box that was all ready for Kirei.

"Don't touch the box!" Karchuk yelled out in fear of damage to the box. "It wasn't made for you, you know!"

The gypsy snatched her scarf up from the box and got offended in a womanly way.

"What a twit! You got no reason to ask for cranberries, since you don't know how to pucker!"

The two women went outside and lay down to sleep in the shed without connubial warmth.

\* \* \* \* \*

Simon Serbinov was riding the tram around Moscow. He was a tired, unhappy man with a quick pliant heart and a cynical mind. Serbinov did not buy a ticket for the ride and he had almost no desire to exist. It was clear that he was truly and deeply disillusioned and could not feel himself to be a happy son of the epoch who aroused universal admiration. He loved women and the future, and he did not love occupying responsible posts where his snout was deep in the trough of power. Not long before Serbinov had returned from an inspection of socialist construction in the distant open plains of the Soviet land. Four months he had driven slowly through the deep natural silence of the provinces. Serbinov had sat in on district investigative committees, helping the local Bolsheviks to budge the muzhik's life from its barnyard roots, and in the reading huts he read Gleb Uspensky. The muzhiks

lived on silently, while Serbinov drove further into the depths of the soviets, trying for the Party to gain from the laboring life an exact truth. Like some exhausted revolutionists, Serbinov did not love the working man or the villager. He preferred to have them in a mass, not in individual units. Thus once again Serbinov walked about the home hearths of Moscow with the joy of a cultured man, examining the luxurious objects in the shops, listening to the silent passage of valuable automobiles, and inhaling their refined gasses as though they were smelling salts.

Serbinov travelled about the town as though it were a ballroom in which was present the lady who longed for him, except that she was lost in the distance among the warm young crowds and was unable to see her impassioned cavalier, while the cavalier himself could not reach her because he had an objective heart and kept meeting other deserving women who were so filled with tenderness and inaccessibility that it became impossible to understand how children are ever born into the world. However the more Serbinov met women and saw objects the manufacture of which had required the artisan that he renounce all that is base and polluted in the body of man, the more Serbinov mourned. Feminine youth brought him no joy, although he was himself young, for he believed in advance in the unrealizability of the happiness which he required. Serbinov had been at the symphony the day before. The music had sung of beautiful man, of lost opportunity, and Serbinov, who had grown unused to this, had had to go to the toilet during intermission to master his emotion and dry his eyes in a place invisible to all.

While Serbinov mused he saw nothing and rode mechanically in the tram. When his musing stopped he noticed a very young woman who was standing near him, looking him in the eye. Serbinov was not shy of her gaze and looked at her himself, for the woman looked at him with the sort of simple and touching eyes which any man can bear without embarrassment.

The woman wore a good summer overcoat and a clean woolen dress. The clothing hid the unknown comfortable life of her body, probably that of a worker, since the woman lacked lumps and rounded contours. She was even elegant, and completely lacked the usual passionate attractiveness. Most of all Serbinov was touched by the fact that the woman was happy about something and was looking around and at him with well-disposed and sympathetic eyes. This made Serbinov frown immediately, for the happy were alien to him. He disliked and feared them. "Either I'm getting more disillusioned," Serbinov finally analyzed himself frankly, "or the happy are of no use to the unhappy."

The oddly happy woman got off at Teatralnaya Street. She resembled a lone and shapely plant on foreign soil which in its credulity did not recognize that it was alone.

Serbinov immediately felt the tram dreary without her. The greasy ticket lady, muffled in someone else's clothes, was taking down ticket numbers on her control sheet, provincial people were heading for Kazan Station

with their sacks, chewing food against their long journey, and the electric motor moaned indifferently beneath the floor, where it had been imprisoned in the straits of metal and linkages with feminine friendship. Serbinov leapt from the tram, frightened that the woman had disappeared from him forever in the populous city, where it was possible to live entire years without an encounter, utterly alone. The happy however are in no hurry about living. The woman was standing by the Maly Theater with her hand cupped while the newspaper boy slowly dropped the coppers of her change into her palm.

Serbinov went over to her, his fear having made him decide upon boldness.

"And here I thought I had already lost you," he said. "I was walking around looking for you."

"Didn't look long," the woman said, checking the accuracy of her change. Serbinov liked that. He himself never checked his change, for he respected neither his own labor nor the labor of others, and it is labor which generates money. Here though, in this woman, he had met an unknown precision.

"Would you like to walk with me a bit?" the woman asked Serbinov.

"I'm supposed to ask you that," Serbinov said without any basis.

The trusting happy woman was not offended. She smiled.

"Sometimes you meet a person and suddenly he seems good," the woman said, "and then when you leave you lose him, and then you miss him and forget him. I seemed good to you, isn't that right?"

"That's right," Serbinov agreed completely. "I would have missed you for a long time if I'd lost you right away."

"And now you can miss me just for a little while, since I didn't disappear immediately!"

The walk and entire air of this woman held a rare pride of open serenity, without any slavish nervousness, and some preservation of the self before other people. She walked, laughed because of her good mood, spoke, and fell silent, and all of this without watching her own life, for she did not know how to adapt herself to the preferences of her companion. Serbinov tried to get her to like him, but it didn't come off. The woman did not change towards him. Then Serbinov abandoned his hopes and with submissive melancholy began to think about how time hurried on, bringing ever nearer his eternal parting from this happy woman who was gifted with some sort of refreshing life. Serbinov recalled how many times he had gone through eternal separation without taking any account of it. To how many comrades and people he loved had he once said thoughtlessly, "So long!" never again in this world to see them? Serbinov did not know what he ought to do to satisfy his sense of respect for this woman in order to make it easier for him to say farewell to her.

"Between friends there are no means of growing so satisfied as to become indifferent, even temporarily," Serbinov said. "After all, friendship

isn't marriage."

"One can work for one's comrade," Serbinov's companion replied. "When you are exhausted things are easier. You can even live alone, because the comrades are left with the benefits of your work. But I cannot give myself to them because I want to remain whole."

In his short-term friend Serbinov sensed a certain firm structure, the sort of independent structure which suggested that the woman was invulnerable to people, or perhaps that this was the final result of an unknown, dead social class, the forces of which were no longer operative in the world. Serbinov pictured her as the remnants of the aristocratic breed. If all the aristocrats had been as her then history would have produced nothing else to follow them. Quite the opposite, for they would have made of history the fate which they required. All of Russia was settled with people who were perishing and had been saved, something which Serbinov had noticed long before. Many Russians were zealously and passionately occupied with destroying within themselves the ability and gift of living. Some drank vodka, others sat among the dozens of their children with half-dead minds, and a third group went out in the fields where they fantasized in vain. This woman however was not destroying herself. She was creating herself. And it was perhaps for that reason that she touched Serbinov's emotions, since he was unable to create himself, and so was perishing, observing the beautiful man about whom the music had promised. Or could this perhaps have been only Serbinov's melancholy, the sensation of his own already unrealizable need, while his companion would become his lover, of whom he would grow tired in a week? But if so whence this touching face before him, defended by its own pride and the insularity of the completed soul, which is capable of understanding and unerringly helping another man, but cannot ask help for itself?

Further walking made no sense, for it would only demonstrate Serbinov's weakness before the woman, so he told her good-bye, in order in his companion to preserve a good opinion of himself. She too said good-bye, then added, "If things get very dreary for you, then come around and we'll see each other."

"You get bored sometimes too," Serbinov said, now regretting having said good-bye.

"Of course, sometimes. But I realize why I am bored, and I don't torture myself."

She told Serbinov where she lived, then Serbinov left her. He began to retrace his steps. He walked amid the thick populace of the streets and grew calm, as though the strangers shielded him with their closeness. Then Serbinov went into a cinema and listened once again to concert music. He recognized why he was sad, and he tormented himself. His mind helped him not at all. He was obviously falling apart. At night Serbinov lay in the quiet of his cool hotel room and silently followed the workings of his mind. Serbinov was astounded that despite all its disintegration, his mind was exuding truth, and

Serbinov did not trouble it with the misery of reminiscence about the woman he had met. Soviet Russia passed before him in the solid dream of his journey, his motherland, so poor it did not have two kopeks to rub together, pitiless towards itself, and somewhat resembling the aristocratic woman he had just met. Serbinov's melancholy, ironic mind slowly recalled to him the poor, ill-adapted people who were adapting socialism to fit the empty places of the plains and washes, and for nothing.

And something was already under way on the depressing fields of forgettable Russia. People who had disliked plowing ground for the rye in their own holdings were now with patient suffering planting the garden of history for their own inseparability in the future. Gardeners, however, like painters and singers, lack sturdy, useful minds, for their weak hearts were quickly troubled. As soon as the plants had barely begun to sprout they had in doubt uprooted them and sown the soil instead with the petty grasses of bureaucratism. A garden requires care and a long wait for the first fruits, while grass grows immediately, and its cultivation requires neither labor nor expenditure of the spirit on endurance. And after the garden of the revolution had been mown down its fields were given over entirely to wild grass, so that all might be fed without labor. Serbinov had in fact seen how little the people worked, since the grass fed everyone for free. And so it would continue for a long time, until the grass had devoured the entire soil, and the people would be left there, on clay and bare stone, or until the well-rested gardeners started the cool garden anew on the exhausted soil, parched dry and cracked by the desolate wind.

Serbinov fell asleep in his usual melancholy, with a cramped and muffled heart. In the morning he went round to the Party Committee and was given an assignment in a distant province, where he was to investigate the fact there of a 20% reduction in the number of acres under cultivation. He was to leave the following day. The rest of the day Serbinov sat on the boulevard, waiting for evening. Waiting proved to be debilitating work, although Serbinov's heart beat calmly, with no hope of a woman for his own.

He was to go that evening to his young acquaintance of the day before. He walked there in order to waste the unnecessary time on the road and thus find respite from his waiting.

The address was probably not accurate. Serbinov wound up at a farmstead made up of equal parts old houses and new, and he began to seek out his acquaintance. He walked up and down many staircases, always to the fourth floor, from where the outlying reaches of the Moscow River were visible. The water there smelled of soap and the banks, which were much frequented by the naked poor, resembled the approaches to an outhouse.

Serbinov rang at unknown apartments, the doors of which were opened by elderly people. They felt themselves to be residents who more than anything needed quiet, and they were astonished by Serbinov's desire to see a person who did not live there and who was not registered to live there. Then

"The homeless love of humans"

Serbinov went outside and began a systematic, detailed search of all the living accommodations, for he did not have the strength to remain alone that evening. The next day would be easier for him, since he would go directly to the vanished acreage, on which theoretically there should be weeds. Serbinov found his acquaintance by chance. She came down a staircase and ran into him; without this he would have had to search for her through twenty responsible tenants. The woman showed Serbinov to her room and then went out again for a time. The room was empty, as though no one lived in it, but used it instead only to meditate. The function of bed was filled by three crates once filled with cooperative society goods, the table was replaced by the window sill, and the clothing was hung on nails in the wall, hidden by a poor curtain. The window showed the same wandering Moscow River, and along its banks the same naked torsoes which Serbinov had memorized during his days on the dreary staircase of this house continued to sit pensively.

The neighboring room was cut off by a closed door. In the room some students from a workers' college were absorbing political science through cadenced oral readings. Earlier a seminary student would probably have lived there, and would have studied the dogmas of the churches of the world so that later on, following the laws of the dialectical development of the soul, he could arrive in blasphemy.

The woman returned with refreshments for her new acquaintance, some tea cakes, a piece of cake, and a half bottle of sweet sacramental wine. Could she really have been so naive?

By degrees Serbinov began to eat these fruits of a woman's sweet table, his mouth touching the places where the woman's hand had touched the food. By degrees Serbinov ate everything and grew full, while his woman friend laughed and talked, exactly as though she was rejoicing that she had managed to bring the food as a sacrifice instead of having to offer herself. She was mistaken. Serbinov only admired her and sensed his own melancholy, that of the dull man in this world. Now he could no longer live calmly, remain alone, and be independently satisfied with life. This woman had evoked in him melancholy and shame. Had he gone outside into the excited Moscow air, away from her, it would have been easier for him. For the first time in his life Serbinov did not have his own evaluation of the person opposite him, and he could not smile down at her in order to free himself and emerge the solitary man he was before.

Now the moon shone brightly above the houses, the Moscow River, and the whole surrounding decay of the town. Women and girls rustled around beneath the moon as if beneath an extinguished sun, in the homeless love of humans. Everything was well arranged in advance; love walked about in the form of a fact, in the form of a defined, limited substance, in order to be complete and finished. Serbinov rejected love not only as an idea but as an emotion as well, considering love to be only a well-rounded body. It was even impossible to think about love, for the body of the beloved was created for

legs

Sonya / Moscow

the forgetting of thoughts and feelings, for the silent work of love and mortal exhaustion. Exhaustion is the sole comfort within love. Serbinov sat in the short happiness of life which must not be abused, for it grows ever less. Besides, Serbinov did not try to quench himself in it anyway. He considered world history a useless bureaucratic establishment where with precise zeal man was deprived of the sense and weight of existence. Serbinov knew his general defeat in life, and lowered his gaze to the feet of his hostess. The woman wore no stockings. Her bare pink legs were filled with the warmth of blood and a light dress covered the remaining fullness of her body, which flamed already with the tension of ripe, contained life.

"Who will quench you, burning one?" Serbinov pondered. "Not me of course, I'm unworthy of you. My soul is like a district in the provinces, filled with backwardness and fear." He looked once more at her ascending legs and could understand nothing clearly. There was a path of some sort from these fresh feminine legs to the necessity of being committed to and trusting of his usual revolutionary business, but that path was too long and Serbinov yawned in advance from the exhaustion of his mind.

"How is your life going?" Simon asked. "And what's your name?"

"Sonya, or in full, Sofia Alexandrovna. I live well, either working or waiting for someone. . . ."

"In meetings there are short joys," Serbinov said to himself. "Out on the street you do up the last button of your overcoat and sigh, regretting that all has passed in vain and one must again be diverted with one's self."

"But waiting for people is also a joy," Sofia Alexandrovna said. "And together with the chance encounters the joy can continue a long while. . . . Most of all I love waiting for people . . . I'm almost always waiting. . . ."

She put her hands on the table, then moved them to her adult knees without creating any unnecessary motion. Her life spread out in circles like a sound. Serbinov even closed his eyes so that he would not love himself in this strange room, which was filled with smells and noises of no consequence to him. Next to her build Sofia Alexandrovna's hands looked thin and old, and her fingers were wrinkled like a charwoman's. These disfigured hands reassured Serbinov a bit and he began to envy her a little less for being committed to another man.

The refreshments on the table were gone. Serbinov regretted that he had hurried so to eat them, for now he would have to leave. But he could not leave, which is why he had gone to Sofia Alexandrovna. Even back in the tram Serbinov had noticed in her that excessive gift of life which excited and alarmed him.

"Sofia Alexandrova," Serbinov said to her, "I wanted to tell you that I am leaving tomorrow. . . ."

"Well, and so? . . ." Sofia Alexandrova was puzzled. Obviously she did not feel sorry for other people, since she could feed upon her own life. This Serbinov had never known how to do.

Rather she needed other people as a way to expend her superfluous strength, rather than as a way to receive that which she lacked. Serbinov still did not know who she was. Probably the luckless daughter of wealthy parents. The thought however proved to be mistaken. Sofia Alexandrovna was a machine cleaner at the Trekhgorny Factory and had been abandoned by her mother at birth. But all the same, perhaps she had loved someone and given birth herself? Serbinov half asked this and half guessed.

"I have loved, but I haven't had children," Sofia Alexandrovna answered. "There are people enough without my children . . . if I could have had a flower instead of a child, then I would have been a mother. . . ."

"You don't really love flowers, do you? . . . that's not love, that's an insult, because you've stopped having children and growing. . . ."

"So? When I have flowers, I don't go out and I don't miss anyone. I feel so good with them that I would like to have been their mother. Without that the love somehow doesn't come out. . . ."

"Without that it won't come out," Simon said. He began to have hopes of subduing his jealousy, anticipating that in the end Sofia Alexandrovna would turn out to be precisely the same sort of person as Serbinov himself, unhappy and frozen in the middle of life. He did not like successful or happy people because they are constantly departing for fresh and distant parts of life, while those who were near to them remain alone. Serbinov had already been left an orphan by many people, and at one time had joined himself to the Bolsheviks in fear of remaining behind them, alone. However even this had not helped. Serbinov's friends continued to expend themselves completely without him, and Serbinov had no time to accumulate anything for himself from their emotions, since they had already left him, passing on into their own futures. Serbinov made fun of them, denigrating the poverty of their intentions. He always said that history had ended long ago and that all that had been happening since was an interhuman leveling process. When he was at home Serbinov locked the door and sat across the bed with his back to the wall, destroyed by the grief of separation and of not knowing where he was loved and awaited. Serbinov sat silently, listening to the beautiful ringing of the trams, which were carrying people past the warm summer boulevards, people who were going to visit one another. Gradually tears of self pity came to Serbinov, and he watched how the tears washed away the dirt on his cheeks. He did not turn on the electricity.

Later on, when the streets had grown quiet and his friends and lovers were asleep, Serbinov calmed down, for many people were alone at that time. Some slept, some were weary from talk or love and so lay alone, and thus Serbinov too agreed to be alone. Sometimes he got out his diary and jotted down beneath orderly numbers his thoughts and condemnations.

"Man is not meaning, but a body filled with passionate veins, ravines of blood, mounds, openings, satisfaction, and oblivion."

"I was a stranger and ye took me in" means when I was new in town

they stole my luggage.”

~~“History was spawned by a base failure who invented the future in order to exploit the present. He pushed everyone else from their place and remained alone by himself on the warmed and well-inhabited place of settlement.”~~

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“I am a by-product of my mother, no different from her menstruation, and so I lack the opportunity to respect anything.”

“I fear good people, for they will abandon poor me, and I fear the chill of remaining behind the others.”

“I curse the current population, among whom I wish society and membership.”

“Even in society I shall be not a member but a chilled extremity.”

Serbinov watched all men with suspicious jealousy, wondering if they might be better than him. If one was better, then he had to be stopped, or else he would outstrip Serbinov and not be an equal friend. Sofia Alexandrovna also seemed to him to be better than he was and was hence lost, while Serbinov would have liked to accumulate people like money, as a means of existence. He even kept a zealous inventory of the people he knew and continually up-dated a special list in his main domestic book of profit and loss.

He would have to list Sofia Alexandrovna as a loss. However Simon wanted to cut his loss by a method which he had not previously employed in his human economy, which always left him with a deficit. What if he were to embrace this Sofia Alexandrovna and become an imitation of that tenderly demented man who wished precisely to marry her? Then Simon could develop the passion within him, overcome this upright body of a higher person, leave his mark within it, and thus give existence, if even but briefly, to his solidarity among people. Then he could go outside calm and reassured, to continue to further successful acquisition of people. Trams went past, headed somewhere with a nervous fussing. They carried people who were departing into the distance, away from Serbinov. Simon went over to Sofia Alexandrovna, lifted her slightly beneath the shoulders, and stood her up full-length before him. It came out during this that she was a heavy woman.

“What are you doing?” Sofia Alexandrovna asked without fear, but with attentive tension.

Serbinov’s heart disappeared in the proximity of her foreign body, warmed by on-rushing, unachievable life. It would have been possible then to chop Serbinov with an axe and he would have felt no pain. He sighed, a rattle in his throat, and he sensed the faint smell of sweat from beneath Sofia Alexandrovna’s armpits. He wanted to suck dry those stiff, sweat-spoiled hairs with his mouth.

“I want to hold you a bit, lightly,” Simon said. “Permit me . . . then I’ll go right away. . . .”

Ashamed before this suffering man, Sofia Alexandrovna lifted her arms in order that Serbinov might more easily hold her in his weak embrace.

"Does that really make things easier for you?" she asked, and her raised arms swelled.

"How about you?" Simon asked, listening to the distracting voice of a steam locomotive, which was singing somewhere amidst the summery world of labor and peace.

"It makes no difference to me."

Simon left her.

"It's already time to go," he said indifferently. "Where's your bathroom? I didn't wash today."

"Where you came in, on the right. There's soap there, but no towel. I took it to the laundry and I use a sheet to dry."

"Give me the sheet then," Serbinov agreed.

The sheet smelled of her, of Sofia Alexandrovna. Obviously she cleaned her body thoroughly with the sheet in the morning, refreshing her body while it was still hot from sleep. Serbinov moistened his tired, burning eyes. He did not wash his face. He hurriedly twisted the sheet into a handy lump, then stuck the lump into the side pocket of his overcoat, which hung in the corridor across from the bathroom. Since he was to lose the person, Serbinov wanted to retain an irrefutable document about the fact.

"I hung the sheet on the radiator to dry," Serbinov told her. "I got it all wet. Good-bye, I'm leaving. . . ."

"So long," Sofia Alexandrovna answered cordially, unable to let a person go without some attention. "Where are you going?" she asked. "You said you were going away? . . ."

Serbinov told her of the province where 20% of the cultivated acreage had disappeared and that he was off to look for it.

"I lived my entire life there," Sofia Alexandrovna announced, speaking of the province. "I have a great comrade there. If you see him, give him a bow from me."

"What kind of fellow is he?"

Serbinov thought about how he would go home to his room and sit down in order to record Sofia Alexandrovna as a loss to his soul, under the heading of irretrievable capital. Late night would mount above Moscow and his many dear ones would go to sleep and dream of the silence of socialism, while Serbinov himself would record them with the happiness of full forgiveness and place minus signs above the names of his lost friends.

Sofia Alexandrovna took a small photo from a book.

"He wasn't my husband," she said of the man in the photograph, "and I didn't love him. But without him I feel dreary. When I lived in the same town with him I lived more calmly . . . I always live in one town and love another town. . . ."

"Where I don't love any town," Serbinov said. "I only love it where there are always lots of people on the streets."

Sofia Alexandrovna looked at the photograph. It depicted a man of

(PLATONOV / DVANOV)  
Sofia / Sonya

about twenty-five, with sunken eyes, like those of the dead, whose eyes resemble tired watchmen. The rest of his face was impossible to remember after one turned away from it. It seemed to Serbinov that this man thought two ideas at once and found comfort in neither, for which reason a face like his had no repose in which it paused, and hence could not be remembered. h  
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"He's not an interesting man," Sofia Alexandrovna said, noticing Serbinov's indifference. "And that's why it's easy to be with him. He senses his own belief and that calms others. If there were many people like him on earth, women would marry only rarely. . . ."

"But where will I meet him?" Serbinov asked. "Maybe he's dead already? Why wouldn't they marry?"

"Why should they? Marriage is embraces, jealousy, and blood. I was married for a month, and you know yourself. . . . With him you probably wouldn't have to do anything . . . just lean against him, and things would be good. . . ."

"I'll write you a postcard if I meet a fellow like that," Serbinov promised, then hurried to put on his overcoat so he could carry off the sheet.

Serbinov saw the Moscow night from the landing. Already there was no one on the shore and the water poured onwards like something dead. Simon whispered as he walked that if Sofia Alexandrovna had been maimed, than she would have drawn him to her and he would, perhaps, have come to love this staircase. He would have been happy waiting each day for evening, since he would have had a place to snuff out his tardy life. Another human would have been sitting across from him, and in this Simon would have forgotten himself.

Sofia Alexandrovna remained alone to sleep her dreary sleep until her morning work. At six in the morning a newspaper boy came around, stuck a copy of *Working Gazette* under the door, and then to be on the safe side, he knocked.

"Sonya! Time you got up! Today makes ten times . . . that's thirty kopeks you owe me. Get up, read about the facts!"

In the evening, after her shifts, Sofia Alexandrovna washed again, but now dried herself with the pillowcase, and then opened her windows out into the warm, guttering Moscow. At this time she always longed for someone, but no one came to see her. Some were busy at meetings, while others found it boring to sit with a woman and not kiss her. When it grew dark Sofia Alexandrovna lay her stomach against the window sill and drowsed in her anticipation. Buckboards and automobiles drove by below, while a hidden, orphaned little church quietly rang for a service. Large numbers of people walking had passed already before Sofia Alexandrovna's eyes, and each of them she had followed with her gaze of anticipation, but all of them had passed by the outer door of her building. Only one man stood a bit by the entrance, threw a cigarette butt on the sidewalk, and then came into the house. "Not for me," Sonya decided, then grew quiet. Somewhere in the depths of the floors a man

was walking around uncertainly, stopping frequently to breathe or think. The steps stopped near Sofia Alexandrovna's door. "Walk higher," Sonya whispered. However the man knocked at her door. Without remembering her path from the window across the little corridor, Sofia Alexandrovna opened the door. Serbinov came in.

"I couldn't leave," he said. "Inside of me I got to missing you."

Simon smiled as before, but more mournfully now. He saw already that no happiness awaited him here, while behind him stood only the echoing hotel room and his ledger of lost comrades he kept there.

"Take your sheet out of my overcoat," Serbinov said. "It's dried out and there's no more of your smell left in it. Pardon me for having slept on it today."

Sofia Alexandrovna remembered that Serbinov was exhausted, so silently she collected something to feed him for dinner out of her own, for she did not think that in and of herself she could be of interest to a guest. Serbinov ate her dinner as a duty, and after eating he felt then even more sharply the misery of his own loneliness. He had many strengths, but they had no direction at all and crushed uselessly at his heart.

"Why didn't you go away?" Sofia Alexandrovna asked.

"I'm going out to look for weedlots in one province . . . earlier socialism was threatened by lice, and now it's weeds . . . come with me. . . ."

"No," Sofia Alexandrovna refused. "I can't go anyplace."

Serbinov would have wished to sleep there, where he would have slept in peace greater than elsewhere. He kneaded his back and left side. It was already several months now that something which earlier had been soft and enduring was starting to turn into something hard and painful. Probably this was the cartilage of youth living out its day and dying out to become eternal bone.

His forgotten mother had died that day. Simon did not even know where she had been living. Somewhere in the next to last house in Moscow, where the country had already begun. At the same time that Serbinov was extremely carefully cleaning his teeth, freeing them of all decay so that he could kiss, or perhaps when he was eating his ham, his mother had died. Simon now did not know why he was to live. The last person who would have remained forever inconsolable had Simon died had died herself. Among the living people Serbinov had left, there was no one like his mother. He could not love her, he had forgotten her address, and yet he was alive because at some time and for some time his mother had enveloped him in her own need of him, protecting him from the many other people who had no need of him whatever. This fence had fallen now, and somewhere at the edge of Moscow, almost out in the provinces, an old woman lay in a coffin after having preserved her son in place of herself, and there was more living matter within the fresh boards of her coffin than there was in her withered body. Now Serbinov felt the freedom and lightness of the life which remained him. His death now

would cause no one regret, and no one would die of grief at his death, as once his mother had promised to do and would have done, had she outlived Simon. It was turning out that Simon was alive because he felt his mother's pity on him, and he kept her peace in the world complete. She had served Simon as a shield and blind against all the strange people of the earth. He because of his mother recognized the world as an entity sympathetic to himself. And now his mother had disappeared, and without her, all had been exposed. It was not obligatory now to be alive, since for Simon not a single one of the living had any mortal necessity. And so Serbinov had come to Sofia Alexandrovna, to be with a woman. His mother had also been a woman.

After sitting a bit, Serbinov saw that Sofia Alexandrovna wanted to sleep, so he said good-bye. Serbinov said nothing of his mother's death. He wanted to use the news as a fundamental reason for a new visit to Sofia Alexandrovna. Serbinov walked home, about three miles. Twice a thin rain began to drip above him, then stopped. He sat on a bench waiting for tears. He leaned forward and got his face ready. On that boulevard he had suddenly sensed he was going to cry. But he could not cry. It was later that he cried, in an all-night beer hall, where music played and people danced. These tears though were not because of his mother, but instead because of the multitude of actresses and people whom Serbinov could never attain.

Thus Serbinov went to Sofia Alexandrovna for a third time that Sunday. She was still asleep and Simon waited in the corridor for her while she got dressed.

Through the door Serbinov said that his mother had been buried the day before and that he had come for Sofia Alexandrovna so that they could go to the cemetery together and gaze at the place where his mother would be found until the end of the world. At that Sofia Alexandrovna, still not dressed, opened her door to him, then went unwashed with him to the cemetery.

Fall had already begun there. Dead leaves fell on the graves of the buried people. Crosses to eternal memory snuggled among the high grass and woody foliage, in their shape resembling people with their arms flung wide to embrace the dead, in vain. A cross near the road bore the inscription of someone's soundless plaint:

*I live and mourn  
While she is dead and still*

The grave of Serbinov's mother lay in a crowd of other graves, covered with the fresh dust of earth and isolated and lonely among their ancient mounds. Serbinov and Sofia Alexandrovna stood under an old tree. Its leaves whispered evenly in the current of the lofty, continual wind. It was as though time had become audible in its passage and was carried away above them. People passed occasionally in the distance as they called on their

dead relatives, but there was no one nearby. Sofia Alexandrovna breathed evenly at Simon's side, looking at the grave without understanding death, for she had no one who might die. She wished to feel the grief and sympathy for Serbinov, but all she felt was a little dreariness from the long whispering of the beckoning wind and the sight of the abandoned crosses. Serbinov stood in front of her like a helpless cross, and Sofia Alexandrovna had no idea how to help him in his senseless depression, so that things would be better for him.

Serbinov himself stood in terror before the thousands of graves. In them lay dead people, who had lived because they had believed in eternal memory of and sympathy for themselves after their deaths. Yet they had been forgotten. The cemetery was deserted and the crosses replaced the living, who might come there to remember and mourn. So would it be with him, Simon. The last person who would have come to him when he was dead and beneath the cross now lay herself in the coffin beneath his feet.

Serbinov put his arm around Sofia Alexandrovna's shoulder, so that sometime after their separation she would remember him. Sofia Alexandrovna did not answer him in any way. Then Simon embraced her from behind and laid his head on her neck.

"They'll see us here," Sofia Alexandrovna said. "Let's go to another spot."

They went down a path and into the depths of the cemetery. Although there were few people there, they did not stay out of the way. They met some sort of sharp-eyed old ladies, gravediggers stepped unexpectedly from the still of the underbrush, and the bellringer leaned from the bell tower and watched them. Occasionally they came upon somewhat more cozy private places, where Serbinov leaned Sofia Alexandrovna against a tree or simply held her close to him, lifting her almost off the ground. She looked at him unwillingly, and then a cough would ring out or the gravel in the path would scrape, and then Serbinov would once again lead Sofia Alexandrovna away.

Gradually they walked in a big circle around the cemetery, unable to find shelter anywhere, and returned ultimately to the grave of Simon's mother. They were both worn out already. Simon sensed how his heart had grown weak in anticipation, how he had to convey his grief and loneliness into another friendly body, perhaps to take from Sofia Alexandrovna the thing which she valued, so that she would also regret its loss, which would be hidden within Serbinov, and thus would remember him.

"Why do you need it right now?" asked Sofia Alexandrovna. "Let's talk instead."

They sat on some enormous tree roots which stuck out of the soil and then they put their feet up on the mother's mound. Simon was silent, for he did not know how to share his sorrow with Sofia Alexandrovna, for he had not previously shared himself with her. Even family property becomes general only after the mutual love of husband and wife. Always, as long as Serbinov had lived, he had noticed that an exchange of blood and body evokes then an

exchange of the solid things of life. It never happens the other way about, for only a valuable thing can make one not regret the loss of a cheap one. Serbinov was willing to agree as well to the possibility that this was simply his degenerate mind which spoke.

"What should I say!" he said. "Things are hard for me now. . . . Grief is living inside of me like some substance and our words will remain apart from it."

Sofia Alexandrovna turned her face, grown suddenly sad, toward Simon, as though she feared suffering. Either she understood or had no idea whatever. Simon embraced her glumly, then lifted her from the hard stone to the soft mound of his mother's grave, his feet in the lower grass. He forgot whether there were still other people in the cemetery or if they had all left. Sofia Alexandrovna turned away from him in the lumps of that earth, which held the fine dust of the graves of others, brought up from the depths by spades.

After some time Serbinov found a long, small portrait of a thin old woman in the bottom of his pocket. He hid it in the place of the grave which Sofia Alexandrovna's head had softened, so that he would neither remember nor torment himself about his mother.

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In Chevengur Gopner had made an orangery for Yakov Titych. The old man revered captive flowers, sensing from them the quiet of his own life. However the evening, frowning sun of mid-autumn shone above the entire world, as well as above Chevengur, and Yakov Titych's flowers barely exhaled in their weakening breath. Yakov Titych called the youngest of the miscellaneous to himself, thirteen year old Yegory, and sat with him beneath the glass roof in a circle of aroma. He was sorry to have to die in Chevengur, but already he had to, for his stomach had ceased to love food and even drink turned into the torturous gas. It was not however because of the illness that Yakov Titych wished to die, but because of loss of patience with himself. He began to sense his body as an alien, second person with whom he had lived sixty entire years of boredom and for whom Yakov Titych had now begun to bear implacable hatred. Now he looked at the field where Proletarian Strength was plowing while Kopenkin followed behind, and he wanted all the more to forget himself, to hide from the dreariness of his own constant presence. He wanted to become a horse or Kopenkin or any endowed object, anything that would loose his mind from the sense-sated life which covered it, like the withered scar of some old wound. He felt Yegory with his hands, and things grew easier. All the same he was a young boy, a better life, and if it was impossible to live that life, at least it was possible to have it at hand and think about it.

The barefoot Kopenkin was turning under the steppe, which had had time to return to its virgin state, using the strength of his war horse. He was plowing not for his own food, but rather for the happiness of another man, Alexander Dvanov. Kopenkin saw how Dvanov had grown thin in Chevengur, then gathered up the handful of rye which had remained whole from the old world in the sheds and barns. He harnessed Proletarian Strength to the wooden plow in order to prepare the ground to sow winter wheat, to feed his friend. However Dvanov had not grown thin from hunger. Quite the opposite, for in Chevengur he rarely felt like eating. He had grown thin from happiness and care. It seemed always to him that something tormented the Chevengurians, that they lived among themselves flimsily. So Dvanov shared his body with them, through his labor. In order to get Kopenkin to settle down in Chevengur with him, each day Alexander wrote from his own imagination the history of Rosa Luxemburg's life for him. For Kirei, who now always followed Dvanov with pained friendliness and guarded him at night to keep Dvanov from suddenly disappearing from Chevengur, Dvanov dragged up from the bottom of the river a small black stump, because Kirei wanted to carve a wooden weapon from it. Chepurny and Pashintsev cut brushwood without rest, for Chepurny had remembered that there are also winters with little snow and that if it happened thus, then the snow could not warm the houses and the entire population of communism might catch cold and die as spring came on. Chepurny also had no peace at night, for he lay on the ground in the middle of Chevengur and put branches on an eternal bonfire, so that fire would not vanish from the town. Gopner and Dvanov had promised to make electricity in Chevengur soon, but they were always burdened with other troublesome matters. In anticipation of electricity Chepurny lay beneath the raw sky of autumnal murk and with a drowsy mind guarded the warmth and light of the sleeping miscellania. The miscellania woke while it was still dark and their arising was a time for joy for Chepurny. All over Chevengur doors squeaked and gates boomed, bare, well-rested feet walked between the houses in search of food and meetings with comrades, water buckets rattled, and everywhere things grew lighter. Then Chepurny fell asleep in satisfaction, while the miscellania guarded the common flame themselves.

Each of the miscellania set off into the steppe or to the river to pick grain stalks and dig tubers, while at the river they fastened their hats to staffs and caught the abundant trash fish. The miscellaneous themselves ate but rarely, for they foraged food to treat one another. Already however the food grew more scarce in the fields and the miscellaneous had to walk among the weeds until evening in the misery of their own hunger and the hunger of their comrades.

As the shadows began the miscellaneous gathered on an open, overgrown spot and prepared to eat. Suddenly Karchuk got up. He had worked himself to the bone all day, so at night he loved to be among the simple folk.

"Citizens and friends," Karchuk said in his satisfied voice, "Yushka has a cough and the trouble in his chest. He should eat lighter. I've gathered thousands of handfuls of grass for him and than I added the milky stuff from the flower stems. So now Yushka can eat bravely. . . ."

Yushka sat on the burdocks, holding his four potatoes.

"I'm also going to raise my principle on you," Yushka answered. "For some reason I felt like surprising you with a baked potato. I'd like it so you had a good treat to make it through the night."

The terror of night rose among them. The desolate sky grew morosely chill and did not allow the stars to emerge. Nothing rejoiced anywhere. The miscellaneous man ate and felt good. In the middle of that alien nature, before the long night of autumn, he stocked himself with nothing less than comrades, which he held as his possession, and not merely possession, but also as a mysterious blessing, on which a man relies only in his imagination but of which he cures himself in the flesh. That the other, necessary man lives entire in the world is already sufficient to allow him to become a source of spiritual calm and endurance for the miscellaneous man, the highest substance and the riches of his poverty. Because of the presence in the world of one's own other human, the rawness of the night and Chevengur became wholly habitable, even comfortable conditions for each of the miscellania.

"Let him eat," thought Karchuk as he watched Yushka nourish himself. "Then digestion will give him more blood and his sleep will be more interesting. And when he gets up tomorrow he'll feel warm and full inside his body. Which isn't half bad."

Yushka swallowed the last juice of his food and got to his feet in the circle of people.

"Comrades, now we live here like a population and have our own principle of existence . . . and even though we are the lowest mass, even though we are the reddest dregs of all, all the same we are lacking someone and we are expecting someone. . . ."

The miscellaneous were silent, placing their heads to their own lower bodies because of the exhaustion of their daily worries about food and one another.

"There's a deficit of Proshka," Chepurny said mournfully. "The good fellow is gone from Chevengur. . . ."

"Maybe it's time we organized the bonfire a little stronger," said Kirei. "Maybe Kirei will show up at night, and this is a dark spot we've got here."

"Organize it with what?" Karchuk asked, not understanding. "A bonfire has to burn in a splendid way. How are you going to organize that when the brush is all grown up small bore? Light that and you'll have organized smoke and not much more. . . ."

Here however the miscellania began to breathe quietly from the onset of unconscious sleep and they did not hear Karchuk. Only Kopenkin did not want to rest. "Nonsense," he thought in regard to everything, and went off

to take care of his horse. Dvanov and Pashintsev lay back to back and close together. Warmed by one another, they did not feel their loss of consciousness until morning.

Two days passed. On the third the gypsy women arrived, passing a profitless night in Karchuk's shed. The next day they also tried to get set up with the Chevengurians, but they were laboring in various parts of the town or among the weeds, and each was ashamed in the face of his comrades to go flirt with women instead of working. Kirei had had time already to catch all the bedbugs in Chevengur and also to make a sword out of the black wood, and when the gypsy women appeared he was rooting up stumps to get material to make a pipe for Gopner. Kirei felt within himself a weakness of the body, caused by his melancholy, just as though he had glimpsed the end of his life, but gradually he overcame this heaviness by expending his body in-rooting up the earth. An hour later the gypsies showed up again, now on the highline of the steppe, then disappeared again immediately, like the trail of a receding train of carts.

"The beauties of life," Piyusya said after hanging out the freshly washed rags of the miscellaneous to dry on a fence.

"A solid substance," Zheev said, defining the gypsies.

"Only there's not a smidgeon of revolution to be seen in those bodies of theirs," Kopenkin informed them. He had been looking in the thickets of grass and all the horse places for three days, trying to find a horse shoe, but all he found was trash like confirmation crosses, bast shoes, and the odd sinews and garbage of bourgeois life.

"There is no such thing as beauty without consciousness in the face," Kopenkin said when he found a mug which up until communism had been used to collect capital for the construction of churches. "A woman without revolution is just a half a woman, the sort I don't miss . . . that kind can make you fall asleep, but after that? . . . she's not a fighting thing. She's lighter than my heart. . . ."

Dvanov was pulling the nails out of crates in the nearby houses for the needs of all sorts of construction in wood. Through the door he saw how the unhappy gypsies departed, and he felt sorry for them. They could have become wives and mothers in Chevengur, people compressed by friendship, drawn close to one another by labor in the steppe so that they would not have to be scattered about the terrible, homeless world. These people might also have been strengthened by an exchange of bodies and the feminine firmness of deep blood. Dvanov looked with surprise at the houses and fences, at the amount of warmth imparted by laboring hands which they hid, the number of lives which had cooled in vain, never reaching another man, and which lay in these walls, beams, and roofs. And so for a time Dvanov stopped searching for nails. He wanted to preserve himself and the miscellaneous from wearing themselves out in labor, in order to leave intact within himself his best powers, for Kopenkin, Gopner, and for people such as those gypsy

women, who had left the angrily-working Chevengur for the steppe and poverty.

"Better I should mourn than work carefully and lose sight of people," Dvanov said to convince himself. "Everyone here has found his oblivion in work and it has become easy to live, but for that reason happiness is always postponed. . . ."

The transparent autumn heat lit the stilled outskirts of Chevengur with a half-dead, glittering light, as though there were no air above the world. Occasionally a dreary spider web stuck to Dvanov's face. The grass bent already toward mortal dust, no longer absorbing light and warmth. That meant then that they lived not simply by sunlight, but according to their own time as well. Birds flew up on the horizon of the steppe and settled down again on richer spots. Dvanov watched the birds with the same melancholy in which he had used to watch the flies on the ceiling during his childhood at Zakhar Pavlovich's. But then the birds flew up again and were covered by a slow dust. A troika of horses drew a carriage into view, hurrying into Chevengur at a country trot. Dvanov climbed up on a fence, astonished at this trip by an outsider. Suddenly the mighty tramping of horses sounded nearby. That was Kopenkin on Proletarian Strength, dashing out from the outskirts of Chevengur to fling himself at the distant carriage, ready to greet friend or destroy foe. Dvanov too went to the edge of town to help Kopenkin if necessary, but Kopenkin had already made out alone. A driver was leading the troika by the reins at a quiet walk, and the phaeton behind them was empty. The passenger walked in isolation, accompanied from behind by Kopenkin on his horse. Kopenkin had his saber in one hand and balanced a briefcase and a lady's revolver in the other, pressing the two together with his large unwashed fingers.

The man who had been travelling through the steppe now walked unarmed, but his face lacked any of the terror of endurance in the jaws of death, and expressed instead a smile of curiosity.

"Who are you? Why have you come to Chevengur?" Dvanov asked him.

"I've come from the center to look for weeds. I thought there weren't any, but they are growing in a practical way," Simon Serbinov answered. "And who might you be?"

The two people stood practically nose to nose. Kopenkin watched Serbinov vigilantly, overjoyed at the danger. The driver rested near his horses and muttered to himself about the offenses done him. He was counting already on the seizure of his horses by these local beggars.

"This is communism here," Kopenkin explained from his horse, "and we here are comrades because earlier we lived without the means of life. And what kind of a subject are you?"

"I am a communist too," Serbinov said, giving his bona fides and looking Dvanov over, trying to remember if he had ever met him before because of the familiarity of the face.

"He's come to play at commune a bit," Kopenkin said, disillusioned,

because there wasn't sufficient danger in it for him. He threw the revolver and briefcase into the surrounding weeds. "You won't need any lady's instrument here. A cannon now . . . yes, you should have brought us a cannon. Then it would be clear that you're a Bolshevik. But instead you've got a big briefcase and a little revolver . . . you're a pen-pusher, not a Party member. Let's ride home, Sash!"

Dvanov leapt up on Proletarian Strength's comfortable rump and he and Kopenkin galloped off.

Serbinov's coachman turned the horses back into the steppe and climbed up on the driver's perch, ready to save himself. Serbinov walked toward Chevengur a bit, meditating, then stopped. Before him the aged burdocks were peacefully living out their warm summer age. In the distance, about the middle of the town, someone was chopping wood with an even zeal and there was a smell of some potato dish from the dwelling on the town's edge. So it turned out that even here people lived and fed on their own daily joys and sadnesses. What was it that he, Serbinov, required? Unknown. And so Serbinov went off into Chevengur, an unknown place. The coachman noticed Serbinov's indifference towards him and put the horses to a preparatory quiet walk, then dashed away from Chevengur into the purity of the steppe.

In Chevengur Serbinov was immediately surrounded by the miscellaneous. They were passionately interested in the unknown, fully dressed man. They looked at and admired Serbinov, as though they had been given an automobile and pleasure awaited them. Kirei fished the automatic pen from Serbinov's pocket and immediately ripped off its head in order to make a cigarette holder of it for Gopner. Then Karchuk gave Kirei Serbinov's eyeglasses.

"Now you'll see more, and farther too," he said to Kirei.

"Shouldn't have thrown away the sack and voyage," Kopenkin grieved. "Would have been better to make a Bolshevik's cap for Sasha out of it . . . or maybe not. Let it lie there . . . I'll give Sasha my own cap."

Serbinov's boots went to the feet of Yakov Titych, as he needed light shoes for walking around the kitchen, while the Chevengurians gave the overcoat to Pashintsev to make pants, who since clear back at the Revolutionary National Park had been living without them. Soon Serbinov was left sitting on a chair which stood out on the street wearing nothing but his vest and barefeet. Piyusya thought to bring him two roast potatoes, while the miscellaneous silently began to bring him what they wished to. Someone gave him a jacket, somebody else felt boots, and Kirei gave Serbinov a sack filled with kitchen utensils.

"Take it," said Kirei. "Looks like you're one of the smart ones, so you'll have some need for the sack . . . we sure won't. . . ."

Serbinov took even the kitchen utensils. Later he dug his briefcase and revolver out of the dessicated grass. He fished the paper stuffings from the briefcase and threw away the skin. Among the papers he kept his account

book of people whom he wished to possess as his own. Simon would have been sorry to lose that book. In the evening he sat down in his jacket and felt boots amidst the silence of the exhausted town and opened the book before him. A candle stub burned on the table. Kirei had found it in the stores of the bourgeoisie. The house smelled of the tallowy body of the stranger who once had lived there. Solitude and new places always made Serbinov depressed and gave him a stomach ache. He couldn't write anything in his book, so he merely read it. He saw that his entire past had been a dead loss to him. Not a single person had remained with him his whole life, no one's friendship had become a familial relationship on which he could count. Serbinov was thus alone. He was remembered only by the secretary of the organization, who knew that Serbinov was on a business trip and that he must return. Thus the secretary waited for his return for the sake of the orderly state of their office. "He needs me," Serbinov thought with a sense of attachment to the secretary. "And he'll wait for me. I won't deceive his memory of me . . . I'll return."

Alexander Dvanov went in to check on Serbinov, who was already half-way happy because the secretary somehow was worrying about him, which meant that Simon had a comrade. Serbinov thought only of this and only by this was he comforted in nocturnal Chevengur. He could sense no other idea, and that which is not felt does not comfort.

"What do you want in Chevengur?" Dvanov asked. "I can tell you right off that you won't accomplish your mission here."

Serbinov had not even thought about accomplishment, for he was again remembering Dvanov's face, and because he could not recall from where, he grew disturbed.

"Is it true that your acreage under cultivation has fallen off?" Serbinov asked, wanting to find out in order to satisfy the secretary. He himself was little interested in farming.

"No," Dvanov explained. "It's grown. Even the town now is overgrown with grass."

"That's good," Serbinov said, considering his mission now accomplished. In his report he would write that the acreage had not grown smaller at all but had even grown by one percent. He had not seen bare earth anywhere, and the plants were even crowded.

Kopenkin coughed somewhere in the raw air of night, an aging man who could not sleep and thus wandered about alone.

Dvanov went to Serbinov with suspicion and the idea of chasing the investigator from Chevengur, but as soon as he saw him, he had no idea of what further to say. Dvanov was always afraid of a person at first because he did not have any sort of natural convictions which would have allowed him to feel superior. Quite the opposite, for the man's appearance aroused feelings in Dvanov instead of convictions, and he began to respect him overmuch.

Serbinov still did not know where he was. The quiet of the district, the

Dvanov - semi-intellectual  
wood frying pan / iron Mag

thick air of the surrounding grassland, all this made him long for Moscow, and he wanted to return. He decided to depart from Chevengur the next day, on foot.

"You have revolution here, or what?" Serbinov asked Dvanov.

"We have communism. You hear comrade Kopenkin coughing out there? He's a communist."

Serbinov was not very surprised. He always considered the revolution to be better than himself. In this town he saw only pitifulness and thought how he resembled a stone in a river. The revolution passed above him while he remained on the bottom, made heavy by his affection for himself.

"But have you got misery here or sadness here in Chevengur?" Serbinov asked.

Dvanov told him there was. Misery and sorrow are also the body of man.

Here Dvanov laid his forehead on the table. Towards evening he got agonizingly tired, not so much from action as from the fact that he watched after the people of Chevengur all day with great care and fear.

Serbinov opened the windows to the air. All was quiet and dark, and only a long midnight sound carried in from the steppe, so peaceful that it did not disturb the calm of the night. Dvanov crossed over to the bed and fell asleep on his back. Hurrying because of the guttering candle, Serbinov wrote Sofia Alexandrovna a letter. He informed her that communism had been set up in Chevengur by gathering all the wandering proletarians into one place and that a semi-intellectual, Dvanov, lived among them, probably having forgotten why he had come to the town. Serbinov looked at the sleeping Dvanov, whose face was changed by his closed eyes and whose legs were stretched out in dead calm. He resembled, Serbinov wrote, the photo of your early beloved, but it is difficult to imagine that he loved you. Then Serbinov added further that his stomach always hurt on business trips and that like the semi-intellectual he would have been willing to forget why he had come to Chevengur and to remain in it to exist.

The candle died out and Serbinov lay down on a trunk, afraid that he would not fall asleep immediately. But he did, and the new day rose before him instantaneously, just as it does for a happy man.

By that time many items had been gathered in Chevengur and Serbinov walked around and looked at them, unable to remember the use of such things.

That morning Serbinov saw a frying pan made of fir wood on a table and up on a roof there was an iron flag attached to a pole, a flag which could not submit to the wind. The town itself huddled so closely that Serbinov thought there must truly have been an expansion of the cultivated acreage, at the expense of the living space. Everywhere that he could see Chevengurians were laboring zealously. They sat in the grass, stood in the barns and doorways, and everyone worked at what he needed to. Two men were hewing a

tree trunk, one was cutting and bending tin which because of the shortness of materials had been taken from a roof, and four men leaned against a fence and wove extra bast shoes, for whoever might wish to become a wanderer.

Dvanov woke up before Serbinov and hurried off to find Gopner. The two comrades met at the smithy, where Serbinov later found them. Dvanov had thought up an invention which would turn sunlight into electricity. To help Gopner took all the mirrors in Chevengur out of their frames and also collected all the glass that had the least bit of thickness to it. With these materials Dvanov and Gopner made complex prisms and reflectors which would transform the sunlight as it passed through them, at the rear of the device yielding an electric current. The device had been ready two days before, but it had not produced electricity. The miscellaneous came by to look over Dvanov's light machine and even though it did not work they decided as they saw necessary, considering the machine correct and vital, for it had been invented and made by the corporeal labor of two comrades.

Not far from the smithy there stood a tower of clay and straw. At night a miscellaneous would climb up on the tower and light a bonfire so that wanderers in the steppe might see where the harbor for them had been prepared, but the steppes had either grown empty or the nights had grown desolate, for no one so far had come to the lights of the clay beacon.

While Dvanov and Gopner tried to improve their solar machine, Serbinov walked into the center of town. Before it had been narrow walking between the houses, but now it was completely impassable, for the miscellaneous had brought their things there for finishing. There were wooden wheels twelve feet across, tin buttons, clay statues which resembled portraits of beloved comrades, including Dvanov, a perpetual motion machine made of a broken alarm clock, a self-heating oven stuffed with all the pillows and blankets in Chevengur, but in which only one person at a time, the coldest, could warm himself. There were also other things, the functions of which Serbinov could not even imagine.

"Where is your executive committee?" Serbinov asked Karchuk, who was preoccupied.

"We used to have one, but not now. Everything's already been executed," Karchuk explained. "Ask Chepurny. You can see that I'm trying to make a sword out of a bull bone for comrade Pashintsev."

"Why does your town stand out in the open, but all crowded together?" Serbinov asked.

Karchuk however refused to answer the question.

"Ask whoever you like. You can see I'm working. That means I'm not thinking about you but about Pashintsev, who the sword's for."

Serbinov asked another man, who was carrying clay from the ravine in a sack. He was making statues and by his face looked to be a Mongol.

"We live without pauses between ourselves," Chepurny explained. It was he who was carrying the clay.

abolition of labor  
(PCA-MYANOV'S report)

Serbinov laughed at him and at the twelve-foot wooden wheels and the tiny buttons. Serbinov was ashamed of his laughter, but Chepurny stood before him unoffended.

"You all work hard," Serbinov said in order to stop the smiling quickly, "but I've seen your works, and they are all useless."

Chepurny regarded Serbinov seriously and vigilantly. He saw in Simon a man who had departed from the masses.

"You can see that we are working not for usefulness but for each other."

Serbinov was not laughing now. He did not understand.

"What?" he said.

"Just so," Chepurny affirmed. "How else can you, I ask you? Must be you're non-Party. It was the bourgeoisie what wanted labor to have some use, but that didn't work out. There's no putting up with tormenting of the body for the sake of an object," said Chepurny. Then he noticed Serbinov's glumness and smiled. "But that's no danger to you. You'll get by with us here."

Serbinov walked on, comprehending nothing. He could invent a great deal but he was unable to understand that which stood before his eyes.

At dinner time Serbinov was called to come eat at the field, where for the first course he was given grass soup and for the second a mush of vegetables, after which Simon felt completely full. He wished already to leave Chevengur for Moscow, but Dvanov and Chepurny asked him to stay until the next day. By the next day they would have made him something for a souvenir of his journey.

Serbinov stayed after deciding not to go on to the provincial capital to give his report but rather to send it, and after dinner he wrote to the Provincial Committee that there was no executive committee in Chevengur, but there were many happy, if useless, people. Cultivated acreage had not decreased at all but had rather grown, on account of the replanned, more closely grouped town. Again though there was no one who would sit down to make a report to that effect, since in the town there was not a single secretary of interpretive production. As his conclusion Serbinov included the idea that Chevengur had been seized by an unknown minor national group or by itinerant beggars who did not possess the art of communication and who had as their only signal in the world a clay beacon where at night straw or other dry substances were burned aloft. Serbinov left the practical conclusions to be drawn by the provincial center itself.

Simon read over what he had written. It had turned out intelligently and ambiguously, hostile and sarcastic both toward Chevengur and the capital. Serbinov always wrote that way about those whom he had no hope of acquiring as comrades. In Chevengur he had immediately understood that until his arrival all of the people had mutually understood one another and that there was no one left for him, so that Serbinov could not forget the responsibilities of his mission.

(Утепия)

After dinner Chepurny again began hauling clay. Serbinov turned to him about how to send off his two letters and asked where their post office was. Chepurny took both letters and asked, "There's people you miss? We'll send them to a post office by carrier. I miss Prokofy too and I don't know where to go about finding him."

Karchuk finished the bone sword for Pashintsev. He would have been happy and not bored any longer, but he had no one more about whom to think and for whom to work, so he clawed the earth with his nails and felt no point in life.

"Karchuk," Chepurny said, "you honored Pashintsev and now you are in shame, without a comrade. Please carry comrade Serbinov's letters to the mail car. You can walk and think about him. . . ."

Karchuk looked Serbinov over mournfully.

"Maybe I'll go tomorrow," he said. "Right now I've got no feeling for him . . . might even set off before evening, if I start feeling anything for the newcomer. . . ."

In the evening the soil exhaled and a fog came up. Chepurny lit the straw fire on the clay tower so that the missing Proshka could see it from afar. Serbinov lay in an empty house covered with bedding of a sort. He wanted to go to sleep and find peace in the stillness of the province. It seemed to him that he was separated from Moscow by not only space but by time as well. He curled up beneath the bedding and felt his legs and chest to be a second and also pitiful man, whom he caressed and warmed.

Karchuk came in without asking, just as though he lived in a wilderness or a brotherhood.

"I'm off," he said. "Give me your letters."

Serbinov gave him the letters, then asked, "Sit with me a bit. All the same it's on account of me that you'll be walking all night."

"No," Karchuk refused. "I can think about you myself."

Afraid of losing the letters, Karchuk took one in each hand, crushed them in his fists, and set off.

There was a clean sky above the misty earth and the moon rose into it. Its humble light weakened in the moist gloom of the fog and lit the earth as though it were an underwater depth. The last people walked quietly about Chevengur. Someone on the clay tower began a song so that he could be heard in the steppe, for he did not trust the bonfire alone. Serbinov covered his face with his hand, wishing to sleep and not see, but his eyes opened beneath his palm, and he was even less able to sleep. In the distance a concertina played a gay martial song. Judging by the tune, it was probably something like "Yablochko," but more skillful and affecting, some sort of Bolshevik foxtrot which Serbinov did not know. A wagon squeaked in the middle of the music. Someone must have arrived. Two equine voices rose up in the distance as Proletarian Strength whinnied from Chevengur and its arriving friend answered from the steppe.

Simon went outside. A mound of straw from old wattle fences was blazing majestically on the clay beacon. The little concertina found trusty hands and did not slacken its sound, instead driving them ever faster, summoning the populace to life in one place.

Prokofy arrived in the phaeton with the naked musician who at one time had left Chevengur on foot to search for a wife. They were drawn by the whinnying horse. Behind the wagon walked ten or more barefoot women, two by two with Klavdyusha in the first rank.

The Chevengurians met their future wives silently. They stood beneath the beacon and made no step toward the women and said no word of greeting, for although the new arrivals were comrades and people, at the same time they were women. Kopenkin felt shame and reverence before the women they had found, and in addition he was afraid to look at the women, out of conscience about Rosa Luxemburg. He left to go see to the bellowing Proletarian Strength.

Prokofy stopped the music and made a sign to the procession of women that they had to hurry no further.

"Comrades of communism!" Prokofy said, turning to the silence of the little town. "I have fulfilled the measure which you choose. Before you stand your future spouses, brought to Chevengur in parade march, with a special woman of the poor which I brought for Zheev. . . ."

"What do you mean you brought her?" Zheev asked.

"By machine," Prokofy explained. "Musician, address the spouses with your instrument and play a flourish for them so that they will not mourn in Chevengur, but will love the Bolsheviks."

The musician played.

"Excellent," Prokofy approved. "Klavdyusha, lead the women to shelter. Tomorrow we'll assign them a viewing and a triumphal march past the municipal organization. The bonfire gives no conception of their faces."

Klavdyusha led the drowsy women into the dark of the empty town.

Chepurny embraced Prokofy about the chest and then said to him alone, "Prosha, we don't need the women so quick now that you've showed up. Want me to make you something and give it to you tomorrow?"

"Give me Klavdyusha!"

"I would have given her to you, Prosh, but you already gave her to yourself. Please, choose something else. . . ."

"Let me think on it," Prokofy said, postponing it. "Right now for some reason I don't need anything and don't feel any appetite . . . Hello, Sasha!" he said to Dvanov.

"Hello, Prosh!" Dvanov answered in the same way. "Did you see other people anywhere? Why are they living out there?"

"They live out there because of patience," Prokofy informed them to reassure them. "They don't feed themselves on revolution. They have got counterrevolution organized and enemy winds howl over the steppe. We are

the only ones left with any honor. . . .”

“You talk too much, comrade,” Serbinov said. “I’m from there and I am also a revolutionist.”

“Well then, things must have gotten worse for you there,” Prokofy concluded.

Serbinov could not answer. The bonfire on the tower died down and was not stoked again that night.

“Prosh,” Chepurny asked in the dark “I ask you, who gave you the music?”

“A passing bourgeois. He sold me the music cheap and I did the same thing to his life. There’s no pleasure in Chevengur now, except for the bell, and then that is religion. . . .”

“Prosh, we’ve got pleasure enough here now, without the bell or any other means too!”

Prokofy crawled into the bottom chamber of the tower and went to sleep, out of exhaustion. Chepurny also bent low near him.

“Breathe more, warm up the air,” Prokofy requested. “For some reason the road has left me chilled.”

Chepurny stood up and breathed quickly for a long time, then took off his overcoat, bundled Prokofy up in it, leaned against him, and also found oblivion in the alienation of life.

In the morning a pleasant day appeared. The musician was first up, and he played a preparatory march on the concertina, which aroused the well-rested miscellania.

The wives sat ready, already dressed and shod by Klavdyusha in whatever she had turned up in the nooks and crannies of Chevengur.

The miscellaneous came later and in their confusion avoided looking at those whom they had been appointed to love. Gopner and Dvanov and Serbinov and the first conquerors of Chevengur were also there. Serbinov had come to request that he be supplied with a carriage for his departure, but Kopenkin refused to give him Proletarian Strength for the trip.

“I would give him my overcoat,” he said. “I could give you myself for a day. Take everything you want, but don’t ask for the horse. Don’t get me mad. What would I ride to Germany on then?”

Then Serbinov asked for the other horse which had pulled Prokofy the day before, for which he turned to Chepurny. He answered Serbinov that there was no need to go, that maybe he’d settle down there, since there was communism in Chevengur and pretty soon everybody would show up there anyway. Why go to them, when they are all headed the other direction?

Serbinov left him. “Where am I going to in such a hurry anyway?” he thought. “That burning portion of my body which left into Sofia Alexandrovna has already been digested and destroyed, like any other untraceable food. . . .”

Chepurny began to speak loudly, so Serbinov left himself in peace in

order to hear out the unknown word.

“Prokofy we can call a pain taken to ease the burden of the proletariat,” Chepurny said in the midst of the people. “Here he has gone and got women for us and though they’re fitting by quantity, the dose is almost too small . . . but for all that, I address the women’s contingent to sound for them a word of joy and anticipation! I ask you now, anybody, why do we respect natural conditions? Because we eat them! And why have we used our gestures to call these women here? Because we respect nature for its food and women for their love. I announce here our gratitude to the women who have come to Chevengur as one does to specially constructed comrades. May they live as one with us and feed our peace and through the comrade people of Chevengur come to possess happiness! . . .”

The women were immediately frightened. The former men had always begun their business with them right at the end, while these held out and waited, giving speeches first. So the women pulled the overcoats and greatcoats in which Klavdyusha had dressed them right up to their noses, covering the openings of their mouths. They were not afraid of love, for they did not love, but they did fear torment, the near destruction of their bodies by these dry, patient men in soldiers’ greatcoats, their faces etched by the trials of their lives.

These women possessed no youth or other obvious age. They had exchanged their bodies, their places of age and blossoming, for food, and since the procurement of food was always unprofitable for them, their bodies were expended before their death. Long before it. For that reason they resembled both young girls and old women, both mothers and younger, undernourished sisters. For them the caresses of husbands would have been painful and terrible. During their journey Prokofy had tried to squeeze them, bringing them into the carriage to test, but his love made them scream as though they were ill.

Now the women sat opposite the eyes of the Chevengurians and stroked their wrinkles of extra skin which covered their worn out bones beneath their clothes. Only Klavdyusha was sufficiently comfortable and fluffy among this Chevengurian flock, but sympathy towards her was already controlled by Prokofy.

Yakov Titych observed the women the most thoughtfully. One of them seemed to him to be sadder than the rest, and she was freezing beneath an old greatcoat. How many times he had been ready to give up half his life, and this back when there was still a lot of it left, if only he could find himself a real relation of the heart among the strange and miscellaneous. And though the miscellaneous everywhere were his comrades, it was only because of the misery and crowding. That was the woe of life, not origin in one womb. Now there remained in Yakov Titych not half a life, but only the last scraps, but he could have traded freedom and bread in Chevengur for a relation, and for the sake of that relative he would have been glad to go back out on the

unknown road of wandering and need.

Yakov Titych went over to the woman he had chosen and touched her face. He thought that from the outside she resembled him.

"Whose are you?" he asked. "How do you live in the world?"

The woman bent her head away from him. Yakov Titych glimpsed her neck below the nape. There was a big sink there, where had gathered all the muck of homelessness, but when the woman raised her head again, the entire head stood meekly on that neck, which was precisely like a desiccated stalk.

"Whose are you that you're such a ragamuffin?"

"Nobody's," the woman answered, then frowned and began to play with her fingers, alienated from Yakov Titych.

"Let's go to the house, I'll scrape the dirt and scabs off your neck for you," Yakov Titych said once more.

"I don't want to," the woman refused. "Give me a little something or other, then I'll get up."

While on the road Prokofy had promised her wedded bliss, but she, just as her girl friend, poorly understood what that might be. They simply guessed that her body would be tormented only by one man, instead of by many, which was why she asked for a gift before the torment. Afterwards men never give anything anyway, but just chase you out. She hunched up even more beneath her big greatcoat, guarding beneath it her naked body, which served her both as life and means of life, and which was her only undashed hope. For woman it is an alien world which begins just above the layer of their skin, and she had been able to acquire nothing from that world, not even clothes for warming and preserving her body to be the source of her own food and of happiness for others.

"What kind of wives are these, Prosh?" Chepurny asked, doubtful. They're like mongrels born premature . . . there's not enough stuff to them."

"What do you want?" Prokofy answered. "Communism can be their ninth month!"

"That's right!" Chepurny exclaimed happily. "It's like they're in a warm belly here in Chevengur, and soon they'll ripen up and be born whole."

"Of course! And even more so since particular plushness isn't desirable for a miscellaneous proletarian. He just wants to be spared the exhaustion of life. And what do you want? All the same these here are women, people with an empty place, so that there's where to put things."

"There aren't any wives like these," Dvanov said. "There's mothers like this though, if anybody has one."

"Or little sisters," Pashintsev defined. "I had a little sister who was all rusty like them. She didn't eat well and then up and died on account of herself."

Chepurny listened to everybody and, out of habit, was getting ready to propose a decision, but then he grew doubtful as he remembered his own low intelligence.

"What do we have more of though, husbands or orphans?" He asked, not thinking about his question. "If you want I'll formulate it all this way. For starters all the comrades should kiss those pitiful women once each, and then it will be clearer what we should make out of them. Comrade musician, give the music to Piyusya, if you will, and let him play something from the music with notes."

Piyusya began a march, in which one could feel the movement of troops. He did not respect songs of solitude or waltzes, and he was ashamed to play them.

It fell to Dvanov to kiss all the women first. During the kisses he opened his mouth and squeezed the lips of each woman in his own lips in a greedy tenderness, meanwhile lightly embracing the next woman with his left hand, so that she would stand steady and not turn away from him until he was through touching her.

Serbinov too had to kiss all the future wives, but he was last. Even that however pleased him. Simon always felt calmed in the presence of a second person, even an unknown one, and he lived in satisfaction for several days after kisses. Now he no longer wished to leave. He clenched his hands together in pleasure and smiled, invisible among the movement of people and tempo of the musical march.

"Well, what do you say, comrade Dvanov?" Chepurny was interested in what was further to come, as he wiped his mouth. "Are they wives or are they better fit to be mothers? Piyusya, give us some silence for conversation!"

Dvanov did not know himself. He had never seen his own mother and he had never felt a wife. He recalled the dry antiquity of the female bodies which he had just held up to kiss and how one woman had clung to him herself, growing weak like a little twig and hiding her accustomed, sad face by hanging it low. Dvanov held up his recollections near her. The woman had smelled of milk and a sweaty chemise. He kissed once more in the bodice of her chemise, as in youth he had kissed the body and sweat of his dead father.

"Better as mothers," he said.

"Whoever is an orphan here, he can choose a mother for himself now!" Chepurny announced. All of them were orphans, and there were only about ten women. No one budged towards the women to be the first to receive his mother. Each man was in advance giving her to a more needy comrade. Then Dvanov understood that the women were also orphans. Better they should choose themselves brothers and other relatives from among the Chevengurians in advance, and then let it stay that way.

The women immediately chose themselves the oldest of the miscellaneous, and two women wanted to live with Yakov Titych, so he took both. Not a single one of the women believed in the paternalism or fraternalism of the Chevengurians, so they tried to find themselves husbands who needed nothing but sleep in a warm place. Only one dark partial girl went over to Serbinov.

"What is it you want?" he asked in terror.

"I want to have a warm little ball born inside of me and all that will come with it."

"I can't. Soon I'll be leaving for good."

The dark girl exchanged Serbinov for Kirei.

"You . . . you're an all right woman," Kirei said to her. "I'll give you whatever you want! When your warm little bundle gets born, he won't be cold then."

Prokofy took Klavdyusha's hand.

"Well, and what shall we do, citizeness Klobdz?"

"Well, Prosh, our task is one of consciousness. . . ."

"That too," Prokofy said definitively. He picked up a piece of dreary clay and threw it somewhere into solitude. "For some reason there is always something serious on my soul . . . maybe it's time to organize a family, maybe on the other hand better just to endure communism a bit . . . how much of a fund have you got saved up for me?"

"What how much? I gave you what I just went and sold, Prosh. They only gave me a price for the two fur coats and the silver. The rest just disappeared."

"All right, all right . . . you can give me an account this evening. I believe you of course, but I worry . . . and the money at your aunt's is the same? All right?"

"What else, Prosh? That's a sure spot for the money. But when are you going to take me to the provincial capital? You also promised to show me the center, but instead you've drawn me into this philistinism, again. Why am I alone here with the beggar women? There's nobody to try on a new dress with! And who would I show it to?! You call this a rural society! Ha! These are parishioners on a pilgrimage. Why do you torture me with them?"

Prokofy sighed. What can be done with a personage like that, if its mind is worse than its feminine charms?

"Go on, Klavdyusha, go take care of those women and I'll think a bit. One mind is a good thing, but a second one is one too many."

The Bolsheviks and the miscellaneous had already left their former place. Once again they began to work at making things for those comrades in whom they sensed their own ideas. Only Kopenkin had not started to work. He morosely cleaned and stroked his horse, then smeared his gun with goose grease, from the reserves he had not touched. After that he went off to find Pashintsev, who was grinding stones.

"Vas," Kopenkin said. "Why are you sitting and wasting yourself? All the women have come. Even before them Semyon brought his carpet bag to town. How come you're living here in oblivion? I mean the bourgeoisie is going to come for sure and where are your bombs, comrade Pashintsev? Where is your revolution and its protective national park?"

Pashintsev fished some bit of dry muck out of his injured eye and with the force of a fingernail stuck it into the fence.

"I sense that Stepan, and I salute you. That's why I am destroying my strength in this stone, because otherwise I'd mourn and weep out in the burdocks. . . . Where is this Piyusya? Why does he have his music hanging on a nail?"

Piyusya was gathering sorrel behind the former houses.

"You want music?" he asked from behind a barn. "You missing heroism?"

"Piyus, play a little 'Yablochko' for me and Kopenkin, give us a mood for living!"

"All right, wait a second and I'll give it to you."

Piyusya brought the chromatic instrument and played "Yablochko" for the two comrades with the serious face of a professional artist. Kopenkin and Pashintsev cried emotionally while Piyusya worked silently before them. He was not living then, but laboring.

"Stop, don't undo me completely!" Pashintsev asked. "Give me some cheerlessness."

"That I can give you," Piyusya agreed and played a protracted melody.

Pashintsev dried his face, listened closely to the cheerless sounds, and soon began to sing behind the music himself:

*Ah, my comrade in arms,  
Ride ahead with your song!  
Long past time we met death . . .  
Now 'tis shameful to live, and so mournful to die!*

*Oh, move closer, my comrade,  
Two wombs promised us life.  
Though my mother said: Best to wait  
Be sure first that your foe he is dead  
Only then on him lay down your head . . .*

"You'll get the heavens," Kopenkin, who sat without activity, said to cut the singer short. "You didn't get a woman so you want to surround her with songs. There's one of the hags now, coming along at a good clip."

Kirei's future wife came up, her face as dark as a Pecheneg's daughter.

"What do you want?" Kopenkin asked her.

"Nothing special. I want to listen. Music makes my heart ache."

"Tphoo! Witch!" Kopenkin spat, then stood up to leave.

At this point Kirei showed up to reclaim his spouse.

"Where are you running off to, Grusha? I got some buckwheat for you. Let's go grind the grains so we can eat blintzes this evening. I felt like something in the pastry line."

Together they went off into the shed where Kirei used to sleep occasionally before but where now he had prepared a shelter for himself and

Grusha for some time to come.

Kopenkin set off along Chevengur. He felt like having a look at the open steppe, where now he no longer even rode, so accustomed had he without noticing grown to the crowded fuss of Chevengur. Proletarian Strength, quartered in one of the barns, heard Kopenkin's steps and whinnied to its friend with its mournful muzzle. Kopenkin took Proletarian Strength with him and the horse began to caper alongside of him, presensing a ride in the steppe. On the outskirts of town Kopenkin leapt up on the horse, drew his saber, screamed an oath of displeasure from within his too-long silent chest, and galloped off into the autumnal quiet of the steppe, which rang as though made of granite.

Only Pashintsev saw Proletarian Strength break out into the steppe and disappear with its rider into the distant murk, which resembled nothing so much as night being born. Pashintsev had only just climbed up on the roof from where he loved to observe the emptiness of cultivated space and the currents of air above it. "He won't come back now," Pashintsev thought. "Time I got down to conquering Chevengur, so that Kopenkin will be pleased."

Kopenkin returned three days later. He rode at a walk into town on a much thinner horse. He was dozing.

"Guard Chevengur," he said to Dvanov and the two miscellanias who stood in his road. "Give the horse some grass, but I'll water him myself." Kopenkin loosed his horse, then fell asleep on a trampled barefoot piece of ground. Dvanov led the horse to some high grass and thought about how to build a cheap proletarian cannon to protect Chevengur. He found the grass and turned the horse loose. Then Dvanov himself stopped in the thick of the weeds. Now he was not thinking of anything, and the old watchman in his mind kept the peace for his treasure. He would allow in only one visitor, who now was wandering about somewhere outside of thought. But she was not to be seen outside. An empty, muffled earth spread out before him, while a melting sun labored in the heavens like something dreary and artificial, and the people of Chevengur thought not of cannons but of one another. Then the watchman opened the rear door of memory and Dvanov again felt the warmth of consciousness in his head. He was walking in the village at night, and he was a little boy. His father led him and little Sasha closed his eyes, sleeping and waking as they walked.

"How come the long day got you so weak, Sasha? Come on up in my arms, you can sleep on my shoulder."

And his father took him upward onto his own body, where Sasha fell asleep next to his father's throat. His father was taking fish to sell in the village and his sack of false bream smelled dramp and grassy. There had been a cloudburst at the end of that day, so there was bad mud, cold, and standing water on the road. Suddenly Sasha woke up and screamed. A heavy cold was creeping down his little face and his father was swearing at the muzhik who had passed them in a buckboard, splashing father and son with his wheel.

"Papa, why does the mud come off the wheel?"

"The wheel turns, Sash, and the mud gets worked up so it gallops off because of its own weight."

"We need a wheel!" Dvanov found his answer aloud. "A forged metal disk that we can use to throw bricks and stones and trash at the enemy. We've got no explosives . . . we can turn the wheel with a horse drive and help it by hand . . . we could even throw dust and sand . . . Gopner is sitting up on the dam right now. Probably eating his buckwheat up there again. . . ."

"Am I disturbing you?" asked the slowly approaching Serbinov.

"No, but then so what? I wasn't busy with myself."

Serbinov finished smoking the last of the cigarettes from his Moscow supplies and feared what he would be smoking in the future.

"It seems you knew Sofia Alexandrovna?"

"I did," Dvanov answered. "You knew her too?"

"I did too. . . ."

Kopenkin, who was sleeping near the foot path, got up on his hands and knees, screamed briefly in his delirium, and again began snoring in a dream, rustling the dead grass beneath his nose with the air.

Dvanov looked over at Kopenkin and reassured himself that his friend was asleep.

"I remembered her right up until Chevengur, but here I've forgotten about her," Alexander said. "Where is she living now and how come she spoke to you about me?"

"She's in Moscow, at a factory there. She remembers you. I've noticed that for you here in Chevengur people are like an idea for one another, and you are an idea for her. There's still a spiritual calm that goes from you to her. You are an activating warmth for her. . . ."

"You haven't understood us completely correctly. Though I'm glad all the same that she is alive, I'm also going to think about her."

"That's right, think about her. . . . Now she is alone and looking at Moscow. There are trams clanging past now and an awful lot of people, but not every person wants to acquire them."

Dvanov had never seen Moscow, so that out of all of it he was able to imagine only Sofia Alexandrovna. His heart filled with shame and the sticky weight of memory. At one time the warmth of life had flowed from Sonya and poured over him, and he might well have enclosed himself within the closeness of one person until death, and only now did he understand that terrible, unrealized life of his in which he might have remained forever, like in a house that had fallen down. A sparrow dashed past on the wind, then lit on a fence and screamed in horror. Kopenkin raised his head, glanced with white eyes about the forgotten world, and burst into sincere tears. His arms leaned powerlessly in the dust and held up a torso weak from the agitation of his dreams. "Sasha, my Sasha! Why didn't you ever tell me that's torture for her to be there in that grave and that her wounds hurt her? Why am I living here

monument  
end of art

and leaving her alone in the torments of the grave? . . .”

Kopenkin spoke the words with a sob of complaint at his offense, unable to endure the grief which roared within his body. Shaggy, elderly, and sobbing, he tried to leap to his feet so as to gallop off. “You swine! Where is my horse? Where is my Proletarian Strength? You’ve poisoned him in the barn! You have deceived me with communism! I’ll die because of you!”

Then Kopenkin collapsed back and returned to his dreams.

Serbinov looked into the distance, where Moscow lay beyond thousands of miles, and where his mother lay in the orphanage of the grave and suffered in the ground. Dvanov went over to Kopenkin, put the sleeping man’s head on his cap, and saw Kopenkin’s half-open eyes, which ran about in dreams. “Why do you reproach us?” Alexander whispered. “Does my father not suffer too at the bottom of the lake, waiting for me? I too remember. . . .”

Proletarian Strength stopped eating grass and picked its careful way over to Kopenkin, its hooves silent. The horse bent its head to Kopenkin’s face and sniffed the man’s breathing, then touched his lightly closed lids with its tongue. Kopenkin grew calmer, closed his eyes entirely, and subsided into continuing sleep. Dvanov tied the horse to a fence near Kopenkin and set off with Serbinov towards the dam and Gopner. Serbinov’s stomach no longer hurt and he forgot that Chevengur was a strange place, the site of a week-long business trip. His body had grown used to the smell of this town and to the rarified air of the steppe. A clay monument to Prokofy stood on the ground near one of the houses on the edge of town. It was protected from the rain by a covering of burdocks. Not long before Chepurny had been thinking about Prokofy and then had made him a monument, which completely satisfied and ended his feelings toward Prokofy. Now Chepurny had begun to miss Karchuk, who had departed with Serbinov’s letters, and so he was preparing the materials to make a monument to that hidden comrade.

The monument to Prokofy was a weak likeness, but for that very reason it immediately reminded one of both Prokofy and Chepurny with equal facility. The artist had sculpted his monument to his chosen beloved comrade with the tenderness of inspiration and the coarseness of inexperienced labor, and the monument turned out like a cohabitation, laying bare the honesty of Chepurny’s art.

Serbinov did not know the worth of other art. He was stupid in the conversations of Moscow society because he sat and took pleasure in the way people looked, without understanding or listening to what they said. He and Dvanov stopped before the monument.

“It should have been made from stone, and not clay,” Serbinov said. “Otherwise time and the weather will melt it away. This isn’t art, of course. It is the end of the universal prerevolutionary hackwork of labor and art. For the first time I am seeing a thing without lies and exploitation.”

Dvanov understood nothing. He did not know how things could be

otherwise. They both went on to the river valley.

Gopner was not working on the dam. He sat on the shore making a winter window for Yakov Titych out of a small tree. The old man was afraid that his two women, his new daughters, would be cold in the winter. Dvanov and Serbinov waited while Gopner finished the frame, so that together they could all begin to build the wooden disk for throwing bricks and stones at any opponents which Chevengur might have. Dvanov sat and listened to how quiet it had grown in town. Those who had received for themselves a new mother or daughter rarely emerged from their dwellings, trying instead to work under the one roof with their relatives, preparing unknown things. Could it truly be that they were happier in their homes than out in the air?

Dvanov could not know, and because of the sadness of the unknown he made a superfluous motion. He stood, thought a bit, and then went to look for material for the shooting disk. He walked through the comfort of the barns and backyards of Chevengur until evening. In this stagnation, in the depths of the little wormwood forests it would also have been possible somehow to exist wholeheartedly for the good of distant people, in an enduring abandonment. Dvanov found sundry dead things like worn-out shoes, wooden tar barrels, dead sparrows, and other bits and pieces. Dvanov picked up these bits, expressed his regrets at their demise and oblivion, and then returned them to their former places, so that all might be whole in Chevengur until the better day of redemption within communism. Dvanov stumbled into something in a thicket of goosefoot and only just managed to pull himself free. He had fallen between the spokes of a cannon wheel which had lain forgotten since the war. It was absolutely right in diameter and strength to make his throwing machine. It was difficult enough to roll it, for the wheel possessed a weight greater than Dvanov's own, so Alexander called Prokofy to help. Prokofy had been wandering through the fresh air with Klavdyusha. They got the wheel to the smithy, where Gopner tested the wheel's build, approved of it, and then stayed in the smithy to sleep near the wheel, so that he could think out the whole of the work in peace.

As his dwelling Prokofy had chosen the brick Bolshevik house where earlier they had all slept and lived without parting from one another. Now there was order there, the womanly cleaning of Klavdyusha, and already the stove was lit every other day to dry the air. Flies lived on the ceiling, the room was surrounded by sturdy walls which preserved Prokofy's familial silence, and the floor was scrubbed as though the following day would be the Sabbath. When he had lived in his mother and father's house Prokofy had loved to rest on the bed and watch the pedestrian movement of the flies along the warm ceiling. He used to lie down, grow calm, and ponder ideas about how to acquire the means for the further life and strength of his family. That day he brought Dvanov with him to feed him tea and jams and Klavdyusha's sugar buns.

"Look, Sash, there's flies on the ceiling," Prokofy pointed. "Flies also

used to live in our hut. You remember that or have you already lost sight of it?"

"I remember," Alexander answered. "Even more I remember the birds in the sky. They flew around the sky like flies around the ceiling, and now they fly above Chevengur as though it were a room."

"That's right, of course . . . I mean, you lived by the lake, not in a hut. Besides the sky, you didn't have any covering, so that the birds were sort of your native flies."

After tea Prokofy and Klavdyusha got into bed, warmed one another, and fell quiet, while Dvanov slept on the wooden divan. In the morning Alexander pointed out to Prokofy how the birds flew in the lower atmosphere above Chevengur. Prokofy had noticed them before. They resembled nimble flies in the morning kitchen of nature. Chepurny was walking barefoot not too far off, only his greatcoat covering his bare body. Chepurny's father had returned from the imperialist war in just that way. Occasionally stove pipes smoked, giving off the same smell a mother does in a hut, after she has been preparing food.

"Sash, we ought to be laying in food for our communism to winter on," Prokofy said, concerned.

"We ought to get started with it, all right," Dvanov agreed. "Except here you went and brought jam just for yourself, while Kopenkin hasn't drunk anything except for cold water in years."

"What do you mean, for myself?! Didn't I treat you yesterday, or maybe you didn't put enough in your glass and didn't get to try any. You want me to bring you a spoonful now?"

Dvanov didn't feel like preserves. He hurried off to find Kopenkin, in order to be with him during his time of sadness.

"Sasha!" Prokofy shouted after him, "Look at the sparrows! They dash about this environment like fat flies!"

Dvanov didn't hear, and Prokofy returned to the room of his family, where the flies flew. However he could see the birds above through his window. "They are identical," he decided on the birds and the flies. "I'll drop round the bourgeoisie on the fly and bring back two barrels of jam for all of communism. Then the miscellaneous can drink their fill of tea and have a good long nap beneath the heavens that are filled with birds as though it were a kitchen."

He looked the sky over one more time and then Prokofy reckoned that the sky covered a far more enormous property than did any ceiling. All of Chevengur stood beneath the sky like the furniture of one kitchen, in a family of miscellaneous people. And what if the miscellaneous were suddenly to push off on their roads again, Chepurny to die, and Chevengur were left to Sasha? Prokofy noticed here that he had miscalculated. He ought to have admitted that Chevengur was a family kitchen, in order that he could have become the oldest brother and heir to all the furniture beneath the clear blue

sky. Even just counting the sparrows, they were fatter and thicker in Chevengur than were the flies. Prokofy studied his quarters with an appraising eye and decided to exchange it for the town, and at a profit.

"Klavdyusha! Oh, Klavdyusha!" he yelled to his wife. "For some reason I feel like giving you all of our furniture."

"Marvellous. Give it to me," Klavdyusha said. "I'll take it to my aunt's before the mud comes."

"You can take it in good time," Prokofy agreed. "Only make sure you stay visiting there until I get all of Chevengur."

Klavdyusha understood well that she had to have things, but she could not understand why Prokofy had to remain alone in order to get the town, when as it was it was all but his. So she asked him about it.

"You don't have any kind of political innerlining," her spouse replied. "If you're here when I start getting the town, then obviously I'd only give it to you."

"Give it to me, Prosh! I'll come to fetch it with carts from the provincial capital."

"Just hold up on that hurry what you've got without orders! . . . Why should I give it to you? Because, people will say, he sleeps with her and not with us. He exchanges his body with her, so it can't be that he'd be stingy about giving her a town . . . but when you're not here, then everyone will find out that I'm not taking the town for myself."

"What do you mean you aren't taking it?!" Klavdyusha was offended. "Who are you going to leave it for then?"

"Lord above, what are you? A bureau for living? Listen to my formulation . . . why do I need a town, when I have no family and my whole body is in one piece? But when I take the town, then I'll evacuate it and summon you express from some other populated settlement . . . get yourself ready for now, while I go inventory the town. . . ."

Prokofy took a blank form from the revolutionary committee out of his trunk and went off to inventory his future property.

Commensurate with its zeal, the sun labored in the heavens for the sake of earthly warmth, but work in Chevengur had lessened. Kirei lay in the house on a pile of hay, holding his wife Grusha to him in drowsy rest.

"Comrade, why aren't you giving any presents to communism?" Prokofy asked Kirei when he came in to inventory the property.

Kirei woke up, but Grusha on the other hand had closed her eyes, out of shame of marriage.

"What's communism to me? Grusha is my comrade now, and I haven't found the time to work for her. I've got such debits of life now that you can't even find the time to get food. . . ."

After Prokofy left Kirei bent over Grusha and just beneath her throat sniffed at the life which was preserved there and the weak smell of deep warmth. At any time that the desire for happiness appeared Kirei could

receive both Grusha's warmth and her accumulated body within his own torso, and then feel the calm of a point in life. Who else could have given him that which he wished to give to Grusha and what could Kirei spare for her? Quite the opposite in fact, for now he was always tormented by conscience-stricken laboring, worrying that he was not getting enough food for Grusha and that he was holding up being able to outfit her with a dress. Kirei no longer considered himself a valuable person because now the very best, most hidden, and most tender parts of his body had passed inside Grusha. When he went out into the steppe for food Kirei noticed how the skyline above him had grown more pale than before and how the occasional birds cried more hollowly, while there was within his chest a spiritual weakness which would not pass. After gathering fruits and grains Kirei returned to Grusha exhausted and he resolved thereafter to think only of her, to consider her his idea of communism, and the only way he could be calm and happy. Then however his time of indifferent rest would pass and Kirei would again feel unhappiness and the pointlessness of life without the substance of love. The world again blossomed about him, the sky turned into a soft blue silence, the air became audible, the birds sang of their own disappearance above the steppe, and it seemed to Kirei that all of this had been created to be higher than his own life. After new relations with Grusha though the entire world once again seemed misty and pitiful, and Kirei had no envy for it.

The other miscellaneous, who were younger in years, acknowledged the women as mothers and merely warmed themselves next to them, for the air of Chevengur had grown chill with autumn. This existence with their mothers was sufficient for them. No longer did any of them share his body with the surrounding comrades by laboring to produce gifts. In the evenings the miscellaneous took the women to the far places of the river, where they washed them. The women were so thin that they were ashamed to go to the baths, even though Chevengur had one which could have been fired up.

Prokofy went round to all the population present and inventoried all of the dead things of the town, taking them over into his premature possessions. Towards the end he came to the smithy on the edge of town, where he noted it into his papers under the gaze of Gopner and Dvanov, who were working there. From the distance Kopenkin came up with a log across his shoulder, while Serbinov held the log from behind, near the middle and clumsily, like an intellectual.

"Get out of here!" Kopenkin said to Prokofy, who was standing in the entrance to the smithy. "There's people holding some weight and you're standing there holding a paper!"

Prokofy made way, but jotted down the log in his inventory before going away satisfied.

Kopenkin chucked the log down and then sat to rest.

"Sasha, when is Proshka going to have the sort of troubles that make him stop in the middle of where he is and start crying?"

Dvanov looked at Kopenkin with eyes grown lighter from tiredness and curiosity.

"You mean you wouldn't keep him from troubles then? I mean no one ever called him to come to them and so he forgot how to need people, and then he began to collect property in the place of comrades."

Kopenkin thought that over. He once had seen an unnecessary man crying in a wartime steppe. The man sat on a rock, the winds of autumn weather blowing in his face, and even the Red Army supply wagons wouldn't take him because he had lost all of his documents, while the man himself had a wound in his groin and for unknown reasons he cried, perhaps because he was left behind, perhaps because his groin had grown empty while his life and head had been preserved in their entirety.

"I'd protect him, Sasha. I can't control myself in front of a troubled man . . . I'd take him up on my horse with me and carry him off into the depths of life. . . ."

"That means that it's better not to wish him trouble or otherwise you'll start feeling sorry for your enemy."

"I won't do that either, Sasha," Kopenkin said. "Let him be there in the middle of communism and he'll transfer to the people's staff on his own."

That evening rain began in the steppe, passing by on the edge of Chevengur and leaving the town dry. Chepurny was not surprised by this phenomenon, for he knew that nature had long known of the town's communism and thus did not sprinkle on it at an unnecessary time. However a whole group of the miscellaneous, as well as Chepurny and Piyusya, went out into the steppe to look at the wet spots and convince themselves. Kopenkin did not believe in the rain and did not go anywhere, but rather rested with Dvanov against a fence near the smithy. Kopenkin poorly understood the use of conversation and immediately told Dvanov that air and water are cheap but necessary things. The same might be said of stones, since surely they were necessary to something. Kopenkin was not expressing meaning with his words, but rather his disposition towards Dvanov. He was in torment during the silence.

"Comrade Kopenkin," Dvanov asked, "which is dearer to you, Chevengur or Rosa Luxemburg?"

"Rosa is, comrade Dvanov," Kopenkin answered in fright. "There was more communism in her than in all of Chevengur, which is how come the bourgeoisie killed her and the town here is on one piece . . . but surrounded with the elements, of course. . . ."

Dvanov held no fixed love in reserve. He lived only by Chevengur, and he feared wasting it. He existed only on everyday people like Kopenkin, Gopner, Pashintsev, and the miscellaneous, but he was continually frightened that one morning they would all disappear somewhere or die off by degrees. Dvanov bent forward, tore off a blade of grass, and examined its humble body. It was possible too that it would not be preserved, when there would

Cossacks & Cadets  
Whites Reds

be no one left.

Kopenkin rose to his feet to head toward a man running in from the steppe.

Chepurny dashed by silently and without stopping, going deeper into the town. Kopenkin grabbed him by the greatcoat and cut him off.

"How come you're hurrying but not giving any alarm?"

"Cossacks! Cadets on horses! Comrade Kopenkin, please! Ride! Fight! I'm going to get a carbine!"

"Sasha, go sit a bit in the smithy," Kopenkin said. "I'll finish them off by myself, only don't you peek out. I'll be back in a second."

The four miscellaneous who had been walking out in the steppe with Chepurny came running back, while Piyusya lay down somewhere and found a target in his solitary way. His shot flashed fire in the darkening silence. Dvanov dashed toward the shot with his revolver drawn. After a short time he was passed by Kopenkin on Proletarian Strength, who hurried by at its heavy pace, while these first soldiers were already being followed by the appearance of the entire armed force of Bolsheviks and miscellaneous, heading out from the outskirts of town. Those who lacked guns carried fence posts or pokers, and the women came with them. Serbinov ran behind Yakov Titych with his lady's Browning and looked for whom to shoot. Chepurny rode out on the horse which had pulled Prokofy, while Prokofy ran behind, advising Chepurny first to organize a staff and designate a commander, or else a massacre would begin.

Chepurny discharged his cartridge clip into the distance as he galloped and tried to catch up with Kopenkin, although he could not. Kopenkin leapt his horse over the prone Piyusya and did not make ready to shoot at his enemy. Rather he drew his sword, in order to touch his opponents more closely.

The enemy was riding along the former road. They held their carbines crossways, raised in their arms. They did not prepare to shoot, but they urged their horses forward. They possessed orders and structure, so they held evenly and unafraid before the first shots of Chevengur. Dvanov understood their superiority, halted his legs in a little gully, and knocked the commander of the detachment down with the fourth shot from his revolver. Still though the enemy did not fall apart. As they rode they moved the commander somewhere within their structure and moved their horses to a full trot. This calm attack held the mechanical strength of victory, but the Chevengurians had the elements which seek to defend life. In addition, Chevengur had communism on its side, which Chepurny knew most excellently. He halted his horse, raised his rifle, and dropped three of the enemy detachment from their horses to the ground, while from the grass Piyusya was able to cripple the legs of two of the horses with bullets. They fell down behind the detachment, where they tried to crawl on their stomachs and dig into the dust of the earth with their muzzles. Pashintsev dashed past Dvanov dressed in his suit of mail

and visored helmet. With his right hand he pulled the pin of a grenade, trying to seize the enemy with nothing more than the mental fears of an explosion, since the bomb had no stuffing and Pashintsev had with him no other weapon.

The enemy detachment immediately stopped in place of its own accord, as though there in all but two horsemen. Then the soldiers whom Chevengur did not know raised their carbines to some audible command, pointed them at the approaching miscellaneous and Bolsheviks, and then without firing continued to ride into the town.

Evening stood immobile above the people and the night grew no darker above them. The mechanical enemy thundered its hooves along the virgin sod, cutting the miscellaneous off from the open steppe, the road into the future realms of light, and the way out of Chevengur. Pashintsev yelled for the bourgeoisie to give up, and then made as if he were going to light his bomb. Once more an audible command was spoken in the advancing detachment and the carbines flashed, then died down. Seven miscellaneous and Pashintsev were swept away from their feet, while four more Chevengurians tried to endure their frothing wounds as they ran forward to kill their enemy in hand-to-hand combat.

Kopenkin had already reached the detachment, where he flung Proletarian Strength forward, trying to destroy the detachment with his sabre and the weight of his horse. Proletarian Strength put a hoof down on the torso of the first horse it met, and the horse lay down with shattered ribs. Kopenkin loosed his sabre on a flight through the air, helping it with all the living strength of his body to slash the cavalier apart even before he could memorize the man's face. The sabre bit into the saddle of the alien warrior with a shattering sound, stinging Kopenkin's hand. Then he grabbed the rider's young and red-haired head with his left hand, let go for a second to wind up, and then with that same left hand smashed the rider on top of his head, throwing him from the horse to the ground. A stranger's sword blinded one of Kopenkin's eyes. Not knowing what to do, he grabbed the sword with one hand and with his other cut off the arm of the man who had attacked him with the sword, then threw it to one side, the weight of a stranger's limb lopped off at the elbow still attached. Here Kopenkin noticed Gopner, who was firing his revolver into the thick of the horses, holding the gun by the barrel. The skin on his cheeks and near his ears had split from the tension and the thinness of his face, or perhaps from slash wounds, and his blood gushed forth in waves. Gopner tried to wipe it off so that it would not tickle and thus interfere with his fighting. Kopenkin kicked the rider to his right in the stomach, which made it impossible to ride over to Gopner. He got righted just in time to give his horse a kick so it would jump; otherwise he would have trampled Gopner, who had already been cut down.

Kopenkin burst out of the encirclement of strangers when Chepurny ran up against the other side of the mounted enemy patrol and dashed his

poor horse through the galloping line of cavalry, trying to kill them with the weight of his rifle, for which he no longer had cartridges. The savagery of one high swing of the empty carbine brought Chepurny flying down from the horse, for he had missed his intended enemy, and he disappeared into the thicket of trampling horse's legs. Kopenkin took advantage of the brief respite to suck the bloody left hand with which he had grabbed the sword blade, and then he flung himself back into the fight to kill the rest of the strangers. He slashed through the enemy detachment unharmed and remembering nothing, then once again turned the snarling Proletarian Strength back, in order to hold the strangers to account in his memory. Otherwise the battle would have given him no comfort and victory would have lacked the sensation of exhausted laboring at the death of the enemy. Five riders broke from the mounted detachment and slashed at the miscellaneous who were fighting off in the distance, but the miscellaneous knew how to defend themselves patiently and tenaciously. This was not the first enemy who had stood between them and life. They fought the troops with bricks and lit straw bonfires on the edge of town, taking the tiny embers in their hands and throwing them into the muzzles of the capering cavalry horses. Yakov Titych hit one horse in the rump with a burning coal so that the coal hissed on the sweaty hide under the horse's tail, and the excitable screaming mare carried her soldier off two or more miles away from Chevengur.

"How come you're fighting with fire?" asked one mounted soldier, who had hurried over just in time. "I'm going to kill you right now!"

"So kill me then," Yakov Titych said. "Can't beat you fellows with just flesh, and we've got no iron."

"Let me take a run at it, so that you won't notice death."

"Take a run at it then. How many people are dead already and still nobody takes death into account."

The soldier went off a ways, whipped his horse to a run, and chopped down the upright Yakov Titych. Serbinov dashed about with his last bullet, which he was saving for himself. He stopped and checked the mechanism of the revolver in fear, seeing whether it was still whole.

"I told him I'd kill him, and I chopped him down," the cavalry man said to Serbinov while he wiped his blade clean against his horse's hide. "Now maybe he'll learn that it's best not to fight with fire!"

The soldier was in no hurry to fight. He looked around for someone else to kill and for a guilty party. Serbinov raised his revolver at him.

"What's with you?" the soldier asked. "I'm not touching you!"

Serbinov thought how the soldier was correct and put away his revolver. The soldier turned his horse about and set it on Serbinov. Simon fell from a hoof blow to the stomach. He sensed how his heart was departing into the distance, from where it then returned again to beat itself into life. Serbinov followed his heart, but did not wish it particular success. After all, Sofia Alexandrovna would remain alive, preserving within her the traces of his

body and thus continuing his existence. Then the soldier bent low and, without a backswing, cut open Serbinov's stomach with his sword. Nothing came out, neither blood nor innards.

"It was you that went to shoot first," the soldier said. "If you hadn't been in such a big hurry to shoot first, you'd probably still be hanging around here in the world."

Dvanov was running with two revolvers, the second of which he had taken from the dead commander of the patrol. He was being chased by three horsemen, but then Kirei and Zheev grabbed them and pulled them off to chase them instead.

"Where are you off to?" the soldier who had killed Serbinov stopped Dvanov to ask.

Without answering, Dvanov blew him off the horse with both revolvers and then dashed off to help Kopenkin, who was dying somewhere. Nearby it was quiet. The battle had moved to the middle of Chevengur, where thundered the legs of horses.

"Grusha!" Kirei called in the advancing quiet of the field. He lay with his chest slashed open and his life weak.

"What's with you?" Dvanov said as he ran over to him. Kirei was unable to say his words.

"Well, good-bye," Alexander said, bending over him. "Let's kiss each other, so things will be easier."

Kirei opened his mouth in expectation and Dvanov embraced his lips in his own.

"Grusha alive or not?" Kirei was able to say.

"She died," Dvanov told him, to make things easier for him.

"And I'm going to die now too . . . it's starting to get dreary . . ." Kirei summoned the strength to speak one more time and then died, leaving his frozen eyes open to the outside.

"There's nothing more for you to look at," Alexander whispered, then covered Kirei's glaze with his eyelids and stroked the man's burning head. "Farewell."

Kopenkin broke free of the crush of Chevengur, bloody and without his sword, but still alive and battling. Four soldiers chased after him in pursuit on steadily tiring horses. Two of them halted their horses and shot at Kopenkin with their carbines. Kopenkin wheeled Proletarian Strength and dashed back, unarmed, riding straight at the enemy, for he wished to fight point blank. However Dvanov noticed Kopenkin's path to death, sat down to get a steady rest on his knees, and began to cut down the soldiers with his pair of revolvers, one after the other, in turn. Kopenkin was already galloping upon the soldiers, who had fallen beneath the stirrups of their excited horses. Two of the soldiers had fallen free, but the other two had not had time to free their legs, and their wounded horses carried them off into the steppe, bouncing the dead men beneath them.

"You alive, Sash?" Kopenkin asked when he saw him. "There's strange soldiers in the town and the people are all dead though . . . Hold it! . . . Some place on me is feeling poorly. . . ."

Kopenkin laid his head on the mane of Proletarian Strength.

"Take me down, Sash, so I can lay below for a bit. . . ."

Dvanov took him down to the ground. The blood of Kopenkin's first wounds had already dried on his slashed and torn greatcoat, while the new and still liquid blood had not yet had time to soak through.

Kopenkin lay on his back to rest.

"Turn your back to me, Sasha . . . you can see that I can't exist. . . ."

Dvanov turned away.

"Don't look at me anymore . . . I'm ashamed to be a dead man in front of you . . . I stayed too long in Chevengur and now I'm dying . . . and Rosa will have to suffer in the ground alone. . . ."

Suddenly Kopenkin sat up and thundered once again in his martial voice, "See, they're expecting us, comrade Dvanov!" Then he lay his dead face down and his body became all burning hot.

Proletarian Strength picked up Kopenkin's body by the greatcoat and carried it off to its native place, somewhere in the forgotten freedom of the steppe. Dvanov followed the horse on foot until the threads in the greatcoat ripped free, when Kopenkin became a half-naked thing more torn with wounds than covered with clothing. The horse sniffed the dead man all over and then began greedily to lick the blood and liquid from the gaping wounds, sharing the last possessions of its fallen companion and lessening the corruption of death. Dvanov got up onto Proletarian Strength and set off into the open night of the steppe. He rode until morning, not pushing the horse. Occasionally Proletarian Strength would stop, look back, and listen, but Kopenkin was silent.

In the afternoon Dvanov recognized an old road which he had seen in childhood and he began to keep Proletarian Strength to it. The road ran through a village and then passed within a mile of Lake Mutevo. Dvanov rode through his native country in that village on a walking horse. The huts and households looked newer and smoke came from the chimney pipes—it was midday—and the weeds had long ago been cut down from the sod roofs. The church watchman began to sound the hours; to Dvanov the noise of the familiar bell sounded like his time of childhood. He held the horse still near the outflow of the well, in order that it could drink and rest. A hunchbacked old man sat on the footings of a nearby hut. It was Petr Fedorovich Kondaev. He failed to recognize Dvanov, and Alexander did not remind him about himself. Petr Fedorovich was catching flies as they basked in the sun and crushing them in his hands with the joy of his life's satisfaction. He was not thinking, for he had forgotten about the strange rider.

Dvanov had no regrets about his homeland, and so he left it. The peaceful fields stretched out in desolate harvest. The lower earth smelled of the

sadness of decrepit grass, and there began the sky from which there was no exit, and the world was made an empty place.

Disturbed by the noon wind, the water in Lake Mutevo riffled slightly, although the wind was already dying in the distance. Dvanov rode up to the banks of the lake. In his early life he had bathed in it and fed himself from it. At one time its depths had calmed his father, and now Dvanov's last and closest comrade had been longing lonely decades for that lake in the closeness of the earth. Proletarian Strength bent its head forward and stamped its hoof. Something down below had caught it. Dvanov looked and saw that the horse's hoof had dragged a fishing pole from the banks of the shore. The dry, battered skeleton of a little fish was attached to the hook on the line, and Dvanov realized that this was his pole, forgotten here in childhood. He looked out over the silent, unchanging lake, and pricked up his ears. After all, his father yet remained. His bones, the living stuff of his body, the fabric of his sweat-soaked shirt, the whole motherhood of life and friendship. And there was there for Alexander a close, inseparable place where could be anticipated the return of that eternal friendship of blood which once the father had divided in his body for his son. Dvanov urged Proletarian Strength into the water, until it reached the horse's chest. Then, not saying farewell to the horse, continuing his own life, Dvanov got from the saddle into the water himself. He sought that same road along which once his father had passed in his curiosity about death, though Dvanov walked it in a feeling of shame at living in the face of that weak, forgotten body whose remains suffered in the grave because Dvanov remained ever and the same, bearing the same warming traces of his father's existence in a still undestroyed form.

Proletarian Strength heard the rustle of the underwater grass and the muck of the bottom rose towards its head. The horse dispersed these unclean waters with its muzzle, then drank a bit from a neighboring spot, which was clean. Then it emerged onto dry land and set off homeward at a cautious pace, returning to Chevengur.

The horse showed up there on the third day after its departure with Dvanov, for it had lain down and slept for a long time in a valley in the steppe. Then after sleeping its fill, the horse had forgotten the road and wandered about the virgin grassland until Karchuk's voice had summoned the horse to himself. Karchuk was walking with an old man who was also going to Chevengur. The old man was Zakhar Pavlovich. He was unable to wait for Dvanov to return to him and so had come himself, in order to take Dvanov back home.

Karchuk and Zakhar Pavlovich did not find any people in Chevengur. The town was empty and dreary. In just one place, near the brick house, Proshka was sitting and crying amid all the property which had fallen to him.

"Why are you crying, Prosh, and not complaining to anyone?" Zakhar Pavlovich asked. "You want me to give you a ruble again? Go find Sasha for me."

“I’ll get him for nothing,” Prokofy promised, then set off to look for Dvanov.

but not without knowledge of the past - the past is  
not to be grasped with nature.

1917 - had to confront nature as we do but  
don't even try to put nature in bed as 'nature'  
that we don't even try?

Boredom / Play out with

33 - after the last edition (CMILIS)

34 now sleeps on both of them for months

Common "poor" children / sleeping on things for  
months / Sister gives clothes to create while doing  
handmade story books

39 the "Platonic" counterpoint of being - something for  
the first time when the culture is - to read  
critique of "Platonism"

40 the dreamer - experience intertwined but not known

41 the house happiness? - essential to good - even  
if it is Platonic

42 no redistribution of goods. Gap between  
Platonic language of heaven & reality

43 Platonism / Quixote the anarchist vs. the "Saint" -  
"revolutionary" not oral part"

44 second coming

45 Marx on the steps

46 growing for communism

47 boredom

48 the inhuman

Appeal of Mothers to those who enjoy the very  
comforts of this night for the way down  
as the world can't be revolved so much the  
more for it.

For the first time in any language the complete, uncensored text of a monumental Russian novel.

Platonov's epic novel was written in 1927-28, but only small pieces have been published in the USSR, and even the emigre Russian edition is seriously flawed by omissions. The reasons for the censorship are not hard to find. Platonov argued that it was an "honest attempt to portray the beginning of Communist society," but Maxim Gorky, though one of the first to praise the novel, said it would never pass the censors: "I do not think it will be published. Your anarchic cast of mind will prevent this... For all your tenderness towards people, they are always described ironically, turn out to be 'characters' or 'half-wits'." Indeed, Platonov describes a bizarre world where the peasants totally refuse to work (because the Revolution means the Golden Age has come), and the Party leaders' humanistic ideals lead only to inhumanity. *Chevengur* is a massive series of satirical scenes from Soviet life during the New Economic Policy instituted by Lenin in the 1920s, the story of the efforts of provincial builders of Communism—but in their grotesque Utopia, Cheka murders are the only thing efficiently organized. *Chevengur* is Platonov's longest work, his most sustained critique of the philosophical precepts and practical results of the Revolution. It is a novel of overwhelming power.

Andrei Platonov (1899-1951), in spite of certain basic sympathies for the Revolution, and even having been a Party member for a short period of time, was at odds with the official regime and literary establishment for most of his life. In each decade, the 20s, 30s, and 40s, he had a few successes—immediately followed by vicious attacks from the critics, ranging from the semi-official watchdogs of RAPP to Stalin himself—who simply wrote "Scum" beside one of Platonov's stories in a journal. Protection by Gorky and Sholokhov helped keep him alive. Even Western specialists in Soviet literature were largely unaware of Platonov's works (the best of which were not published), and not until his rehabilitation in 1958 did regular, but controlled, publication of his prose begin. None of his most powerful satires have appeared in the USSR—this includes *Chevengur*, the short novel *The Foundation Pit*, and the vitriolic play *The Barrel-Organ*.

"Platonov is one of Russia's great literary talents of the early Communist years."

Harrison Salisbury

"*The Foundation Pit* is obviously a masterpiece."

Paul Theroux, New York Times Book Review

"Platonov speaks of a nation which in a sense has become a victim of its own language; or, more precisely, he speaks of this language itself—which turns out to be capable of generating a fictive world and then falling into grammatical dependency on it."

Joseph Brodsky

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