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TESTAMENT

BOOKS by R. C. HUTCHINSON

THE ANSWERING GLORY
THE UNFORGOTTEN PRISONER
ONE LIGHT BURNING
SHINING SCABBARD
TESTAMENT

TESTAMENT

A Novel

BY

R. C. HUTCHINSON

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To

EDWARD SACKVILLE WEST

NOTE.—A list of the more important characters in TESTAMENT will be found at the end of the book.

NOTE

EVER SINCE I first (in 1922) heard something of Count Anton Scheffler's story I had been anxious to learn more about him, but I found it curiously difficult to get any account of his life which was both detailed and reliable, until 1928. In that year I was for some months in Paris making researches for a biography of Macmahon, and I happened to mention Scheffler's name to my old friend Mme Auguet-Soublain, who was intimate with the Russian community. She presently gave me an introduction to a Captain Otraveskov, a painter, who lived in a flat near the avenue Brammont, and who invited me to take supper with him there. He proved to be a man of very great charm, lame, of distinguished appearance, with a kind of shyness, rather unexpected in one of his nationality, which I found most attractive. He told me, I think, that he was of Georgian stock, but that his forbears had been settled for some generations in the Kursk Government.

Otraveskov had been a close friend of Scheffler, and having a phenomenally exact memory he was able to tell me a good deal about him, but only in the half-intimate and half-reticent way in which men speak of their friends. At a later meeting he confessed that he had once planned to write a memoir, using a number of letters, notes and diaries which he had kept, and had actually gone some way towards putting this project into effect; he had found, however, that so much of his own history inevitably came into the work that it took on a flavour of egoism. He had become displeased with it ("cela me parait degoutant") and put it aside.

In the course of the following winter he wrote to me, saying that if I cared to read it he would send me his manuscript with the material on which it was based. I begged him to do so, and later on I asked if he would allow me to put the work into a form suitable for publication in England and America, as a memorial to his friend. After some hesitation he agreed, making the very reasonable and proper stipulation that, to avoid the possibility of giving offence to living persons who appear in the history, I should not only alter the names of all persons (including himself) and of many places and institutions in his manuscript, but should also do such carpentry

upon their features and movements as would serve completely to disguise the originals from any who might try to identify them.

To this condition I have adhered most faithfully. For the rest, I have tampered with Captain Otraveskov's manuscript as little as possible, my only concern being to reduce its length and to alter its form where this was necessary to make it a continuous narrative. (For example, Otraveskov's notes on conversations and the proceedings of several tribunals were in a rough dramatic form which would look very untidy in this text.) I have to thank Captain Otraveskov's son, Ivan Alexeivitch (who is already widely known in Europe and America as a writer on Political Economy and other subjects) for his help in filling in certain gaps in the story. A great part of the manuscript was in French, but some of the sundry material I have used was in the Russian language, and, as every translator from the Russian knows, a great deal of freedom in transcription is necessary if an English version is to make any sense at all. All the way through, however, I have kept as close to my original as possible.

R. C. H.

BIRDLIP, GLOUCESTER.
1936-1938

PART I

1

WE WERE not defeated. In the Lensie Marshes, where we had fought and scrambled all yesterday, more than a thousand men were sprawling now with their faces buried in the mud or upturned, the neck queerly angled, to look coldly at the cold sky. The guns which we had dragged through waist-high drifts and over crumbling bridges, still faintly hoping that the shell would arrive to feed them, had come to their final rest, bogged to eternity, on the lower slopes of the Volderinski ridge. The caravan of our supplies, our cartridges and rations, dressings, kitchen-carts and stretchers, was still (they said) no farther on than Ploeknish. And somewhere farther back, veiled in the heavy cloud of their omniscience, were those who had devised and could tell us what had happened. But in a warfare so confused and large no day's reverses could be final. Our fortune, bad for so many weeks now, must shortly change. If a thousand men had gone there was another thousand on its way, raked from the Ukrainian plains; our enemy could not beat us by the mere destruction of our peasants. At this very moment, if report were true, there were seven million rounds of Gras ammunition, squeezed from our reluctant friends at Chantilly, awaiting transport from the quays of Arkhangel and Romanov; when those arrived, some of our men would be able to fire their rifles whenever they felt themselves in danger, and never be rebuked. Till then, the Urals were behind us; we could go back, we said, as far as that.

For April, the evening light seemed to have lasted long; for the sky had been clear and hard all afternoon. But now a mist was thickening the twilight, and the drizzle to which we were long accustomed, coming it seemed from no cloud but from the air a little way above us, had begun again. The chaussée, which bent a little to the northward here, searching for Kosna-Epoi, was visible for barely fifty paces. The noise of the men's feet was moist and sticky, without rhythm; they were no longer marching, only pushing their feet along the clammy road. None of them, as far as I could see, belonged to me. I tried, with the relic of a soldier's instinct, to keep them going, and when one lay down at the side of the road I would kick him gently, urging him to get up and on. But I was too tired to trouble much about them.

They behaved in an odd way, as soldiers do. I noticed two of the Opolchenie, puny creatures lost in their uniforms, who had a giant Magyar prisoner between them. The prisoner was lame, taking one painful step with his bad leg and then hopping three or four. The larger of the Opolchenie was supporting him as best he could; while the other, I suppose for the sake of form, was holding one end of a piece of rope which he had loosely tied round the Magyar's arm. They were proud of their prisoner, those two, and as they went along they petted him, breaking a cigarette in two and giving him the larger half, encouraging him with Slav endearments. I don't know how far they got him. Farther on I came to a group of the Third Caucasians who were struggling with a captured field-gun. It had slipped from the edge of the chaussée into a foot of mud. They had somehow harnessed a horse, wounded in both forelegs, to the front of it, and half a dozen of them were frantically shoving behind. I shouted to them to fill the breech with mud and leave the gun behind; it could do neither good nor harm, I told them. But they said, addressing me with great affection, they must keep the gun to show they had been good soldiers. If need be they would drag it to the Stavka, and when the Emperor scolded them for being beaten by the Austrians they would answer, "But see, Batiushka, we made them pay for it, look at our gun!"

Old Colonel Geobrazov overtook me, walking at a surprising pace with his burkha trailing through the puddles. He didn't see me. He was white and exhausted, he moved in a sort of daze, constantly pausing to slap a man's shoulder, or rub another's cheek with his glove, his tired mouth still smiling as he murmured little phrases of encouragement, "We didn't do so badly. . . . We'll have another cut at those porpoises as soon as the new Berdans come. . . . Come on, come on, there's soup waiting for us at Kosna, it'll all be getting cold. . . ." A little ahead of me he stopped a Cossack and begged the man, almost with tears, to shoot his horse, which followed pitifully a few yards behind him with half its rump cut away by shrapnel. But the Cossack, with respectful obstinacy, refused. It was against the rules, he argued, it was altogether wrong to shoot a Colonel's horse. Geobrazov asked another and another, but few had cartridges, and of those none would finish off the beast, which had escaped the Austrians and deserved to live, they said.

While the light lasted the noise of heavy guns had continued in the south. Someone was still getting it, perhaps the Austrians but more likely we. But the noise had fallen away now, and hearing nothing but the shuffle of our own feet, the rustle of fine rain through the sparse trees, we slackened our pace again, forgetting we were pur-

sued. You seemed to be carried forward by the men all round you, at their chosen pace, as if you were tied to them; your own stiff limbs and blistered heels rebelling uselessly. In a skirmish of the day before I had received a sabre-cut on the side of my neck, and the rain, working its way into this paltry wound, produced a little pain that was continuous and oddly vivid. That served to keep me awake, and mostly held my attention away from the lesser misery of forcing my legs to go on moving. But I felt no gratitude, only a smouldering anger. Men just behind me, who were hardly fit to walk at all, kept much more cheerful.

As darkness tightened, the figures about me lost their outline and dissolved into each other, till I felt I walked in a company of spirits. I remember clearly, not without amusement, how I was startled by overtaking the head and body of a man who seemed to be walking, stiffly as if on stilts, some way below the ground. I caught my breath, for a moment supposing I had wandered to the very edge of the chaussée and that the man I saw, for some odd reason, was plodding along in the ditch beside. Then I heard him singing, and realized it was Father Hertzen. Everyone knew him. He had been with the Fifth Army at Lodz and wounded there by shrapnel, so that both his legs had to be taken off from above the knee. It seemed to make no difference; he followed the troops about, always as near the line as they would let him, doggedly moving on his thighs when there was no convenient cart or sledge to carry him. And now, stumping along the road, he was singing softly the ninetieth psalm, as once he had intoned it in the Church of the Resurrection at Kharkov. I said I could take him on my back a little way, but he answered, looking up at me as at a mountain, "No, I should be cold up there. Besides," he added smiling, "it is better to be humble, as He was."

When I reached the outskirts of Kosna-Epoi I found that the bridge had already been destroyed. But if we took the road to the right, the picket told us, we should get to another bridge at a village called Sarkost. That was what everyone seemed to be doing. Sarkost was six versts away.

§

I remember only very indistinctly that last six versts, in which we stumbled against each other in the rain-laced darkness, and a man or two walked over the side of the chaussée into the dyke, and no one minded enough to help them out. I do not know how long it lasted; as, waking in the small hours, you do not know how long you have

been asleep. Sarkost, as I recollect it, was a village of one street. The men who had reached it earliest had tumbled into the first cottages they found, and now the later arrivals were forcing the doors and windows of any building locked against invasion. A Cossack patrol rode up and down, pushing their horses recklessly through the mob, trying to beat off these plunderers. But a knot of men thrust away from one house would immediately throw themselves at the windows of another on the opposite side of the street. Men dropped in doorways and huddled together in stable yards. Someone had chalked "reserved for wounded" on the door of the church, but no one took any notice of that and the building was already packed. I came across a man I knew, Zvansovitch, nursing a damaged leg, in the doorway of the priest's house. "It's madness," he said excitedly, "for anyone to stop here. The Austrians will be here in half an hour." I suppose he went on saying that till he himself fell asleep.

By a miracle, of the kind which he made commonplace, my servant Yevski found me in the street. "It's all right, barin," he said in my ear, "I've got a place for you, nice and snug." I asked no questions, I simply followed him.

We went through a stable yard and out into a lane. Then, I think, over a wooden bridge, and through an orchard, where Yevski firmly held my arm to save me from colliding with the trees. The house we came to was a mill perhaps, or just a farmhouse. I don't know what it looked like from the outside. Yevski went straight in, found a dry match, struck it and led me up the stairs. "Wounded?" he asked, noticing my laggard movements. "A cut on my neck," I told him. He looked at it. "That's nothing," he said kindly, "all right in the morning! . . . This way." We went up another short flight of stairs and into an attic full of rubbish—a zinc bath, feeding bins, basins and brooms. Yevski had made a bed for me with sacks and horse-cloth on a carpenter's bench which stood against one wall, the rafter leaving only just room enough for a man to lie. "All perfectly dry!" he said with modest satisfaction, and showed me how he had fixed the "bedclothes" in the vice so that I shouldn't roll off the bench. Then he undressed me as far as my underclothes, which were only moist, and took my wet things, and went away. "I'm in the cellar," he said, "I shall hear if you shout loudly."

From the half-sleep in which I had moved all evening I made small progress towards complete unconsciousness. The rafter was against my shoulder, the teeth of a metal wood-stop constantly pricked my thigh, and I never ceased to be aware of my damp clothes and stiffness. Within this frame I dreamed, going over an argument I had once engaged in with my dear Natalia. She was certain that a doctor

called Cantaculetsi could work a miracle upon our boy Vava. "But my darling, the man is a quack," I said obstinately, "I know he's a quack, everyone says so." I thought she was hurt by that, and stretching to touch her hand I found that she had gone away. Then I realized, with the rafter pressing into me, that there was no room for Natalia to be with me on that narrow bed. It could not have been her voice I heard, I had only been reading her letter. Her letter? I puzzled over that, for I had received no letter from Natalia since leaving the camp at Leajitse. I turned over, painfully, and felt for the pocket where Natalia's last letter always lay, but my fingers would not find it. I called, "Natalia, Natalia darling, I have lost your letter!" and a woman screamed.

I opened my eyes slowly and saw two women stooping in the low doorway with a candle between them. Blinking at the light, I could only see that they were elderly, white faced, and that they wore dark overcoats above their nightclothes. Their feet were bare. I asked stupidly, "What do you want, have you brought me a letter from Natalia?" They didn't reply and I saw that they were trembling. It was they who owned the house, I vaguely supposed, and I wanted to be polite to them. But I could not make the effort, I was dead with sleep. My eyes fell shut, and when I opened them again I saw that the smaller of the two was holding a pistol, which she brought to point at me with a hand that shook violently. That should have made me speak, but I was restrained by the dim feeling that if I entered into an argument with these people I should never be able to sustain it.

The woman with the pistol came nearer, and suddenly asked me, in a voice of unsteady anger, "Austrian?"

"If you are Austrian," the other said more boldly, in a Polish patois, "we are going to shoot you."

Failing to understand them, I said sleepily: "You will get cold, standing about with your feet bare."

Then I went off to sleep again, but for a long time slept badly, dreaming that the woman followed me with her pistol pointed into my face, holding me by the arm and continually asking, "Tell me, are you an Austrian?" And it seemed that as soon as I reached oblivion I was roused again, this time by Yevski, who had taken off my coverings and was pushing my legs into my breeches. A faint daylight came through a little window in the roof. The women had disappeared.

"We must hurry," Yevski said. "The Austrians are in the village now."

§

We went out by the back door, through a little yard where poultry were kept, and then a shrubbery. There was no one about. I glanced back at the house. The windows were still in shadow, and though I thought I saw at one of them the faces of two old women I cannot be quite certain. Yevski seemed to know where he was going, and I was too much drugged by fatigue to do anything but follow him.

"Something to eat, barin," he said, pushing a slab of stale oatbread into my hand.

I bit off a piece, and was glad to feel it in my mouth, but it wouldn't go down; my throat was tight and gritty. When we came out into an open meadow Yevski tried to make me run, but I could only run a few yards, for an acute stitch began immediately and the pain travelled up to my forehead, bringing dark-blue shadows across my vision. I could not understand why Yevski moved so nervously. At the far side of the meadow we dropped into a dyke, where only a foot or so of water was running, and ploughed through the mud in its bed, stooping so that we should hardly be seen from the fields on either side. By that comfortless route we covered a verst or more.

"What is happening in the village?" I asked sleepily.

Yevski glanced over his shoulder and grinned, as he only did when some kind of brutality touched his sour humour.

"Look!" he said.

I raised my head for a moment and saw a spread of clotted, dirty smoke rising into the dull sky.

"So!" I said. "Have all the men got away?"

"Those who were not too tired to wake up," he answered, with a dry pleasure in his cultivated omniscience.

"But what about the people, the people who live there?"

There was no need to ask that. We had reached the chaussée which ran north-east towards Vlodonja, and here the people of Sarkost were all among the soldiers and their cattle with them. The spectacle was painful, but I had grown too much accustomed to its kind to be much distressed. A little, dirty boy, ludicrously clothed with a soldier's jacket over a sleeping suit tucked into rubber boots, hobbled towards me shouting: "Daddy! Daddy!" The soldiers nearby were much amused. "Quick work," they said to each other, "for a single night!" There was no other officer about, and seeing how things were going, I tried to collect my senses. Two soldiers in front of me were carrying a girl between them and ingenuously kissing her cheeks as they went along. I shouted and made them put the girl down. Most of the men seemed to be of the Semenovski; I spotted a sergeant of that regiment, who had his left arm out of order and

seemed to be slightly drunk, and told him to get all the men of his own corps into a proper formation. When I had cursed him roundly he set about the task, clearing civilians to one side of the road and goading his soldiers into ranks of three. I gave the orders to march, and for perhaps a hundred paces they roughly kept their ranks, the drill-yard instinct triumphing over somnolent fatigue. Tired as I was myself, I had the momentary hope that I should get the stragglers into a proper column and march the whole body in good order to Vlodonja. But almost at once the accursed civilians, straying tipsily about the road with their goats and little carts and baggage, became entangled with the men, who casually stopped to pet a grubby child or to buy from a hunchback Jew a lucky egg on which he had drawn (poorly, I thought) the image of St. Michael. An old woman hobbled along beside the soldiers with a sack over her shoulder, from which came the piteous squawking of a brace of mallards; she was crying bitterly, and a soldier stepped right out of the line to wipe her face with his dirty handkerchief. The man on his right, who had been leaning against him, tottered and fell down in the road. When I came up to him he had fallen asleep. I saw then that many of the men walked with their eyes shut, holding a fellow's arm for guidance. An emaciated ewe wandered in and out of the ranks, and one man after another tumbled over her. The drunken sergeant had disappeared altogether; someone said he had gone back to the village to find a woman who had been his lover there.

On this large disorder the new sun, coming up into an empty arc beneath the skirt of clouds, threw a frigid, yellow light. And the brackish morning wind, still moist and harsh from the night's rain but blowing gently, gave me with its sharp touch upon my cheek an odd refreshment. Another day: and we had remained to see and smell it.

All might be well if only I could get the men as far as Droinel, where the forest began, and where, north of the road, they could deploy. But I could not discover whether the bridge at Sarkost had been destroyed before the main part of the Austrian squadron reached the village, and it was more than likely that in the desperate scramble this routine had been omitted. Our own cavalry was nowhere to be seen, and it was dawning on my muddled senses that we retreated without any rearguard. If Zepochin, whose base had been at Eist, had kept his force in workable shape, then we could expect from him a southward shutter movement which would give us respite till we got to Ploeknish and re-formed; but I knew that Zepochin was, as usual, desperately short of shell, and I doubted if the boggy tracks across the Sievers plateau would allow his Cos-

sacks to get through in time. These questions were floundering in my mind when, somewhere westward, a battery raised its voice.

The sleep-starved men trudged on as if they hadn't heard it; to them, a few hours from the hell of Lensie, the sound of casual guns meant nothing. Some of the women in our motley company began to whimper, pettishly, like children. But that was all. Presently I saw, ahead and rather to the north, the puff of shell exploding several versts away. So far so good. But the range was lowered in rapid stages, and less than five minutes had gone when a Kroster-40 shell, which seemed to emerge from an interval of total silence, dropped in the dyke not more than half a verst in front, throwing a wave of turf and liquid mud across the chaussée.

The shock of that explosion set my mind, which had been numb for thirty hours, into its normal pace; but a brain more soldierly than mine, and fresh with the day, would hardly have found a safety for the rabble that stretched a verst or more along that open, ditch-bound road. I yelled the order to lie down. The men that were nearest obeyed, and the rest flopped by degrees like a file of dominoes pushed over from one end. A few of the villagers did the same, but most of them simply stared in bovine wonder at the prostrate soldiers, as if witnessing a barrack-square display, while many ran this way and that, like rabbits looking for a burrow, and uttered tearful, incoherent prayers. One thing was clear then: we could not take this multitude along with our retreat, or they and we should be destroyed together. I seized an N.C.O. of the Semenovski, who looked to have more wits about him than the rest, and sent him forward to split a section from the column's head and take it on in rushes; there was a chance the rest would follow that example. Then I caught the nearest peasant by the arm, roughly, and said that he and his fellows must go back to Sarkost.

They couldn't go back, he said, the village was on fire, their homes were gone. He was a little man, pinched with consumption, he whined as he spoke and his chin wobbled like a broken carriage-spring. "On this road," I told him, "the whole lot of you will be blown to hell." "We can't go back," he doggedly repeated. Just as he spoke another shell burst in the marshes over on our right, perhaps three hundred paces off. I refused to argue. I picked up a rifle which lay at my feet and brought the butt of it across the peasant's haunches. He screamed like a puppy and began to run the way I wanted. "And you!" I shouted, threatening a woman who had watched the scene in stupefaction. Here and there one of the soldiers started to move, and I yelled at them to keep down. "You!" I shouted at the peasants, "and you, and you, that way, get along, hurry!" They stared at me in

bewildered anger, as Adam perhaps gazed at the angel with the flaming sword. They huddled together for protection, they shook their fists at me and tried to slip past. A loosely-hobbled colt who seemed to belong to no one was nibbling the meagre grass at the side of the track. I clambered on to him and rode up and down the road, threatening and striking; till an angry woman with a garden spade turned, as I rode past her, and brought a swinging blow against my horse's flank.

The colt reared, swung, and toppled over, throwing me clear. I lay on the road, face down, unconscious for perhaps a second or more, till a man took the opportunity to kick me. Then, as I got up painfully on to my knees, I saw what seemed to be hallucination: a troop of horsemen on the near skyline, moving towards us at a bold and easy canter. Zepochin's Cossacks had got through.

I got to my feet and waved, laughing with pleasure and relief. But the low sun, slanting across my vision, had deceived me. A shot was fired from behind me, and one of the horsemen swerved. A woman screamed, "The Austrians!" and I heard, not far away, the frightened, angry voice of Yevski: "Barin! You fool! Get down!" The fall had dulled my senses, and I stood there stupidly, gazing at the advancing troop with puzzled, sleepy eyes. Another shot was fired, and though I saw the wisp of smoke lifting above a horse's ears I thought, in a speck of time, that one of my own men had fired it. Then I felt what might have been a dog's teeth, biting a little below my left knee, and a moment afterwards a sharper pain which pierced my body between breast and shoulders. It was like a fire which set the whole of me in flame. Its smoke rose into my eyes, so that a cloud swept over, into which the riders and the fields behind them, the peasants standing at my side, dissolved. For a space of time, perhaps too brief to measure, the wish for consciousness held firm against the pain's assault. But I knew that my leg had given away, I had to fall, and I seemed to drop through many burning fathoms before the darkness grew so tight that the fire could not follow me.

2

In the long, painful twilight through which I passed, two faces were always close to mine. The one Natalia's, near, but veiled and elusive. I could see her mouth often, the lips a little apart and trembling, as when I had waved good-bye to her at Voepensk; but her eyes I could never see. The other face was that of the man who lay beside me. It was unfamiliar, and yet I seemed to have known

it. I had once, I thought, looked at those eyes as closely as I saw them now: grey eyes, with brows of a dirty brown which straggled towards each other; eyes that looked at me with concentration, but with a certain shyness, and sometimes, I imagined, with fear. I did not know who he was, and I supposed, as far as my mind was capable of such conjecture, that he had been among my fellow-officers in the Mihailovski training school at St. Petersburg. When he spoke, asking me how I felt, it was in good French. But from his face, which was small and flat, broad-nosed, and rather sallow, I did not think that he was Russian; and his name, I learnt in time, was Scheffler.

I remember that in my confusion I often addressed him as "Natalia"; and afterwards he told me how, twisting and weeping, I constantly asked for his forgiveness: "They've killed me, Natalia, but it wasn't my fault. Oh, Natalia, if only I had never left you, for together we were so happy in exile! Natalia! Natalia!" And he, struggling with the pain of his own wounded shoulder, would slip his arm beneath my neck and gently move my head till it rested on his tunic, and kiss my forehead with his dry mouth, and call and call, feebly, for somebody to bring me water. He was on my left side. Of the man on my right I knew nothing, for he was nearly always asleep; a body which occasionally rolled over and whimpered, or talked some nonsense about a thrasher he had borrowed from a neighbour and meant to return. There were other men in that small, shaking room, perhaps a dozen, I do not know. The light came chiefly from a little tear in the canvas above me, it showed only shapes like bundles, and I could not raise my head enough to look about me. What I knew of my fellow-travellers came to me only from their voices, which were in several tongues, and from their gasping cries. But I was not curious, for Scheffler's tenderness, which I half-supposed to be Natalia's, was all the companionship I could do with then.

I knew that we were moving, from the way the floor shook and from the occasional sight of branches passing across the visible fragment of sky. And for a long time those were the chief, if not the sole ingredients of my sensation: movement and pain. I closed my eyes, and fell away into the comfort of oblivion; for only a little while, but when my eyes opened again it was night, and in the moving tent I could see nothing. That night, which I passed in alternating patches of shallow sleep and drowsy consciousness, went on for a long time. Once the cart stopped, and man (or it may have been a woman) came to crawl between us with a bicycle-lamp, giving weak tea from a bottle to any who would take it; I drank a little, but it

was far too hot, and it seemed to flow to that part of my chest where the pain was. Then the dreadful, springless movement began again, and I do not think we were visited any more until the morning. The cart must have been an old one; there were cracks in the head-board, and through these a cold draught flowed intermittently; but the damp and heavy warmth of the air remained, and the stench of men too long in their clothes and too long unattended. There, lying so close that no one could turn over without kicking his neighbour, each of us endured apart his private misery. I heard the others' groans and crying without thought or pity, never imagining their wounds could twist as cruelly as mine, or that they were so cramped and thirsty. But when it was light again I felt Scheffler's fingers on my cheek, gently stroking it. That, I think, was the first time I looked at his face with attention; it was in shadow then, but I saw he was faintly smiling.

Were we travelling in this wretched wagon all that day? I cannot believe so, but in recollection it has seemed we did. At least we must have stopped, and received refreshment of some kind, and bodily relief. Perhaps we were carried out to lie at the side of the road and rest for an hour. All that has gone from me. The day has blended with the one before it, I can only remember a journey that seemed to have no end, and Scheffler's comforting hands, and the thought recurring that perhaps with every tortured verst I had got a little nearer to Natalia. I know it was dark, and the night cloudy, when a creaking stretcher carried me over a wooden bridge, along a cinder-path, into another place of heat and thirst and poisoned odours.

By the yellow light of two carriage-lamps placed on a central bench, I could see that this was a long and narrow building, with high rafters; a barn or coach-house. The stretchers were placed along both sides, jammed tight together, and when both ranks were full the latest comers were put down longwise at our feet, reducing the gangway width to a yard or less. The stone floor was covered with a slushy moisture, which made the earth and straw along the gangway into a viscous mud. When the last of the stretchers had been brought in, the door at the end was shut and—for some reason —bolted. A man with a rifle on the sling ploughed up and down the aisle between us, smoking a cigarette; he was there, I suppose, to see that we got up to no mischief. Apart from him, we whose bodies spread all over the floor were left alone. We were quiet, the men who had to groan burying their faces in the blankets. I heard, faintly, a scream like a rabbit's from somewhere outside the building. That might have alarmed me, but I was exhausted by the pain-

ful stretcher-journey. Scheffler had again been placed beside me, and feeling his comfortable hand on my arm I fell asleep.

I was woken by voices and the noise of a door slamming. The man who was talking, rapidly and impatiently, stood near the door. He was wearing, as far as I could see, a mechanic's overall, but by his manner he seemed to be an officer. What surprised me—but only faintly, for I was hardly above the surface of consciousness—was that he spoke in German. There were two men with him, and one of them pushed a wheelbarrow loaded with oddments—a kettle, dressing-boxes, bottles. A stretcher at the end of the room was pulled a little forward, the men knelt and bent over it, the officer took something out of the kettle and wiped it with a piece of cloth. One of the men switched on an electric torch, and for a moment I saw its light on the patient's drawn face. Instinct made me turn over then and pull the blanket across my ear. When the man screamed I heard him only faintly; but a new smell, which I recognized, found its way through the foetid air and the blanket to reach my nostrils. When I looked again, perhaps after half an hour, the trio moving by degrees along the gangway had arrived three stretchers away.

To lie there waiting was unbearable, and I attempted to sit up, but the chest wound would not allow me. I turned my head, trying to see Scheffler and to speak to him, but I found myself crying, in a soundless, child-like way, and no speech would come. I struggled to collect my forces, to stir my mind into full consciousness. But the very effort drained my little strength, my eyelids dropped, I floated once again on the rolling waves of hot delirium. In that condition I might have remained, but a brightness lit the wall before my eyes, I opened them to find myself staring into the electric torch. They had come to me. A man had already bared my chest and was working on the wound, increasing the pain there, but not so badly as I had feared. I could see in the torch's reflected light that his white face was almost without expression, his eyes half-closed. He was breathing noisily through his nose, as a watchmaker does when working, and I found it helpful to count his breaths with the Greek alphabet, *in-out-Alpha, in-out-Beta,* as he worked. Occasionally his lips moved, and he made little, dissatisfied noises. I could smell his breath all the time, and there was schnapps in it; once a drop of warm sweat fell from his forehead on to my neck. *In-out-Xi, in-out-Omicron.* In ten minutes, or less perhaps, the job was done. I thought they would go away then. The man yawned, spat in his handkerchief, and got up, helping himself with a hand on my bad leg. That pressed out the last of my self-control, I screamed and vomited. *"Himmel! was ist das?"* I heard him say. His fellow flashed the torch on to my leg,

and at once began to unwind the bandage. Presently I caught four words: *"Ja! Der trockene Brand!"* and then, "Brandy, Otto, give him plenty." The smallest of the trio came to me with a half-litre flask, while the officer turned and took off the lid of the kettle. I was fully awake now. I knew that they meant to take off my leg.

I pushed the bottle away, and speech came suddenly. I shouted at them, "No! No, I can't, I won't have it off!" The man with the bottle caught my arm and gripped it tightly. The other, kneeling at my left side, said in a gentle, urgent voice, "It's all right, just have a drink, it'll do you good. It'll all be over in a minute or two." The officer turned round, with something in his hand, and stood waiting. I heard him say wearily, "Can't you manage him?" and something else that I could not translate. With the strength of terror I pushed away the man who had got my arm. "I don't want it off," I sobbed, "it's not really bad, it's only a scratch." They didn't understand—perhaps they were not trying. I shouted "Nein! Nein!" but that was all the German I could find. Then I heard Scheffler's voice, quiet and insistent, speaking easily in their own language. "He says it isn't bad, he doesn't want you to amputate. . . . But can't you cauterize in some way? . . . in any case the shock would finish him, he can't stand up to it, he's terribly weak. . . ." The surgeon was answering with short sentences in a grumbling undertone. All that I understood was: "Gangrene . . . his only chance . . . it doesn't matter a damn to me . . . the fellow may as well have his chance." I said in Russian, feebly: "I don't want a chance, I only want to die." "Leave him alone!" Scheffler said. "I implore you to leave him alone."

The surgeon lit a cigarette, took three or four puffs and stubbed it. He knelt down in the mud again, picked up my leg with his curiously soft, bare hand, and turned it a little. "The torch, Otto!" The second assistant was still kneeling by my head, continually trying to get the neck of the bottle between my lips. The surgeon began to work round the outside of the leg-wound with a piece of lint soaked in something which burnt me, holding the torch in his left hand and stopping now and then to wipe his forehead with his sleeve. "What's the time, Otto?" "Three o'clock, sir—ten minutes past." "My God, I'd no idea——!" He shook himself and sniffed, sharply, with decision. "Otto, I shall want that." The other man had at last forced the bottle between my lips and I tasted some sort of brandy. That is all I remember, except the noise of a man inside my head screaming, which sounded farther and farther away.

§

We were moving again, but the motion now was more regular and easier to bear; I was comfortable here, with a proper pillow, and the air was clean, smelling only of antiseptic and straw. Daylight came through the windows, and I could see the men lying on either side of me, a dozen or more each way, some of them smoking. Scheffler was there, two places off: I noticed that with thankfulness. But my eyes would not stay open very long.

There was pleasure of a kind in submitting to my weakness, in lying there quite still and listening to the rumble of the train, the hum of conversation. But I was conscious of an undefined anxiety, and by degrees it shaped itself: something had happened or was going to happen to my leg.

The pain was still there, but its rhythm was steadier now, and in a lower key. What had they done? I could remember a man holding a torch, and I heard him saying, in reality or in my dreams, "Get hold of him, Otto, take his other arm!" Yes, they had meant to take it off, that was clear now; and although I seemed to feel the pain in every bone of it I could not trust that sensation, knowing that pain can still be felt when a limb has gone. I tried to raise my head, to look and see if my leg still showed under the blankets. But I was too weak for that. I called to Scheffler, he heard me and I saw him smile. But I could not get the words out, and presently I fell asleep again.

§

By degrees, in the course of that long train journey, I realized that I was a prisoner. That was the simple explanation of the German voices which I constantly heard about me, and yet their significance impressed me very slowly, for the comfort of physical suffering is that many troubles pass you unobserved. When I knew that the train was taking me further away from Russia, the nostalgia which had been the chief of all my miseries in the line returned with a new bitterness. Lying there, unable to move, and remembering my former serious illness, I had a picture of the square room in the small stone house at Krasnyesk where we had spent the greater part of our exile; of the naked steppe as I saw it then through the small window opposite my bed, and the smell of stove enamel, and the patches on the wall where the crimson distemper had peeled away; of Natalia's hands, which she always warmed before she touched me, her low voice, which I used to tell her was like that of a German contralto, the odd expression in her face, with the mouth solemn and the eyes surprised, which she always wore before she smiled. It had been the scene of most of our companionship, that ugly little

house, and Vava was born there—yes, in that same room, with the huge Yakut midwife squeezed between the bed and the wall, and me holding the petroleum lamp from the other side. In those years we had looked westward towards Moscow; hating the dingy, snow-bound lanes of Krasnyesk and the merciless Arctic winds which cut our faces through eight months of the twelve; always dreaming of the pardon that must one day come, and our return to freedom. Physically our existence there was bleak and hard enough; nothing but the haze of distance could make me see a charm in it, and if only for the sake of Vava's health I had been right, I knew, to take my chance of getting away. And yet we had been happy there; for happiness, as I saw now, cannot be enjoyed and realized at once; we feel it now, we know it afterwards. At Kresnyesk we had had no company except our own, Natalia, I and Vava. That is not enough for those who have lived in cities. But solitude, and the rigour of that cold existence, our common love and continuing anxiety for Vava, had mortiсed us in a fellowship more integral to our lives (or so I believed) than the mean of marriage. So, I looked back at that chilly house, at the scurfy, slush-piled streets of that forsaken village, not as a place of exile but as home: a town of which the smell and very drabness became tender in its long familiarity. Shaken by the train, trying in vain to recover the pillow which had slipped away from my head, ready to weep at my feebleness, I thought of Krasnyesk as a place where I could only be content, where, with the raw, unflagging wind, strength would come back to me.

For more than a year I had not heard Natalia's voice. And now I had been six weeks already without a letter. The mail was at Ploeknish, they had told me, along with the boots I had requisitioned six months ago for my Company, the ninety cases of Kropatchek ammunition, some forty wagon-loads of horse-fodder, and a dozen motor-bicycles from Sweden lacking only the handle-bars and wheels. But at Ploeknish, whither I had sent an orderly, they told us that the private mail was stuck at the Mourogod railhead, awaiting the release of baggage carts to take it forward. In the other direction things were perhaps the same. "I have not heard from you for three weeks now," Natalia had said in the last of her letters I received. Where, then, were the letters I had written almost every day and sent back by the post-corporal whenever he made his journey? Were they, too, buried among the mounting stores in the Mourogod warehouse, or thrown into a dyke beside the Ploeknish road, or had they, in a wagon somewhere up the railway line, been shunted on to one of those verst-long sidings where the wheels froze to the rails and the goods inside slowly rotted away? Had they, because of some

chance remark I had made about Divisional administration, been put aside by censor and forwarded to some Intelligence Office at Stavka, where such expressions were observed and kept as evidence? That last had been the worst of my fears. I had sent an inquiry in the proper form to the lieutenant-commandant of the transport and communications department at Mourogod. An acknowledgement came a fortnight later: my message would be forwarded to the proper authority. I wrote personally to a man I knew in Communications, Vassili Andershenko. He wrote back: "No one has any idea what happens to private letters. They may have been held up at Proskurov. . . ." It was the motto of our army: *Ni kak ne mogu znat!*

But in those days I still had hope to keep me going; even in the Kosna swamps news had to arrive at some time, and at least one letter must be on its way. In the noise and bewilderment of Lensie one thought had sounded constantly in the hinder chamber of my mind: At Ploeknish, if I live to get back there, I shall find a letter waiting! That hope was now blacked-out. I could not reason yet if it were possible as prisoner-of-war to make touch with home. I only knew that I had come to a hostile country, a world I was too weak to understand. I seemed to have been cut off from Natalia as utterly as if death had captured me, and without the privilege death gives of forgetting what has happened.

I had a photograph of Natalia, which a travelling Finn had taken for me at Krasnyesk, and which I kept in my pocket-case with her letters. But none of Vava's. And now I could not remember what his face was like, only the way he lay in his long wheel-chair, with his arms up, the small hands open, and his spindle legs crossed over.

§

Waking from one of my dozes, I found that Scheffler had been moved, and now he was next to me again. I was glad of that.

It was night now, and the train still rumbled on. The coach was lit by two gas-lamps, which burned with a poor, blue flame. Most of the men were huddled under their blankets, but Scheffler, propped up at the shoulders, was smoking a cigarette. "How is it?" he asked, seeing my eyes open, and I whispered: "All right."

A soldier in a brown overall came down the gangway, swinging his torch over the stretchers. He stopped at mine.

"You're right," he said in German to Scheffler, nodding his head at me, "he's still alive."

Scheffler smiled. "Of course, I told you."

The orderly shook his head with faint disapproval.

"They take some killing," he said, with a smile. "That's why the war goes on so long. However," he added more optimistically, "he won't be by the time we get to Shabaunitz."

He picked up a corner of the blanket and wiped my chin, on which I had dribbled, with a certain gentleness.

"Another officer, wasn't he?" he said to Scheffler. "What was he called, do you know?"

"No, I don't know. At least, I'm not sure."

I managed to say, without opening my eyes: "Captain Otraveskov."

§

We got to Shabaunitz next evening, or perhaps it was the one after that. The train halted in the outskirts of the town, and through the misted window I could see yellow lights pricking up into the fading sky. We waited there for an hour or more, grumbling because the orderly had not yet come to light the gas, somehow feeling the irritation of coarse blankets and creases in the stretcher-canvas more acutely now that the stupefying vibration had ceased. Then, by slow stages, we were jerked into the Josef station, and there I fell back into feverish sleep.

I vividly remember being carried along the platform, where there were charcoal burners at every fifty paces and where the light falling in pools from the electric arc lamps was browned by the urban fog. Here and there, between the towering stacks of military stores, a group of civilians had gathered to see us; women mostly; and when through the fluttering shadows, I could watch the expression of a face, it was always that of simple pity. Once I caught the words "—and now we've got to feed all that lot!" but I noticed no other gesture of hostility.

All that lot! I realized what she meant when they brought me out into the Josef Platz. It was alive with prisoners, a mob that spread from the station entrance right across to the Ferdinand Hotel: a vast confusion, in which you could tell the guards by their rifles and that was all. They put down the stretchers wherever there was ground-space, even across the tram-lines, where they had to be shifted when a tram came and were afterwards shoved back. Men who were only wounded in the head or arms had to stand with the rest, lolling against each other, unless they could find an edge of stretcher to sit on. Some squatted in the mud, or lay full length and went to sleep. I saw an officer, a German, moving among the prisoners and briskly ordering those who were on the ground to get up.

They politely obeyed, and sat down again directly he had gone. I noticed only one Russian officer, and he was standing with his hands in his pockets as if he were alone on a mountain-top; if orders were necessary, well, the Austrians could give them; it was no longer, thank God, his job. A number of ragged children squeezed their way about in the throng, offering German cigarettes at five for half a krone or eighty kopeks. And all the time more prisoners were streaming out from the station yard.

It was cold, lying out there, and my brain became livelier in perception. The men around me were talking in sleepy voices. "Where do we go now?" I heard one say, and another answered, "To the gaol, I suppose . . . I suppose they've lost the key." A fat little corporal of the Finlandski was telling his neighbour a long story. ". . . So he came to me next day, Griska, that was, with a cart-load of ox-dung. I said to him, 'One cart-load's not the same as a cart-load and a half.' 'Well, this is one cart-load,' he said, Griska that was; then he emptied half out behind the barn, the new barn I mean, not the one by the pond, 'and here's half a load,' he said, pointing to the cart, 'and that makes one and a half.' I could tell that wasn't right, though I couldn't tell why it wasn't right. 'You put the other half back,' I said, just to see which of us was right. . . ." "Ah yes, Griska," the friend said knowingly, "I haven't seen him lately." "What's this place called?" somebody asked. The man beside him said, "Austria." "Ah yes, Austria, that would be it." A lorry came up and some twenty stretchers were loaded into it. Another followed in a quarter of an hour and took twenty more. The fellow on the stretcher beside me called out that his hands had frozen brittle, and a little afterwards I heard him praying to the Virgin, reverently and with dignity, that She would take away his life.

I heard the long train pull out of the station, and immediately another came into its place: more prisoners, half a thousand of them. "It doesn't matter," I heard someone say, "there are plenty more men in Russia."

At some time during that night a man who had been standing beside my stretcher, first on one leg and then on the other, swayed backwards and crumpled up. His shoulder fell across my legs, giving me excruciating pain. It was not till a long time afterwards that I realized what that meant: my left leg was still there.

3

At a village called Krozkohl, where I next found myself, I steadily got better. But it took me a long time to awake from a curious

lethargy, in which I was often aware of what went on around me, but regarded everything with complete detachment; as the dead, perhaps, regard the human scene. I slept and woke and slept again. The room where I lay grew dark, grew light again. It did not matter. I was often in pain, but my laziness was such that I would not shift into a more comfortable position. When the dresser came to bandage me I let him push my body about as if it were a plaster image. "Yes, this one is still alive," I heard Frau Jaenicke say every day in her melancholy and rather childish voice. "This morning he opened his eyes and looked at me as if he saw me quite clearly. Do you think, Herr Doktor, that he may be going to live after all?" "I don't know," the dresser would grunt, with a safety-pin between his lips, as he tightened the bandage and hurt me excruciatingly. "He's a long time making up his mind. And we need the bed."

I should gladly have obliged him by dying, but I did not know how it was done. I made no effort to live, and I was not conscious of any will to do so. But I believe now, that the thought of Natalia lay constantly in the folds of my mind, and it may be that my longing for her, part physical, sufficed to hold the spirit in my body.

In that passive existence there was a certain contentment. I was out of the war, I lay still, they came and fed me, I had nothing to do. In the early days I was constantly in dread of the next dressing. But in time I became philosophic, and did not start to shiver until I actually heard the dresser's tray being wheeled in. While the man was at work I kept my top teeth stuck fast in my lower lip, and as a rule my eyes were shut. When I opened them I always saw Frau Jaenicke sitting beside me, watching my face intently, but sometimes letting her eyes dart with a horrified curiosity toward the dresser's hands. Poor Frau Jaenicke! She did no good to her patients by watching them at these moments, but I think she went through it from a sense of fearful duty; she would couple her hands, driving her nails into the finger joints, and shudder, and gasp, and make little sympathetic noises, *"Oach! Oach!* But how he suffers!" trying to take some of my pain into her own fleshy, too comfortable body. A clumsy creature: she never re-made my bed without knocking a bottle on to the floor or a glass of medicine all over the pillow, and she would leave me quite uncovered while she scampered off in her worn, flapping shoes to get a cloth. When Doctor Klübe, the terrible Doctor Klübe, paid his daily lightning visit to our ward, she fell into such a panic that she could only speak in a whisper, and things seemed to tumble over when she moved within a yard of them. Moreover, her delicacy was such that she went quite scarlet round the neck whenever one of us asked for the slipper. But I liked the

old duffer, and was grateful for the way that she forced herself to watch me suffering.

When the dressing was over I had a feeling of extraordinary pleasure. A whole eight hours to pass before I had to go through that again!

What I have called the ward was really the billiard-room of the village inn. The table had been pushed against two walls, where it made a bed for three men (an awkward arrangement for Frau Jaenicke); and three folding beds, of which I had one, were just fitted into the remaining floor space, leaving a tortuous alley-way for dressing- and meal-trays between the doors at either end. The marking board had remained beside the door, with sick-room memoranda drawing-pinned on to it. Elsewhere you could still see card-scores which had been chalked on the bilious green-and-yellow walls, and above my bed there was a printed notice, *Gentlemen are politely asked to remove their hats before drinking brandy.* I still wonder why. There was an odd smell in the room, strong enough to compete with the pervading stench of lysol; it came, I imagine, from the gallons of wine and beer slopped on to the floor in earlier days and the dottles rubbed into it; I have since caught a kindred odour in a Moscow stolovya, and it brought back the Krozkohl days most vividly. There was one long window, high, and too dirty to see through; but through a space between the wall-boards behind my bed I had a glimpse of low farm buildings and of cornfields rising beyond; warm country, and not without its charm, but belonging entirely to Europe.

Here in my loneliness I seemed to find that God was close to me, and I spent many hours in a peculiar kind of prayer, more intimate that I had ever experienced. But for days at a time the ability to pray left me altogether, I could only call out to Him my yearning for Natalia; and sometimes my prayer was only a quarrelsome question: why had He driven death away when death had come to rescue me? God, I thought, had pressed back into life a useless spirit, empty of all save the burden of consciousness; He had forced into my hands a priceless gift that I no longer valued and had lost the courage to use.

§

In the canvas hospital at the other end of the village there were more than a thousand Russian prisoners, they told me. The officer-prisoners, as far as they could be sorted out, were distributed in various houses, and that was how I found myself in this select company—the six of us in Frau Jaenicke's charge. I say "this company";

but we were, so to speak, a floating population, for one of us died every week or so and immediately another would come to take his place; thus I remember only very faintly the faces of men who were my companions at that time. I remember best, as one would expect, the man who had the bed next mine in the weeks when I was growing daily more conscious of my surroundings and returning by degrees into the living world. This fellow was registered in the ward as General Shcherbodin. He himself maintained that he was not a General at all, but a private soldier, belonging to the Pavlovski; and indeed, his accent made it plain enough to me that he was an artisan from the Government of Kieff. But the loftier name and title had somehow become attached to him, and Frau Jaenicke, refusing to believe that any typewritten information could be inexact, held that the General's mind was wandering when he denied his rank. He was a lean man, and short, I fancied; with a hollow chest, a thin, web-skinned face, and lank, sparse hair. His eyes, deeply cut, had the palest irises that I have ever seen. From the way his mouth was held, with the beard-skin caught up tight and the jaw constantly vibrating, I knew that he suffered pain far worse than mine; but when, as the days went on, he began to talk to me, he spoke not so much of himself as of Russia. He felt deeply the humiliation of having been taken prisoner "by these savages, these worshippers of Satan," whom in some unusual way he supposed to be of the Mohammedan religion. "I have betrayed my Russia," he repeated, "I have given myself to these infidels, and Christ is betrayed again into the hands of sinners." Was I a true Russian, he often asked me, would I give all I possessed for Christ and His cause? "You must forgive me, Vashe Visokoblagorodie, it is not that I do not trust you, but lately I have felt sick sometimes, sometimes I fear that I shall never fight for Russia again; I have a great secret and it makes me frightened."

I could see that he wanted to confide in me. And though I was too weak for much conversation I encouraged him, wishing to relieve his mind. By degrees—for he would not talk if he thought Frau Jaenicke was anywhere within earshot—I learnt what his secret was.

He had an invention, a means by which Russia could easily beat the Mohammedans, and he wanted some other loyal Russian to give this secret to the Emperor if he himself should never get back. The plan he had thought of was a simple one. A soldier, preferably one who could read and write, was to be dressed up as a milch-cow and in this disguise to wander into the enemy's lines. The Austrians, seeing a fine cow who apparently belonged to no one, would take it for

its milk, and while they were milking it the soldier would make a note of all their conversation. Then, after dark, he would go back to the Russian lines and tell the officers just where the Austrians had their guns and where the trenches were weakest.

Somehow this singular man had got a pencil and paper, and secretly, during his captivity, he had laboured to make a sketch of his reconnoitring cow, which showed how the milk was to be carried in a rubber bag and squeezed into the imitation dugs when the Austrians set about the milking. He kept this sketch (which to me showed a sea-lion with a bonnet and feathers) underneath his pillow, and he was terrified lest Frau Jaenicke should find it and send it to the Kaiser. Would I, if he happened to die as the man on the billiard-table had done last night, swear to take the secret diagram and keep it safely? I gave him my oath, and he was pathetically relieved. He struggled to the side of his bed, and with a great effort I leaned over, and he kissed me. He wept a little then; from happiness, he said.

Frau Jaenicke told me next day, speaking in German, that both his legs were gone—amputated half way up the thigh; but he did not know, she thought. Also half his stomach had been blown away. He died about a week later, and I took charge of the drawing. The authorities still thought that he was an officer of the highest distinction, and with that chivalry which is so singularly Austrian they arranged for his body to go back to Russia through Sweden. What the Russian authorities did with it I do not know. I never learnt his real name.

§

Growing better, I become more bored and wretched. The room was too small for six men, who for the most part lay, murmuring, gasping, sometimes vomiting, in constant dread of the dresser's next visit. We had hardly anything to read, and our only source of news was Frau Jaenicke, who, if she knew anything of how the war was going, was too tactful to mention the subject. We were strangers to each other, we had no common past and, as far as we could see, no future at all. We were as decently looked after as the pressure of circumstance allowed, and I have known much harsher captivity. But the colour of the walls, when I had looked at them for week after week, depressed me; and the only change that ever occurred in our drab routine was when a body was taken away and another, still technically alive, brought in to take its place.

Frau Jaenicke never lost heart. Her big round eyes were well adapted for weeping, and she was always on the verge of tears;

but to every new arrival she gave her pudding-fisted devotion, believing that this one would get well and strong. Sometimes she asked me, in an awestruck voice, to translate the Russian curses with which my fellow-patients often greeted her when she came in. "They call out the name of Saint Euphrasia," I told her, "because they think of you as the emblem of womanly tenderness and charity." That made her very happy.

§

I longed for someone I knew to talk to; even my faithful scoundrel Yevski would have served. And in time my wish was partly granted. A man came to see me: curiously, but perhaps because I had never seen him upright, I did not know him at once. He was rather short, short-necked and shallow-stomached, with a slight stoop, as if his big shoulders—of which one was padded out with bandages—had grown too heavy for the lumbar vertebrae to support. I should have guessed him to be a man of my own age—I was thirty-seven then—but his hair was patched with grey and his glance short-sighted, like that of the elderly. Nowhere, in his figure or features, had he the common attributes of beauty; but when his lips moved in a slow, humorous smile I could see beauty there, and I had found it already in his grey, cautious eyes. For as soon as he spoke, with a slight stammer, I recognized the man who had lain beside me on the journey to Shabaunitz: it was Scheffler.

He came to the end of my bed and looked at me rather whimsically.

"Not up yet!" he said reprovingly. "But the chest's better, isn't it?"

I nodded.

"And the leg?" he asked.

"It's still there," I said, ". . . thanks to you. I remember what happened——"

He became uncomfortable then; he was one of those men who cannot bear to be thanked for their kindness.

"The surgeon was screwed, poor devil," he said. "He'd got to the state when he'd have amputated a man's head on suspicion of sepsis. . . . Beautiful hands, he had. Did you notice?"

"What about your shoulder?" I asked.

He turned his head in rather a droll way, trying to look over the end of the mountain of padding.

"All right now," he said. "They go on dressing it, but it's all right."

He was still rather weak, he told me, but glad to be on his legs. "They let me do odd jobs now, down in the prisoners' hospital. I started by rolling bandages and that sort of thing. I went round and talked to the men a bit—they like that, someone to come and talk to them in Russian. Then I found that everything was terribly dirty, the staff has got too much to do, the men were mostly lying in the shirts and drawers they were captured in, filthy with blood as well as everything else. I made a row about it with the sergeant-superintendent. He said yes, he quite agreed, it was abominable, but who was to wash the things? I said I would. So they let me have an old dairy which has a boiler of sorts—it doesn't work very well—and a big tank where the milk-pails used to be washed. Then I got two convalescent prisoners to help me, and I made the sergeant send to Shabaunitz for a hundredweight of laundry soap. But you've no idea what a mess we made of it to begin with, the blankets came out looking like doormats. . . . I'm having another row now, trying to get an extra tank. They're ever so kind, the Austrians, but you've got to use dynamite to make them do things. I've told the sergeant-superintendent that he's utterly incompetent. . . ."

He had had some difficulty, he said, in finding out where I was, but the commandant had made no fuss about his coming to see me. He had, in fact, the run of the village, he kept regular hours at his laundry and for the rest he could do what he liked so long as he reported morning and evening. This did not surprise me, for he was a transparently unmilitary person (I could not imagine what he had looked like in uniform) and the incarnation of simple honesty: the last man on earth you would suspect of planning an escape. At that time I thought that he represented a familiar type, the rather lazy-minded member of the Petrograd intelligentsia who had taken a war-commission to relieve his boredom or from idle acquiescence in a current fashion; a type that was a nuisance in the line because it had no sense of responsibility and regarded professional soldiers with contempt. My chief wonder was that he had ever been passed by the doctors.

On the whole, in spite of gratitude, I did not like him quite so much at this new meeting. But it was nice to have someone to talk to, and I begged him to visit me again.

After that he came every day, and as we talked I learned a little more about him, but scarcely anything of his life before the war. I asked one day if he was married, and he seemed surprised at the question. "Oh yes!" he said, as if I should have known, "my wife is in Petrograd," and immediately changed the subject. He claimed to be good Russian, though his grandfather, Count Otto Scheffler,

had come from Breslau; "Yes, Russia is my country, as far as I have any. I am not a person who belongs very much to any particular set of people. . . . They always say I look like a German, but what does it matter?"

"At any rate you have fought for Russia," I said.

He gave me a questioning look, and I saw a faint smile on his lips.

"So you think I'm a patriot?" he asked. "A Russian hero?"

"You must have taken some trouble to get through the doctors. . . ."

He laughed. "It was quite easy. I went to one of the official doctors in the Millionnaya. He hardly looked at me at all, he said straight away that he suspected tuberculosis, and he wrote 'probable T.B.' on my form. Then I went to another doctor, one of the expensive ones, and asked him if I was a likely case of incipient tuberculosis. 'No,' he said, 'your chest's quite the wrong shape.' I made him give me a certificate to that effect, and I took the certificate back to the man in the Millionnaya. 'Now,' I said, 'I'm going to prosecute you for uttering a criminal libel.' He was horribly scared, all doctors are terrified of the law courts if their professional competence is in question. He begged me to drop the matter, he would erase the 'probable T.B.' from my form. I told him I'd destroy the evidence of his libel if he signed a new form, which I'd got all ready for him. It said: 'Count Anton Scheffler is, in my opinion, a first-class life and physically capable of active military service.' I pushed a pen into his hand and he went all pale and signed it."

"But why were you so eager?" I asked.

He shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know. I was unhappy in Petrograd, I wanted to get away."

"You preferred the trenches?"

"No."

He seemed unwilling to pursue that subject, and I did not press him. But after a time he came back to it.

"I happened to be in Riazan," he said, perching on the edge of my bed, "I was there on business. That was just after the war broke out. I went to the station to meet a man who was coming from Moskva with some papers, his train was late, and while I was hanging about I saw a detachment of soldiers entraining. It was the usual sort of scene—you know what it's like, women watering the platform with tears, children crawling all over the place, the men longing for the tiresome business to be over. I'd seen it all before, I'd almost lost the ability to be moved. I crossed the platform to give my cigarettes to a group of men and we stood talking for a time.

They were labourers from the Tambov government, four of them. Not one of them, I found, had the smallest enthusiasm for the war or even an approximately correct idea of what is was about. The most knowing of them imagined that the object of the war was to take a place called Stamboul away from the Kaiser. I asked him who the Kaiser was, and he thought it was the Emperor of the French. Another agreed with that. 'Yes,' he said, 'the French have captured some Russians and put their eyes out for being Christians, and we've got to go and punish them.' The third had quite a different idea. The year before he had done a little horse-stealing on his landlord's estate—'it was only a small affair and I was quite ready to sell the horse back to him at a low price.' So his landlord had been to the Emperor, who had started this war, and he was being sent as a punishment. 'I've got to do six months' drilling,' he said, 'and then I'll be allowed to go home again.' The fourth man was quite apathetic. They had a war from time to time, he said, and you had to go and fight in it. He wouldn't have minded if only they'd given him time to finish a little shed he was making for firewood. . . ."

"Yes," I said, "I know that sort. . . ."

"That was what made me go," he continued simply. "I had at least some idea of what it was all about, I was the kind of person who stands to gain—if anyone does—from a successful war. I didn't want to fight, I hated the war, I thought the whole thing was a gigantic hoax. But I couldn't sit down in Petrograd and think of that happening—every day, all the time—those trains going off, one after the other, stuffed with helplessly ignorant humans."

It was curious to watch him as he said that. Behind the dull pupils which I knew as his, the brilliant eyes of another person appeared, as if Scheffler's face were a mask and a stranger had put it on. The facial muscles tightened. He spoke with his lips moving very little, as a man who is frightened of giving way to grief, his voice was gritty, and he had almost lost the stammer. It was the first time I had seen the shape of anger in this gentle, city-nurtured man.

Frau Jaenicke came in just then and looked at him severely. Not being one of her own patients, Anton Scheffler was merely "one of those prisoner-gentlemen," and she never cared for his intrusion.

"You're not to keep Captain Otraveskov talking," she said sharply. "He's not fit to stand excitement." Scheffler looked at her with humorous obstinacy, and she brought out her most terrible weapon. "Doctor Klübe says he's not to be excited."

Anton stood up and took a step towards her, holding her with his eye.

"Do you know what I'd say to Doctor Klübe if he came in here now?"

Frau Jaenicke stood breathless, appalled by the idea that anyone could say aught but "Yes" or "No" to Doctor Klübe.

Anton put his hand right between her eyes and clicked his thumb. "I should say *'Shoosh!'* "

Frau Jaenicke went away.

Next day I asked him if he had cared for fighting when he came to it.

"I hardly did any fighting," he said, in a pale, rather remote voice. "When I first got to what they called the front we were running away. We never saw the Germans at all, we just heard their guns and saw the shell bursting. We were running away for three days. Then they sent me to another place about five hundred versts further south where they were short of junior officers, and I arrived in time to do some more running away. I spent the winter in the marshes west of Vulnyetz—that was our nearest village, ten versts off. I had a very good lot of men there—good in the military sense, I mean. They were always begging for a chance to attack; but that wasn't the idea, we just had to stay where we were. The Austrians were in a much better position than ours, on higher ground, and they were sniping all the time. We couldn't do so much, because we only had one Japanese rifle to three men, and what ammunition we possessed was mostly Kropatchek. I used to take a party over every night to try and collar some Austrian rifles, but it was very hard to get cartridges. I did my best to improve our parapets, but they were always getting mucked up by the Austrian shell. I used to telephone to our battery and ask if they could send something over to keep the Austrians quiet, but the battery commander invariably said he had used his shell ration for the week, and he'd be court-martialled if he fired one more. So there we were, you see, nothing but human targets for the Austrians when they felt restless. We had two feet of water in some of our trenches and several inches in the others, there was absolutely no way of draining them, we slept in soaking clothes and blankets, I lost more men with rheumatic fever than I did from the enemy's fire. There were no deserters from my sector; I kept the men up to scratch by promising that we should attack and get into better trenches as soon as we had a rifle per man—they knew the Austrians had the most palatial trenches, with duckboards all the way along and tarpaulin ceilings. But in March they were beginning to grumble a bit because they couldn't keep their cigarettes dry and there was no oil for the trench lamps; they had nothing to

do all day long, and they were worried about things at home. One man told me that his cow Tatiana would be calving in a week's time, and there was no one there who really understood Tatiana; might he just go home to supervise the event and come back at once? It would only take four days, he thought. He lived at Chelyabinsk. . . . I kept on telling them that the new rifles would come in a few days. But they didn't. What did come was the order for a general advance. Yes, just as we were. . . ."

§

When I was better, and could walk about with a stick, I got permission to join Anton in his laundry, and I helped him there for a couple of hours every day. That was as much as I could manage; and Frau Jaenicke was jealous of my spending even that length of time "away from home."

He was not altogether easy to work for. His standards were high, and when I was new to the job I did it badly. There is a trick in rinsing a heavy garment which I took a long time to learn, and Anton was constantly finding traces of the coarse green soap we used in blankets which I had already mangled. When that happened he forgot that I was a senior officer and would rate me soundly. But afterwards he would always apologize. "I forget," he would say, clasping my hand, "I keep on forgetting that you're still a sick man. Tomorrow you mustn't work so long, and Kovalin will turn the mangle for you." Later on, when he realized how much the washing exhausted me, he moved me to the ironing-table, instructing one of the men to watch me carefully lest I should burn the shirts.

When his shoulder was bad he came to the ironing-table and worked there himself. We could talk then, and that gave me pleasure, for I had grown very fond of his soft voice and I was fascinated by the fluctuations in his temper: the swift changes between gravity and humour, the sudden revelation of that quiet anger which, as I knew now, was no casual part of his moral constitution. It was in one of these conversations that he told me the characteristic story of his capture.

". . . I was taking a walk in the woods, very early in the morning. We had been skirmishing there the day before, I had lost a lot of men and I thought some of them might still be about, wounded. There was only one man with me, it was slightly foggy, and I lost him. I was feeling rather depressed; it had taken us just twenty-four hours to lose the ground we had gained in three weeks, and

this shoulder of mine was bothering—it had got smashed up the day before and the ambulance people had been too busy to give it proper attention. Well, I arrived at the edge of the wood, on the Austrian side, and I suddenly came on three of their men. They were sitting round the rim of a shell-hole and having a picnic, passing a tin of something between them. Their rifles were lying on the ground several yards away, they looked thoroughly happy and peaceful. I stood watching them for quite a long time, with my revolver in my hand, and then one of them saw me. What would you have done then? I couldn't cover the three of them single-handed and march them back to my own lines, and there wasn't time to run for it. The only thing was to make three good shots and hope for three hits. But I was only an amateur soldier, you see, and I couldn't at once persuade myself that there was any sense in shooting three men who were having a quiet breakfast at the side of a wood. So I threw my revolver into the shell-hole and said: *'Meine Herren, ich bin Ihr Gefangener.'* It was quite amusing to see their faces. If I'd said 'Gentlemen, I am the Angel Gabriel,' they could hardly have looked——"

He stopped short and glanced at me sharply.

"It's all right," I said, with a smile. "I won't report the incident."

"But you don't approve?" he asked, still serious, with his iron held in the air. "You of course were trained as a soldier——"

"No," I said, "it's only that I wish I myself could have gone into exile with so little regret."

He nodded sympathetically.

"Of course, you are married——"

I was surprised, for I did not remember speaking to him of Natalia.

"Have I told you——?"

He said in some confusion: "I don't know. I think you must have."

"But you also," I said, "you have a wife in Petrograd——"

"Yes," he said quickly, "—but it's no good regretting. . . . Look, you're ironing a crease into that shirt!"

Just then I saw him as I had seen him first, in the ambulance-wagon; and once again I had the feeling that I had known this face for a long time, that at some earlier stage in life it had been important.

§

In the hot weather it was trying to work in that damp and stuffy little dairy, and my nose never got used to the clammy, stagnant smell from the soiled linen arriving and the blankets steaming in

the drying-room. Considering those conditions, I think it was creditable that we worked together so happily. Occasionally, when my mind wandered towards Russia, or when the heat sent me into a faint for a few moments, I would get something scorched with the iron, and then Anton would curse me, threatening to send me back to Frau Jaenicke and get "a reliable muzhik" in my place. But his annoyance never lasted long.

It was a different affair altogether when he had a row with Doctor Klübe.

Heinrich Klübe, who was in charge of the whole disabled-prisoners' settlement, had before the war been a heart specialist in Vienna with a large cosmopolitan practice. Frau Jaenicke, who told me all about him, said that wealthy people used to come to his clinic from America as well as from all over Europe. At Krozkohl he had a reputation for roughness with the prisoners and was universally hated. I did not wonder, for the first time I saw him I was positively frightened. He had dark black hair, his skin was unnaturally pale, tight, and always shiny, his chin as sharp as a cutter's bow. He wore pince-nez with lenses tinted a faint blue; through these you saw his eyes very small, and peering with a scientist's dreadful, chilly curiosity.

Anton sent him a note one day, asking for another man for the drying-room if he had one in sufficiently good condition. Klübe promptly sent a neck-wound case, a poor little shrimp of a Berdichev Jew, with his head all on one side, who, even if he could have reached the drying racks, would never have had the strength to lift up a single blanket. Anton gave the man my place on the ironing-bench, sending me into the rack-room, and the Jew proceeded to be sick all over a pile of nightshirts, whereupon Anton returned him to Klübe with compliments. Next day the Jew came back with a note: Doktor-Kommandant Klübe's compliments, and if Doctor Klübe said that a man was fit for laundry-work then that man *was* fit for laundry-work and Herr Leutnant Scheffler would oblige by employing him accordingly. Anton returned him at once, with another note: "This man is not fit for work of any kind. This is final."

Klübe came himself then. He strode into the ironing-room and stopped dead about two feet away from Anton and looked at him for about five seconds in total silence. Then he said in an odd high voice:

"Do you realize, Herr Scheffler, that I am Kommandant of this settlement?"

Anton blinked at him.

"Yes——"

"And do you realize that you are a prisoner of war, that you have no rights of any kind except those granted by my indulgence?"

Anton said quietly: "There you're mistaken, Herr Klübe. Your ignorance of international law is only equalled by your incompetence as a doctor."

Klübe became livid. He didn't stir, he didn't move a limb, he simply quivered like the string of an archer's bow. He could only just speak.

"Incompetence? Do you——"

"I simply state," Anton pursued, calmly, "that a doctor who sends out a man in that condition to work in a laundry, or do any other sort of physical work, is utterly unfitted for medical practice of any kind whatever."

Klübe found his voice then. He blazed.

"Do you think we want all these men here? Do you think it matters a brass farthing in hell to us if the whole lot of them dies? D'you think we haven't any wounded of our own to look after? What do you think it's costing my government every day to keep these men—yes, just this lot here—and look after them? D'you think we're ever going to get any labour out of them? Us, yes, we Austrians, we who've got the whole Russian army to keep out of our little country, ten of your men against every one of ours, we spend millions of Kronen and time and material and organization in looking after *your* wounded! And you have the incomparable nerve——"

He lost his breath, and then Anton let fly at him.

"*Our* wounded! And who wounded them? What do you mean, *our* wounded? You call yourself a doctor, a healer, you pretend to belong to an Order as high as any priesthood, you take a title that dedicates you to the service of humanity and you use it for serving—what? The interests of one small country! And how? By pretending to minister to helpless men and deliberately letting them die——"

"That's a lie! What do you know——"

"Hold your tongue!"

Anton stood up and caught him by the lapel of his coat and pushed him to and fro.

"Listen to me, shut your mouth, listen! I don't care whether those men down there are Russians or Austrians or Eskimos or Chinese. They're prisoners, they're a thousand miles from their homes, they're ill, they're in pain, they're helpless. Your job is to care for them, and by Almighty God you're going to do it."

I had to break in then.

"Steady, Anton!" I said, taking his arm. "Wait a minute, wait a minute!"

He stopped, and looked at me in rather a bewildered way. Then he swung round and marched out of the room.

When he had gone, Klübe sat down, with his hands crossed on the table; and his head dropped slowly forward until his forehead rested on his wrist. Presently he asked me, without looking up:

"What did he say? I wasn't listening. What was he saying?"

I was quite at a loss.

"My friend thinks," I said, "that the man you sent him is not quite up to the work here. We want a tall fellow who can reach the racks."

I don't think he heard me. When he looked up his eyes were all red and his lips trembling.

"I can't go on," he blurted, "I can't stick it any more! Hundreds of men, every one of them suffering, more coming in every day. I see nothing but pain all day long, I get up at six, I'm not in bed till after one in the morning, all that time I've got to watch these men in agony. . . ."

He dropped his head again and shook with sobs like a child. An orderly came in.

"Is Herr Doktor Klübe here? Oh, excuse please, Doctor Klübe, there's a man dying in the S ward, the Fräulein thinks——"

Klübe got up and faced him, raging.

"What?" he screamed. "What do you say? Can no single man in Krozkohl die without my coming to look at him? Tell the Fräulein——'

The orderly disappeared.

Klübe turned round and picked up the shirt I had been ironing and wiped his face with it. Then he put his pince-nez on again and went to the door and shouted to the orderly to come back.

"Tell the Fräulein," he said, sharply but soberly, "I'll be there in three minutes."

§

For several reasons that incident has stayed with woodcut sharpness in my memory; but chiefly, I suppose, because so little happened in that long summer at Krozkohl. My chest-wound healed remarkably, the leg remaining at the stage where I could use it but not with any confidence. I went on washing blankets and ironing towels, in the evenings I listened, fighting to keep awake, to the motherly monotony of Frau Jaenicke's conversation upon Faith and Flowers and neutral topics of that kind. Others left Krozkohl as

they grew well, the men mostly to work in the Carinthian forests, many of the officers of St. Polten and Krems. Anton and I remained. I was hardly conscious that time moved, for time seemed to have no relation to my nostalgia; there was nothing to look forward to, except the end of the war; and that was infinitely remote.

Without positive hope, and without any natural society, your mind slows down. The objects of sensation lose all colour, your thoughts play their own dull tune, you begin to set a morbid value on your privacy and to jump and be vexed when someone interrupts your lethargic course. I do not know how far I should have gone in that fatal direction if Anton had not been with me every day. His presence reminded me of the world to which I had once belonged; and among all his moods he never showed despair. He worked his laundry with a steady fever, for that, at the moment, was all he could do. But sometimes he would stop, and bang his iron on to the leather pad, and lean across the table to hold my hand. "We shall see other things," he would say then, with a shy eagerness like a boy's. "The war can't lead us back into the old world, we shall arrange things differently." Then the light he had switched on behind his eyes would flicker and go out again, he would march off into the washing-room and start working there with furious energy, as if to make up for the time he had lost. Perhaps the effect did not last with me very long, but at the time they were always infectious, those outbursts of exaltation.

It is curious that I knew so little about him, when we were joined so closely by circumstance and by a growing affection. But he never questioned me about my history, and consequently I never asked for his. He was, I think, a little suspicious of a tall, square-shouldered man who had been trained for the Grenederski and still looked like that. Once I told him, in confidence, that I had left the army to work for the Dombrowa-Radzikov society. He smiled, with a flash of interest, and said: "Ah yes, the Dombrovists, their hearts were always sound. . . ." But we never discussed politics; nor any matter of religion, for I had found that he was a zealous Roman Catholic. Occasionally he spoke of Russia, with a certain wistful affection: "A great country—there are such chances there!" But when, in a moment of expansive sentiment, I told him that my father had died for Russia, he said quickly: "I wouldn't do that, not for Russia. No, no country is worth dying for." I think it was on another occasion that I chanced to say something of "loyalty" and he looked at me sharply. " 'Loyalty'—I don't understand that," he said. "It's just a confusion of sentiment; if you're 'loyal' to people who treat you well it's merely gratitude, and 'loyalty' to people who treat you badly is a verbal

contradiction." I disagreed, and he grew quite warm. "Listen, Alexei, men muddle themselves with this abracadabra of morality . . . you serve your master, your overlord, your senior officer, because you are under contract, or because it's the most reasonable course in the circumstances of the time. Directly you make a virtue of it you become blind to real virtue. I tell you, Alexei, we don't belong to a group, to a flock: we belong to everybody. . . . Bring over those blankets, will you. . . ."

Unlike romantic lovers, who try to possess each other's past, we were both content with that form of friendship; loving the depths and shallows of the present, not venturing to seek its basis in the privacies of former life or to test it on the chessboard of opinions. But in me there remained a kind of curiosity, like a sore place in one's mouth that the peering tongue cannot find. Again and again, as a piece of glass in the roadway glints from a swinging lantern, the thought came: You belong, not to this stage of life without meaning or purpose, but to a past reality. And once, when that teasing sensation lasted for an extra breath of time, the picture widened. I saw behind Anton's face, which was very tired, a long passage with a blue carpet and a door at the end of it closing. I heard Anton's voice—yes, his voice, that I knew so well now—saying, "No, it is not yet decided."

Without my will, my brain set out to find that scene's position; exploring wearily, but with ultimate success, the long, half-lighted corridors of memory.

4

For a few weeks in the spring of 1909 political cases were heard in an old house in the Liteini Prospekt still known as the Skoropadski Palace; nominally because the courts were overcrowded, but in reality, I think, because the Skoropadski would be easier to guard in case of a hostile demonstration. It was there that my own examination took place, in a small room on the top floor from which you looked across to the Artillery Barracks. It was held *in camera,* but if all the world had been invited I do not think a single person would have come to attend it, for public interest was wholly centred on the Zvetzkov trial, proceeding at the same time in the big No. VII Chamber on the first floor. During the first two days of the trial that chamber was choked with people—with a fair sprinkling of the aristocracy—who had been lined up in the Liteini since the early hours in the morning. Later the public was excluded, "in the national interest."

The centre of all this fuss, the alleged revolutionary Jakob Jakovlievitch Zvetzkov, was a man I knew quite well; in fact, at the time of my summons I had come to St. Petersburg chiefly to see if I could do something for him. His grandfather had belonged to mine, and he himself had worked on my father's estate until some freak of imagination had sent him in search of riches in the capital. For the last ten years he had kept a saddle shop in the Viborg Quarter, and had constantly sent to me for loans to keep him out of bankruptcy. He was of Kalmuck origin, a big fellow with such mountainous shoulders that they seemed to come up above his ears; a flat square head, shallow-browed; his cheeks great cliffs of bone scooped at their summit into a narrow cave, where, deeply recessed, there were huge black eyes of a preternatural stupidity. This decent, witless creature had been threatened with the loss of his premises; the street in which he traded was to be demolished to make room for a military riding-school, and every shopkeeper on one side of it had been served with notice to remove; whereupon, finding that all appeal to the military authority was useless, Zvetzkov and his neighbours had resolved to petition the Czar. A clerk prepared their appeal in the proper form; nine of the traders, with Zvetzkov as their fugleman, donned their best clothes and marched on foot to Tsarskoe Selo. At the outer gateway of the palace they were challenged by the sentry, and replied that they merely wanted to see the Emperor "for a very few moments" to present their petition. The sentry, naturally, said that they could not be admitted to the palace without special authorization. Zvetzkov grew impatient and tried to push past him. It was not clear what happened then, but evidently Zvetzkov lost his temper and it is not unlikely that he struck the sentry with his fist. He was then taken into custody.

It was now alleged by the secret police that immediately after Zvetzkov's arrest they had found a Hafemeister bomb in the tail-pocket of his coat.

I doubt if a dozen people in St. Petersburg accepted the police story; and it was common gossip—in that city where everyone boasted inside information about the Court—that Nikolas himself, who had heard the outlines of the affair, was entirely sympathetic with the tradesmen. But that would make no difference: the morale of the Okhranha had to be preserved; at that uneasy time a new example was necessary. I saw that Zvetzkov's case was entrusted to reliable attorneys—the Buchmeier partnership, which had supervised my father's legal business—and that was all I could do.

On the first morning of his trial I managed to see Zvetzkov for a few minutes; my own attorney having bribed the guard on duty.

Pending his summons into Court, he was being kept in Chamber IX (the old "little drawing-room") together with the other tradesmen who had supported the petition; they, I gathered, were to be charged with "conduct prejudicial to the public order and safety" or some such legal mumbo-jumbo, and were really being brought into Court in the hope that they would let slip something injurious to the chief party. They were all ranged along one wall, on two benches which had been placed there for them; depressed, scared, and utterly silent. Zvetzkov sat apart, on the edge of an Empire settee which the dvornik had carefully covered with a dust-sheet; his chin in his hands, his elbows on his great knees, his face stiff with apathy and dejection. Avdotia, his wife, a frail and sickly woman, had been allowed to see him before the trial opened. She sat nervously on a little chair some few feet away from the sofa, with her back turned to her husband; she was weeping in that convulsive, tearless way of peasant women which can go on for hours and give no relief. She had one child in her arms, a tiny head like a fistful of suet just emerging from a vast complication of dingy linen, while two or three more were crawling about the floor, unbelievably healthy and in brilliant spirits. The bearded gaoler, leaning against the grand piano with the *Novoye Vremya* spread out before him, was smoking a short pipe. None of Zvetzkov's fellow-prisoners spoke a word all the time I was there; no doubt the gilt-framed mirrors, the Hui Tsung screen, the baroque cornice, seemed to insist on their silence.

I took the poor fellow's hands and talked to him in the idiom of our own district, which he never heard in St. Petersburg. I told him that his case was in the hands of clever attorneys who for my father's sake would fight their hardest for him; he had only to hold himself like a man and speak out and tell his story plainly "as you would do in the cattle fair at Kieff." It was no good. He turned his eyes away from me as if I were in the conspiracy against him. "They'll hang me," he muttered, "no matter what I say."

"Yes," his wife said, without turning round, "they'll hang him."

And one of the children, squatting on his heels in a corner of the room, stretched his thumbs and middle fingers round his own throat. "Like that!" he said.

"That man who caught me," Zvetzkov went on, in the same listless voice, "he gave me a parcel to put in my pocket. 'You'll want that,' he said, 'it's something to eat while you're waiting at the police-office.' Then when I got to the police-office they took it out and gave it to the gentleman behind the table. 'What did you mean to do with this?' he said, and he showed me it was a bomb. I didn't say anything, what could I say?"

"You must tell the judge that," I said. "Remember, you must tell the judge plainly that one of the policemen put the bomb in your pocket."

"It's no good," he replied, "they never listen, they don't understand what I say."

Then a messenger came to announce that they were ready for me upstairs.

Next morning, when I managed to see him again for a minute or two, he was sitting on the sofa just as before, his wife was there again, again the dirty, cheerful children. The previous day's experience had left him unaltered; he was completely apathetic. "They don't listen," he repeated, "they don't hear anything I say."

§

That was not my own complaint. In the little room upstairs they listened to me all too intently.

I had three judges, "Inquiring Officers" as they were formally termed, Krishnienko presiding. I had counsel sitting beside me, but he took no active part in the proceedings at all. Yudenski, who sat on the president's right, said nothing aloud throughout the hearing, but was occupied in making a shorthand verbatim report—no clerks of any kind were present. The third member of the panel, Skorovetsin, popped occasional questions at me in his phlegmy, indistinct voice, always adding, when I hesitated, "Never mind, never mind, it doesn't really matter!" He was the man I feared most, for I knew him as the most brilliant prosecuting counsel of his day.

Krishnienko treated me with the greatest courtesy, and his manner was kindly to the last. I still find it hard to think anything ill of that handsome old gentleman, with the beautifully shaped forehead, the fine, white beard sweeping almost to the table, the gentle, intelligent eyes. His voice, which still had a Southern inflection, was never raised; each sentence was metrically accented as if the whole of it had been formed in his mind before his lips opened; and all his questions began with a phrase of politeness:

"Perhaps you can tell us, Captain Otraveskov, how long you have known this Strabodin? . . ."

"Will you be so kind as to say in what year this revolutionary paper was first brought to your notice? . . ."

"May I ask you to think again: are you quite certain that you have never contributed an article, or a series of articles, to that organ? . . ."

"I shall be grateful if you will tell us the date when Gretsin removed his printing-press from Kharkov to Kieff. . . ."

"We are afraid, Captain Otraveskov, that we must trouble you to give us the name of the editor who approached you on the seventh of August last year for an article. . . . Should we, perhaps, be correct in supposing that you yourself were the editor in question? . . . May I trouble you to tell us if it has always been the Secretary of the Dombrowa-Radzikov organization who edits that Society's journal? . . . It would be very helpful to us if you could remember the names of some of the compositors employed by Gretsin in his press. . . ."

Sitting there for hour after hour, with Krishnienko's resolute eyes gazing into mine, with Skoravetsin's swift glances felt like the flash from a mirror on my face; trying to weigh the significance of every question, to give exactly the most plausible answer that would not incriminate my friends, I forgot all about the trial that was going on down below. But the judges had not forgotten, and in the first session of the second day it was Krishnienko who sharply reminded me.

"I believe, Captain, that you have for some time been a benefactor to a man named Zvetzkov?"

I said, Yes, he was a former servant of my father's.

"Yes, yes, I understood that!" Krishnienko said affably, and went on to another subject. But an hour later he was back again. I had been in fairly constant communication with Zvetzkov, had I not? Could I remember the date of my last letter to him previous to March the fourth? . . . I had had an interview with Zvetzkov yesterday morning, he thought? And again this morning, was that right?

I was able to answer these questions with complete frankness; and perhaps I was a little too voluble in explaining precisely the nature of my relationship with Zvetzkov, for in the gentle, reasonable nodding of Krishnienko's head I at last detected a sign that he thought my account over-fluent. But at any rate it was restful to speak without evasion for a few minutes, and by the time the hearing was adjourned I had a greater sense of confidence than I had enjoyed the day before.

Below, I found the hall and the great staircase crowded with chattering groups, with lawyers and officers of the Court hurrying to and fro between them. I caught sight of the younger Buchmeier and chased him. How was Zvetzkov's case going? I asked. "It's hard to say," he answered. "Your friend is being very difficult, most awkward, an impossible fellow to deal with, I'd far rather look after

a rascal who knows the ropes any day—innocent men are always the devil to handle. . . . Still, I've got the very best man on the job. . . . You'll excuse me?" He hurried away. On the street-steps I was stopped by the guard. He begged my pardon, but he had orders that Captain Otraveskov was not to leave the building today. He understood that luncheon was being provided for me in Chamber XI.

Returning upstairs I ran into a lawyer friend, Dariatenski, who had been in Court all morning.

"It's not too good with Zvetzkov," he said, "his counsel's working it all wrong, as I see it. He's holding up Zvetzkov as the innocent victim of the Okhranha. That's all wrong, because what the Okhranha says goes—anyone can tell you that. What he ought to do is to admit everything, make Zvetzkov say he took the bomb and meant to chuck it into the palace, then make out that he was under the influence of some radical organization and not responsible for his actions. That's just what the Court wants. They don't care two kopeks about Zvetzkov, they'll be quite satisfied with giving him a few months in the Trubelskoe Bastion—and so will the police—if only they can incriminate someone more important."

Another lawyer came up to us.

"I'm telling Alexei Alexeivitch that Zvetzkov's counsel is no good," Dariatenski said.

His friend folded in his top lip and shook his head slowly. "Doing his best!" he said. He spoke with the slurring of hard syllables that was fashionable then. "He's the only first-rank man that Buchmeier could get, there's simply no one else of standing who'll take on a case of that sort—it means that you're right out of it for any plums that may be dropping. I wouldn't take it myself, for a million roubles. . . . Mind you, I think he's the most impressive orator of the Russian bar, in spite of the stammer. And everyone knows he believes in his clients, that's as clear as glass—and that counts for something in an ordinary criminal case before an ordinary jury. He'd prove to any man alive that Zvetzkov's honest. The only thing is that no one in the Court cares a mouthful of bran whether Zvetzkov is honest or not. . . ."

I went on to find my lunch.

In the afternoon I was taken over the same ground again, and yet again. "You told us this morning, Captain, that you were not the editor of *The Russian Voice* at the time when the articles on the English conception of monarchy were published? It was during Strabodin's editorship, was it not? But we understood you to say that Strabodin was the previous editor. . . . You told us, I think, that you knew *The Russian Voice* had a considerable circulation

here, in the Viborg Quarter? . . . Oh, but surely, Captain, you wouldn't say that the parcels which came here addressed in Strabodin's handwriting were all thrown into the Neva? . . . Have you any idea how Zvetzkov, the man to whom we were referring this morning, obtained his copies? . . . Oh yes, according to the police report a number of issues was found in Zvetzkov's house just after his arrest. . . . You told us this morning that all your letters to Zvetzkov were sent to him in small envelopes? That is right? You must excuse me, Captain, but are you quite certain of that? . . . Can you tell us what it was that you sent to Zvetzkov in a long-shaped manilla envelope? I beg your pardon, I think perhaps your memory is at fault there; this is the envelope to which I refer—that is your handwriting, is it not? . . . I see, you sent life-insurance papers to Zvetzkov in this envelope. . . ." The light faded from the chilly Petersburg sky, the noise of traffic in the Prospekt slackened; the lamp was lit and placed on a table behind Krishnienko's shoulder, so that his face was half in shadow. The room had been stuffy all day, and now it was cold as well. The muscles behind my eyes throbbed, a crease had formed in my shirt under my buttocks and I could not get comfortable. Krishnienko went on and on, apparently as fresh as ever. My concentration slackened. Did this interview matter? Could there be any real relation between this fatigue and discomfort, this ceaseless repetition of questions with unwavering politeness, and the actualities of my well-being? "Let us just go back again to the autumn of 1904. It was in that year, you told us, that you left the army in order to help your mother with the management of her estate—though in actual fact you took up residence in Kieff. . . ." The lamp shone in my eyes, I yawned, I found myself saying "Yes . . . yes . . . yes, I suppose so. . . ."

They would not let me go back that night to the house where I was staying. I was driven to a small hotel in the Furshtadskaya and requested "to oblige M. Krishnienko by not leaving the hotel until special permission was given." Natalia, however, was allowed to spend an hour with me there in the course of the evening.

§

It is still painful to remember that time. Our minutes together had been measured out, and that brought home the existence of a power strong enough to come between us, showing our weakness and its dreadful possibilities. As in the first frosts, living in the country, you feel familiarly the whole chastisement of the coming winter, so I seemed to know at that first taste the sum of bitterness

that might infect our life. And in those few minutes that we had together I found the truth which is preached but never taught: that the human creature makes for himself the deepest agony that he can suffer, turning the lamp so high that when it fails he is crucified by the darkness.

They had given me a huge bedroom, the stove was not working properly and the room was so cold that Natalia had to stay in the big sable coat which always made her look so small and childlike. I sat on a low chair and she on the carpet between my knees with her head dropped back across my thigh, her eyes half-closed. It frightened me to see her look so tired. Her skin was naturally pale, but tonight her face, lit clearly from the ceiling-lamp, was a greyish-white, the tint of her cheeks dulled and diffuse. You had said it was a sick child that leant against my leg, with her round lips and the still unhardened contours of her face; a child dressed in her mother's clothes and wearing rather absurdly her mother's sapphire ring on a tiny finger; but her voice was very low, and sometimes it still surprised me by its firm maturity, making me feel that I was young in the business of living while she had long since mastered it. In that voice there was no accent of St. Petersburg, where the young women of that day talked the drawling French of the St. Raphael hotels; but often, in our visits to the capital, I felt that among those finely groomed, world-weary girls Natalia was the only one grown-up. It was a tired voice now, but held on a steady rein.

"How long is it going to be, Alexei, how long before we know?"

"They ought to have finished with me tomorrow," I said. "There's hardly anything more they can possibly ask me."

She looked at me steadily and then closed her eyes.

"I don't mind if it isn't the Fortress. . . ."

I was going to reply with some easy optimism. But with Natalia that was not the way.

"If it's the Fortress we shan't be far apart, not really. Andrei Petrovich will find a little flat for you—in the Petersburg Quarter, somewhere quite close. . . ."

"How long would it be?" she asked. Then, without waiting for my reply, she said with a kind of scientific precision: "It mustn't be longer than three years. I think I could manage that—I don't know, I think so. If it's longer than that, Alexei, you must kill yourself somehow—yes, yes, I mean that, I want you to do that. And then I'll do it too—yes, kill myself. I know a way that's quite easy, it doesn't hurt at all. Listen, Alexei, you do understand that, don't you? I'm serious, you do understand that? If it's longer than three years—three years is the most I can manage. . . ."

She had no need to tell me that she was serious.

I wanted time to think of that bargain, but to delay would only hurt her. I said:

"Very well, if it's more than three years . . . if I can find some way."

She reached for my hand. She said: "Thank you, Alexei!" She took a deep breath and slowly released it, and smiled at me soberly, as if I had given her an expensive present which she hardly deserved. She said in a whisper, "It's all right, now that we've settled that. . . ."

Looking away from me, she stretched her hand up till it reached my breast pocket, took out my case and lit a cigarette. She said:

"What a huge room for one person! . . . Have you got a head, chéri?"

"A bit."

"What were they asking you about today? Did they make you tell them you wrote those articles."

"Yes—but they knew that from the start. . . . They were asking me about Zvetzkov. They think it was I who put him up to the Tsarskoe expedition."

Natalia laughed. It was a crinkled sort of laughter.

"But Alexei, that's absurd! How can they possibly make that out?"

"My dear, they can prove anything. If they badger me for a few days more I'll find myself telling them I made the bomb myself and gave it to him on the very day he was arrested."

"But they haven't proved yet that he had the bomb with him when he went to the palace. The defence say the police planted it."

"They did, of course. But the defence will never prove that."

Natalia nodded slowly.

"But they would if only Buchmeier had got someone better for him. That man's no good—I was in the Court nearly all morning, I could have shaken him. That awful stammer—and he got muddled over dates." She was speaking rather fast, trying to keep pace with the tempo of her nerves so that I should see no gap between her words and her emotions. "Oh yes, he's doing his best, he's awfully sweet and patient with poor Jakob, but the other man—Arachienko, the police lawyer—he keeps on tying him up over little details."

"But Buchmeier told me he was absolutely first class."

"Yes," she said, "they all tell you that. But you know he's in love?"

"In love? Who is?"

"Zvetzkov's counsel. Everyone's talking about it—he's running

after that squirmy Roumaniev girl, Princess Yelisaveta, you know who I mean—no, I suppose you don't. That's what he's thinking about all the time in Court—I can see it as plainly as anything."

I said: "Natalia, are you sure about that? I want to know that, because——"

She gave way then. I heard her say passionately, with her mouth pressed against my knee, "He's got no right—he's got no right to be Jakob's lawyer when he's like that. I saw Jakob's wife this morning—all those children. They'll hang him, Alexei, I know they're going to."

We were not ashamed, neither she nor I, that she should cry about Jakob; and as I held her shaking against me I was almost glad that she had this reason for releasing her tears so freely. I made no movement that would interrupt her weeping; only when it was over, and her body still again, I said:

"I'll get hold of Buchmeier, I'll get hold of him somehow tomorrow morning. I'll tell him we're not satisfied."

There was a knock at the door then, and Natalia went over to the washing-stand to sponge her face. A servant came in: a gentleman was waiting in the hall, he would accompany Madame back to her own house.

"Ask him," I said, "if he will wait just a few minutes."

Natalia said, "No, I'm ready now—you must go to bed now, Alexei, I want you to get a good night."

The servant still waited at the door. Natalia came and kissed my forehead; her face was dry, she had pushed her hair into order. "I'm so glad we've agreed on that," she said, "about the three years. It makes everything all right." She went to the door—I thought her walk was rather unsteady—and then she turned and ran back to the bed, where she put her hand between the sheets. She did not look at me again. She said to the servant, sharply. "I'm not satisfied with that bed, it has not been aired properly." The door closed after her, I heard her say, as she went down the stairs, "You will see please that a new sheet is aired at once and put in place of that one. Those are my orders, you understand. . . ."

From the window I saw her cross the pavement and get into the carriage which was waiting for her. She did not look up. In the light of the carriage-lamps I caught sight of a man in a great overcoat who walked patiently up and down opposite the hotel entrance; at the request, no doubt, of M. Krishnienko.

§

I did not see Buchmeier in the morning; I had only five minutes between arriving at the Skoropadski and my summons to the resumed hearing. But another lawyer whom I knew slightly was hanging about in the hall, and I had a few words with him.

He told me what I had heard before: that Buchmeier had had practically no choice, it was almost impossible to find a first-class advocate who would burn his fingers with a case against the Okhranha. The case was a farce, he said, everyone knew that; they were only dragging it out to give the impression of a careful hearing. "Of course you never can be sure about the defence in a case like this. People are saying that Zvetzkov's counsel is getting more from the Okhranha than he is from Buchmeier. . . . I don't know, I'm sure, but that's one way of explaining why he takes on one case of this sort after another and loses all of them. . . . No, no one knows anything about his politics—a secretive little man. . . ."

I went on upstairs.

§

I had a bad morning. It was evident that Yudenski had brilliantly collated my answers in the previous hearings. I felt perfectly calm, but like a creature in a sheep-pen; whenever I moved towards a gap a hurdle was swiftly placed across it, and the hurdle was of my own construction. For all practical purposes the examination was over, and Krishnienko was merely labouring to make me call Strabodin into the enclosure where he had me safely held already. I heard again and again, beneath what I said aloud, the queer echo of my own voice: "Very well, if it's more than three years. . . ."

Just before the adjournment my nerves had a little relief. Krishnienko, returning to the side-issue of Zvetzkov, was asking me whether in the course of my military training I had handled the Hafemeister type of bomb. I said that I had, and proceeded without flinching to describe the bomb's mechanism in detail; for throughout the examination I had given quite straightforward answers on subjects that did not seem to me dangerous. Krishnienko, for once coming to a point directly, asked:

"You are aware, Captain, that the man Zvetzkov, to whom we have previously referred, was carrying a bomb of this type when he was arrested at Tsarskoe Selo?"

I suddenly felt a very pleasurable anger: to ask me that question, so smoothly, with such confidence!

"No," I said gently, "I'm not aware."

With a note of surprise, Krishnienko said:

"But I have here a copy of a police statement to that effect."

"And you believe the police statement?" I asked innocently.

Skoravetsin broke in.

"Excuse me, Captain," he said, with a hint of anger that Krishnienko would never have betrayed, "you are not here to ask M. Krishnienko questions."

That bullying note, that touch of human weakness in Skoravetsin, brought to the boiling point the inward rage I had so long guarded. I could actually feel myself going white.

"Do *you* believe it?" I snapped at Skoravetsin. I banged the table with my big fist, frightening the water-blooded little lawyer. "Do you believe it?" I roared at him.

Krishnienko, dignified as ever, said: "Naturally we accept the police statement."

I stood up.

"Then God help your intelligence!" I said. "You're the only three men in Russia who do."

The session, as far as I can remember, ended almost immediately after that.

§

In the hall I found a group of barristers-at-pasture who were talking with some excitement. Zvetzkov's counsel, it appeared, had come into his own at last. He had delivered a speech lasting for ninety minutes. Starting with an onslaught upon Arachienko for his cynical manipulation of evidence, he had then attacked the police witnesses themselves, and without even looking at his notes had quoted verbatim long passages from their statements to show the most damning contradictions. Overriding the judge's interruptions, he had proceeded to indict the whole Okhranha system, to question the judicial conduct of the present case, to stigmatize the Court itself as the passive instrument of the most reactionary element in the Russian State.

"In that part of the world which is rightly called civilized, the function of the Judiciary has always been to hold the balance even between the State and the Individual. Here the Judicial System has become the means by which the State renders the Individual powerless. And in this case we see the State, divested of all moral power, borrowing the sword of sleeping justice to assert Its omnipotence by a reckless stroke against one of Its weakest members. When history asks what sort of justice there was in twentieth-century Russia, this case, and the verdict on this case, will give the answer. . . ."

The speech had made a very bad impression, the lawyers told me; Maskazinov, the judge, was an old man in delicate health, he had

been much upset by the tirade, everyone agreed that on this occasion such a speech was unpardonably tactless; but no one could deny that it was a forensic masterpiece.

Was the case finished, I asked them. They said no, Maskazinov hadn't started his summing-up yet and it would certainly go on all afternoon.

I left them talking and went off down the long, badly lighted corridor which led to Chamber VII, hoping that a bribe to the doorkeeper would get me in. I was half-way there when the door at the end opened, letting the grey light from a distant window fall along the blue carpet of the corridor, and releasing, with the rumble of the proceedings within, that peculiar, fusty smell of Justice which must come from the special underclothes of lawyers. A man, at first black against the light, came out of the chamber and moved swiftly towards me. He would have passed by, but I stopped him and asked if he could tell me how the case was going. I think he was rather annoyed at being accosted. He said in a tired voice, and with a slight stammer, "No, it is not yet decided," and hurried on.

§

But of course they hanged Zvetzkov, as everyone knew they would. His murderous intention had been proved up to the hilt, Maskazinov said. Standing at a window on the second floor I watched the policemen hustling him into a cab. His face, in the instant when I saw it, was neither frightened nor surprised, neither pale nor defiant, only miserable and stolid. A woman, pushing out from the crowd, fell full length on the pavement just behind him. But fortunately he did not notice her, or if he noticed her he did not realize who it was.

An hour later I was summoned to wait on some puffy-cheeked official whom I had not seen before. He informed me, reading from a document, that "having admitted" my complicity with recent disturbances in the capital, I was required in the interests of good order and the public safety, etc., etc., to remove to and remain within the Government of Yeniseisk, under the disciplinary code applying to political exiles of the second class, until such time as His Imperial Majesty might consider it expedient to reconsider, etc., etc. The old man, who was suffering from some bronchial trouble, read in a lugubrious sing-song voice, periodically smothered by the coagulating mucus in his throat, and every few seconds he had to clear a channel for it by convulsive expulsion of wind from his nostrils. He seemed to go on for a very long time. There were references

to morality and even, I think, to God. But I was no longer listening. What I remember now is the tiny black shoes the old man was wearing, ludicrous in relation to his spreading paunch, and a long, yellow cleaner's-tab which stuck out from the top of his trousers. When, at last, he looked at me over the top of his pince-nez he was much embarrassed to see me laughing.

5

It would have been quite easy to slip away from Krozkohl, and I believe I should have had a fair chance of getting back to Russia, for I was not without experience in the craft of escape. But I did not make the attempt. I felt a sense of loyalty to Anton, who required someone of intelligence to look after the laundry when his wound troubled him, as it did severely whenever the weather was damp; but if the laundry had been our only care I might have yielded to my passionate nostalgia and asked him to let me go. No: it was not alone my love for Anton which kept me there, nor fear of the risks in escaping, nor respect for the Austrians' kindness, nor that lassitude which my wounds had brought and which seemed to increase as the summer grew feeble.

Every day I spent an hour or two inside the prisoners' hospital, taking the tents in turn, limping along the rank of litters and stopping where a man wanted to talk. In those tents it was always twilight, though the naked electric bulbs slung across the roof were burning all day long; and the grey army blankets covering the beds so nearly matched the colour of the canvas that when you first went in, leaving the sunlight and the sweet smell of a country lane, your eyes found nothing at all. Often the noise of my boots on the floorboards was enough to cover all the sound there was in those vast tombs of canvas; only when I grew accustomed to the shadow, and saw the yellow-grey of a face here and there in the swirl of bedclothes, with the dark eyes staring, had I evidence that men were alive in this lifeless place. Then a man would call to me, "Vashe Blagorodie, please spare a moment," and I would go to him.

For hours those men lay quite unattended. There were twelve tents in all, some eighty men to each, and fewer than thirty women to look after them; so that if a nurse gave way to sentiment, and stopped for a few minutes with her hand against a patient's cheek, it meant that a dozen men must be missed in her present round. Those girls fought a steady, losing battle with the clock; several times I saw one of them come out of a tent, white with exhaustion,

to vomit into the grass, and hurry back again; and once I found a child in the nurse's uniform sprawled across the foot of a bed, fast asleep, with a flask in one hand and a hypodermic syringe in the other. But the men did not seem to expect attention from the nurses or from anyone else; they wetted their beds when left too long, but that was an act of weakness rather than protest; when someone came they were grateful, and faintly surprised. Alone, those who suffered least talked drowsily to their neighbours, who were often asleep; when one of them spoke loudly and volubly you usually found that he was dreaming, or had passed outside the frame of sanity. Those who were in greatest pain made a continuous yawning noise, punctuated with a hideous retching; when the pain sank to just-endurable monotony they hummed or whistled through their noses, hour after hour. Those few who were lettered, and well enough to read, would go through an old newspaper over and over again, struggling for a position where they could get a glint of light on the crumpled sheets. The rest had nothing to do but to turn from lying on one stiff arm to the other, push up the blankets, work the pillow down till it came between the shoulders and then up again till it bore the neck; waiting, they vaguely supposed, for the end of the war.

But the weight of dullness lay not so heavily on these country fellows as it would on townsmen; for they were used to watch time passing slowly, and the mind adjusts its stride to the pace of externality. They suffered most from the sense of desertion. When the doorway-flap was raised and the wind brought in the smell of Krozkohl, it was not a smell they could recognize. The doctors knew a little Russian and some of the nurses had a word or two, but they spoke it with the leather tongue of Europe, barely comprehensible. The food, much better than a Russian labourer's fare, they found strange and tasteless. There was nothing, in that wretched journey through unchanging grey, to remind them of the country they came from.

For that reason they liked to hear my voice; and I think it gave them some relief to see an officer, one who belonged to Russia's framework as they understood it. To me they made their small complaints: they had nothing to clean out a pipe, an arm had been bandaged twice within an hour from some confusion among the nurses: confident that I could put things right. They dictated letters to their women, often with no address to send them to. "Tell Preskovia, if you please, Vashe Blagorodie, that the shirt I left in the stable wants sewing up at the shoulders. Send the letter quickly please, or she'll think I don't want the shirt any more and she'll cut it up

for a petticoat for Anya. Yes, my wife Preskovia, she lives in the Uvalli district, it's an isba with three pines on either side, everyone knows it." "I shall be grateful, Vashe Blagorodie, if you will write to my father at Kostroma; yes, Grigori Kapitonovitch Gorbik at Kostroma; I want him to know that I received his message which he sent by the blessed Jesus. Yes, Vashe Blagorodie, the blessed Jesus came to me last night when the lights were out, he sat down on the edge of my bed, where you are sitting now, and told me my father had got in all the hay, and I was to keep away from vodka." There was a boy in F tent who frightened me with his peculiar eyes, they were large and coloured like a pilchard's belly, glossy as woven silk, with the iris like the head of a carpet-nail. He lay in the last bed, far from the light, and as you came near him you saw hardly any face at all, only those fixed, protruding eyes, set between the lank, black hair which drooped to his eyebrows and the dark fringe of his beard. His chest had been ripped across by shrapnel, he had practically no lungs and he talked in a sticky whisper. "Come here," he would say, "come here and talk to me. Tell me, Captain, what have you heard from Russia?" His emasculated hand would creep along the blanket till it discovered mine, and he would grip my fingers fiercely. "They must do something for us, I tell you they've got to pay us for what we've done. Listen, Captain, come closer, I can't talk very well, I'm hoarse today. My wife's got cancer, did I tell you that? She can't work properly with cancer in the stomach, not when she's got four children to look after. What are they going to do for her, the people who rule in Russia? Listen, you must write to the Czar for me, you must tell him what I'm like, I can't do anything, it makes me so weak lying in bed here. Tell him it wasn't my fault getting captured, I was fighting as best I knew. Tell him—oh Christ! Oh belly of Satan! Oh Blessed Heart of Jesus!—it's all right, it's all right Captain, don't go away—tell him what it's like, us lying here. They'll do something for us, they'll look after Masha, they will do that, won't they, Vashe Blagorodie? . . ." That, I think, was the common hope: that a price would be paid for what they were enduring, that Russia had not forgotten them.

The sun would have gone when I came out from L tent, leaving the pine-combed Runemarkt hills dark blue on the light-soaked sky, and a wind too fragile to carry the odours of dust and soil. I reported to the clerk in his wooden cabin on the other side of the lane and walked on slowly, stopping to rest my leg, through the village street. A few soldiers were lounging there with their tunics off, but it was mostly children who sprawled on the shadowed doorsteps. A single cart, piled with flour sacks, bumped over the cobbles, where

the dust and straw lay still. From the open doors of the cottages, mingling with the scent of the cooling dung, there came a smell of cooking.

§

Two hours, that was the longest time I could endure the hospital. But Anton, who went more often, stayed there longer than that. When we had worked late in the laundry, and he was very tired, I would persuade him to come to my quarters, hoping that he would finish the evening in my company; for the men who shared with me Frau Jaenicke's tutelage were not always of my disposition; but when he had smoked through half a cigarette he would rise with a show of briskness, give us good night with a slightly German courtesy, and stumble off down the stairs. Somehow I imagined that he went to bed then; until one night, just after midnight, a hospital orderly came to say that a man who was dying—a throat-wound in J—had begged to see me. As I sat at this man's bedside, with the farmer's lamp which they used on these occasions just beside my shoulder, I dimly saw that another visitor was leaning over a soldier half a dozen beds away. When his head turned, and the light fell for a moment on his upper profile I knew it was Anton; and afterwards one of the women told me that he was in one tent or another almost every night until the small hours. "Some of them hate the darkness," he had told her.

During the day, when I met him in the hospital, his face had a sweetness which I did not see at any other time. It was not for me, that look of special gentleness, for as we crossed on our way from bed to bed he hardly seemed to see me; and with the doctors, even with the nurses, he was always a little sharp. But the smile so became his face that I could not think it artificial, and it seemed that the men who lay in those ranks so quietly had something to fan a light that always burned inside him. When he came out he was generally a little sullen, and would grumble to me or anyone who was handy about something he had found amiss—the slops not emptied, the drinking water left to stand too long. Whenever he was fussy and dictatorial in the laundry I knew where he had been.

§

When the snow came, a thin, damp snow to which we were not accustomed, they put a brazier in each of the hospital tents. That was a great kindness, for it meant more labour, and the Austrians were short of fuel at that time. But the braziers did not suffice to

keep men warm who were lying still all day. For a month—or so it seems in recollection—the sky never changed from a languid grey. When the wind came from the east it reminded us of our previous life; and Krozkohl, with its drab little street, its chipped and faded signboards, the vinegary smell that lay in dark and draughty staircase passages, was almost impossible to bear.

But God had not been blind to our loneliness nor deaf to our prayers.

A big American automobile came lurching and splashing through the slush on the Shabaunitz road one afternoon; a young man in Staff uniform, with breeches cut like a wine glass, and an elderly civilian almost smothered by his huge fur collar, picked their way across the mud into Klübe's office. They were there for half an hour and then drove off again. That evening Klübe sent for Anton and me. What we had dreamed but hardly dared to talk of had come about: an exchange of disabled prisoners had been arranged, and a complement of 300 was to go from Krozkohl, with four officers who would superintend the journey. Klübe suggested (in Anton's presence he was always strained and polite now), that as Lieutenant Scheffler and I were "a good deal attached to the men" we might care to be included in the draft, myself taking the senior responsibility with Scheffler as my second-in-command. There were, of course, certain formalities. . . . At first I did not think Anton would agree to come. Taking 300 would leave behind too many, he distrusted Klübe, he feared that the treatment of those who were left would deteriorate if no one were there to make a daily fuss. I could see all that in his mind, though he said nothing about it. I pointed out that the work at Krozkohl would be vastly eased with 300 men fewer to care for, and I said that I could not face the responsibility of taking these invalids for hundreds of miles without a completely reliable assistant. In the end I persuaded him.

In spite of our efforts to suppress the news it got about in the hospital that a number of men were to be "sent home"; the excitement was terrifying; and we had the pitiful task of making a selection, in which it was Klübe's duty to prevent our taking anyone likely to recover quickly, while Anton and I were anxious to exclude those who were too feeble for the journey. In that week of feverish and exhausting preparations, what I remember best is the stoic fortitude of those who heard that they had been omitted; and I still find myself close to tears when I think of their faces on the wet morning when the lorries drew up and the litters of the fortunate were taken out. Oddly, it was the chosen ones who seemed to be most upset, and I remember how one of them produced a sliding-

pencil which he treasured and handed it in silence, with a kind of despairing gesture, to the fellow who had been next to him and who was not on the list. The people of Krozkohl were all watching, crowding at the doors of the tents and getting in everyone's way. They were very quiet, talking to each other in whispers; but I saw that cigarettes and autumn flowers were being flung on the lorries as they moved away.

I announced my impending departure to Frau Jaenicke on the night before we left. She received the news in total silence, and hardly seemed to have heard what I said. Next morning, when I was getting my things together, she came and stood beside me, seized my hand, tried to say something and burst into tears. She went away, and I did not expect to see her again, but at the last moment she appeared once more, carrying a big oblong parcel which she thrust into my hands. It contained a photograph, some twelve by sixteen inches and framed in fretwork, of Frau Jaenicke's uncle, an elderly sergeant of artillery. On the back she had written: "Presented to Herr Kapitän Otto Weskod, by Hilda Jaenicke, in honourable and undying affection."

§

It took a great part of the day to get the men moved in successive lorry-loads and settled in the special train of ten coaches at Shabaunitz. The train did not leave till nearly midnight; but when I consider the weight of military traffic passing through the station at that time I marvel that they got us off so soon. Our route was to be through Groelgod, which was being held under a neutral commission as extra-territorial for this purpose. From there we were to be conveyed by road to Loitzny, and we should pass on to Russian soil at Nievsk. It was hoped that we should get through in under ninety-six hours.

I do not know how the rumour began, but in every coach as I made my journeys up and down the train it was confidently stated that the whole Royal family would be at Nievsk to welcome us. Some of the most optimistic thought that medals would be distributed. I should have scotched this vision, but Anton believed that anything to maintain the spirits of the men was useful; and although, since we had returned to our normal positions, he was scrupulous in regarding my authority, my instinct was still to consult and defer to his opinion.

It needed a richness of spirit for that company to endure the journey. The train would canter for twenty minutes and stop with a

jerk, wait half an hour, move on another verst at a cart-horse trot, halt violently and be shunted back on to a siding to let a troop-train pass. The coaches were old, with broken springs, the men strapped on the leather seats or lying on the floor between were remorselessly shaken. Besides my own officers I had an Austrian doctor as far as Groelgod—a good-hearted youngster—and two women, but the men were constantly vomiting with nausea and pain, and it was all we could do to keep them reasonably tidy. Food was short, and what was worse, our supply of water gave out. The heating-system went out of order and at night the train was bitterly cold. But for me that long and sleepless journey, the train's foul smell, the rattle of utensils, the endless trunks of the Schulavetzy forest crawling past the dirty windows, remains as a memory of purest happiness; for my heart was full of God's grace, and in every racking movement of the train I felt His purpose bringing me nearer my beloved. Nor was that happiness confined to me. "It's getting colder," a man said, as I helped one of the nurses to bandage his thigh, "that means we are getting nearer to Russia." And in every carriage they were calling out as I passed, "How near are we now? Never mind, Vashe Blagorodie, it doesn't matter, we shall get there in the end." In the darkness of early morning, as I made my round with a paraffin-lamp, men turned over to stare at me with pain-dulled eyes, and their grey, dry lips fell into a smile. "Tomorrow, perhaps, we shall be there." We enjoyed a family spirit, we prisoners of Krozkohl; we touched each other's hands with affection and laughed together at the Austrian nurse who scolded us for shutting all the windows. In one of the carriages they were singing. And all day long Anton went up and down the corridors, smiling; giving an ancient copy of *Svet* to one man and a cigarette to another, arranging the folded coat which a head-wound used for pillow, gently persuading the younger men to spit into the corridor instead of in the carriages, repeating with unwavering optimism that another five hours would bring us to Groelgod. Yet he, the father of that cheerful, hopeful family, was himself the least happy of us all: I could see that when we sat together for a minute or two in the guard's-van where we had our berths. I asked him if his shoulder was bad, and he answered, No, it no longer troubled him at all.

"Tired?"

"A little, Alexei. . . . It will be strange to get back to Russia."

He stuck a cigarette in his mouth with the action of a telephonist plugging-in a call and held a match to it. It failed to light, but he did not seem to notice. He put his hand on my knee for a moment,

and then jumped up and started on another excursion along the corridor.

§

The Royal family was not awaiting us at Nievsk. We arrived there in the early morning, just as it was getting light, and were at once turned out of the train, to spend three hours in the station area before a broad-gauge train was found for us. Most of the snow had melted here, the area was half-covered by muddy lakes, a playful breeze droves waves of icy sleet into our faces. When we had waited for an hour or more a lieutenant of the Transport department came out from the town in a cab. We were before our time, he said, he had not expected us till twelve. No, he did not know where tea or coffee was obtainable in Nievsk.

The sleet stopped, but the day grew no lighter, we waited in a kind of suspended dawn. This was a quiet place; the troops were mostly quartered on the other side of the town. From time to time we saw men picking their way between the trucks in the vast shunting-yard which filled our westward view, and once a cattle-wagon rolled into sight with an old woman behind who seemed to propel it all by herself. A cart or two came out from the town, and a group of children standing in the gutter threw handfuls of slush at the horses in a humourless, formal way, without cries or laughter. The long, two-storied, wooden railway inn, and a street of warehouses, were all we could see of the town itself: for the rest, there were eleven railway sheds, dull brown, with roofs of corrugated iron; a monstrous dump of tins and broken packing cases which stretched from the station building as far as the canal; a web of cables, from which the wooden poles marched north across the plain of Nievsk to the eye's farthest reach. The sodden clout which twined and flopped about a little mast on the railway inn could just be recognized as the flag of our empire. Before our train was ready the sleet began to fall again.

6

We arrived at last at the famous Mariki-Matesk. This village in the Sobol wilderness had perhaps contained a thousand souls before the war. In 1915 some ninety thousand men were quartered there at one time or another, housed in innumerable wood-and-iron sheds slapped up by groups along the Paulskov road. As the tide of war shifted the armies disappeared, the huts were left to rot, the wind had blown many of them down. Now the place was

in use again as a "clearing-station" for repatriated prisoners; and already the simple joke was current, that in this clearing-station everything was collected and nothing ever cleared.

I found at Mariki men and officers who had been there for months already. And some of them, for no reason that I could appreciate, were getting well. The huts were damp and inadequately heated, food was scare, the medical service contemptible: dysentery was rife, half the population had scurvy. But at the door of every hut, and wandering in disconsolate bands along the muddy road, you saw men who could have worked a good morning behind the plough with positive enjoyment. These fellows no longer received any treatment; they were supposed to undergo examination every week, but that, from the pressure on the doctors' time, was often omitted. Their occupation was to sit in the huts, as a rule on the beds of those who were not so far recovered, and play innumerable games of *vott;* to walk to the canteen and buy—if they had the money—a packet of cigarette papers; to answer to their names when a roll was called at seven in the morning and again at ten in the evening; to attend, if they were so disposed, a weekly Mass. Several had asked if, as alternative to remaining at Mariki, they might go back to the line.

The officer commanding this settlement of outcasts was a Colonel Vestil. He was young, reputed to be a brave and clever soldier, had been wounded at Rava Russka, and still had an ounce or more of lead imbedded in his skull. At Mariki he lived in the dower-house of the Pan's estate, where he kept a German motor car of prodigious powers. Each morning, shortly after ten, he was seen driving this machine at speed in the direction of Paulskov, and as a result he was not back before midnight. It was understood that at Paulskov he cultivated a lady.

§

I had wired to Natalia from Nievsk, hoping that she would telegraph a reply. As soon as I had seen my party settled in their new quarters at Mariki I sent in an urgent request for a week's leave "to settle private affairs." Vestil sent a short reply, to the effect that by staff instructions he was disallowed from granting any leave to officers attached to the station, pending their relief by new personnel who were expected shortly. In brief, nobody could get away from Mariki till the end of the war; and the war, as far as I could make out, was still not going very well.

I waited for a letter. The posts arriving at Mariki were irregular; I gave instructions at the office that anything addressed to me should

be sent up at once; and all day long I had one eye towards the street, expecting every man who came down from the village to be the messenger. That had a curious effect on my physique: my digestion went wrong, I could eat hardly anything, I woke regularly at three in the morning and could not get to sleep again. Nothing came. I wrote to Vassili Anderchenko beseeching him to find out what was happening to Natalia's letters, I wrote to Natalia's father in Chaveschok, to the postmaster at Voepensk. Vassili answered a week later: he was making diligent inquiries. Natalia's father did not reply; a servant wrote that he was unwell and could not deal with correspondence. About then, I went down with an attack of jaundice, and Anton, on top of his other labours, had to nurse me. I was confused in mind at that time, and imagined that I was back in Austria. Growing better, I asked Anton whenever he came in if there was a letter for me. The answer was always the same: "I'm afraid not." I asked him what was happening, whether any of our lot had been given leave. No, he said, they were all there, except for three who had died; no one in Mariki had been sent home.

§

When I got about again the fields and sky were heavy with snow, all the sounds of the village were softened. To freshen my lungs I climbed up the little hill which lay north of Mariki and stood there against the wind, looking eastward across the Sobol valley. In that expanse there were few trees and you could see no roof or chimney, nothing but the river twisting its slim, brown course across the snow, until the haze blurred it out. Turning, I looked back to the sprawling wooden township which was now my home and prison. To this promised land I had led the chosen.

I resumed my rounds, I went from bed to bed, I played a game of cards with the men in the convalescent ward, I smiled and made my little jokes. But things had altered, and now I half feared that they resented my visits. At Krozkohl they were governed by aliens and I had been on their side; now perhaps they saw me as one belonging to the hierarchy which kept them tethered in this hated place, or perhaps they could see that my mind no longer followed my eyes' direction. Anton, bustling between the huts, teaching the men to read, sticking up newspapers and hessian where the cracks between the boards were widest, was unchanged in himself and in his popularity. They grumbled to him; before me they were silent. And often I was near to wishing they would curse and shout, break up the matchwood furniture and wreck the flimsy buildings; in my

present mood I should have found that better than to watch all day the hunger and the boredom, the hopelessness of their thin, grey, silently resentful faces.

Sometimes I thought that Anton was oddly complacent. I would ask him, "How do you find the men in twenty-three today?" He would smile, and say, "Very much the same—they don't alter, you know, they grow no fatter."

"How long," I asked him one evening, "how long do you think they'll stand this place?"

He looked at me with faint surprise. "Stand it? What do you mean, stand it? They're under orders, aren't they? They've just got to stay here, there's no 'standing' about it."

"But they'll break out——"

"Break out? Where to? Do you think they can jump out of bed and march in a body to Moscow?"

He seemed to me strangely obtuse.

"But they're not all in bed," I said. "Don't you think there's a chance they'll mutiny? Don't you think they'll set light to the huts and cut the throats of every officer they can lay hands on?"

He looked at me closely, with his lips twisting a little as if he might smile. "No, I don't think they will. These people will go on as they are for ever, it is their habit to suffer. No, Alexei, I don't think you need worry." He turned round to go on with a letter he was writing to his wife; and I heard him say under his breath, "Cependant, je l'espère."

§

In the hut we used as mess, the only one that was draughtproof, the stove was always stoked like Nebuchadnezzar's furnace. There the majority of my fellow-officers, for the most part elderly, were sprawling all day long; by ten o'clock you could not see through any of the windows and the place stank like our Krozkohl laundry; by evening the sheets of *Novoye Vremya* had been so much passed from hand to hand that you could hardly read them.

Here, when my colleagues were awake, the war was discussed with professional insight. The cavalry, they thought, was mainly at fault. They had no good opinion of Brussilov, who they said was weak on tactics. They considered that Alexeiev had been over-cautious. They themselves would have executed a decisive thrust much earlier and made certain of fifty thousand prisoners. They could not, upon their souls they could not understand how Evert had failed to reach Baronovitchi in July. Captain Grassogi, the faded beauty who was always yawning, would gaze benevolently at the

younger men from the edge of the stove emplacement, holding his spectacles in one delicate hand and feeling the temperature of his buttocks with the other. Reading between the newspaper lines, he could not be happy, he said, about the morale at the front; it was hinted that men were deserting, and that was something quite new; in all his experience in the line there had been no case of desertion; he felt that the newest drafts of officers had been undertrained, officers were being taken now from an inferior class and had not the right influence with the men. Everybody agreed with Captain Grassogi: in their time things had been quite different, the officers now in the line were a very poor type indeed; and would Lieutenant Virchov, who had just come in, mind shutting the door, as it was rather draughty?

We were much disturbed by the rumour that among the latest consignments to arrive at the station there were political agitators who were disseminating noxious propaganda among the men. Anton and I were sent for, chairs were turned to face the table and a formal committee of the staff was held with Grassogi as chairman. It was resolved, after an hour's earnest discussion, that the N.C.O.s throughout the station be instructed "to look out for and to check any conversation among the ranks of an unmilitary character." And having thus grasped the nettle, we turned our chairs again to face the stove.

§

A messenger came up from the post office late that night. He brought me a package containing five of my letters to Natalia, marked "house unoccupied, present address unknown."

When Anton came in, an hour afterwards, I could not hide from him that I had been weeping like a child. And as if I had been a child, he put his arm about my shoulders, and drew me close to him, saying nothing.

PART II

7

AT Obliensk the station had been crammed with troops, new drafts going westward, and at Kraschev, by contrast, the long platform was deserted when I reached it late in the evening. A train for Mozir, a Staff connection, would leave about six next morning, I was told. So I was there at five and spent an hour or two, still half asleep, alternately freezing in the waiting-room and limping up and down the naked, lightless platform to recover circulation. Long trains went by, but none of them stopped. In the first blue light which the snow reflected I caught a glimpse of staring faces in an open truck that passed, the dirty, stone-coloured faces of men in whom nothing was left save consciousness. They were Austrian, and I realized then that these were prisoner-trains.

I should probably have waited till midday, except for good fortune. A group of officers arrived and one of them, recognizing my face, came up to speak to me. It was Fyodor Besaskitov, now Colonel of the Fourteenth Pavlovski, a Finn who had been my friend at the Mihailovski school. I knew him at once by the length and narrowness of his face.

"I didn't know you were alive," he said. "In fact I thought—who was it? someone told me, I don't remember who it was, someone from Stavka—well, never mind—where are you off to now?"

Eventually, I told him, to Petrograd—if I should ever get there.

"I think," he said, "I can at least get you as far as Mozir. I've got a coach over here and I'm getting it hooked to one of the prisoner-trains—if you don't mind the indignity—it's the only way of getting anywhere these days. Where's your luggage? Oh, is that all . . .?"

He shouted for his batman to come and take my valise, signalled to a shunting engine to stop, and led me across the lines to where his coach was waiting. The coach was divided into three saloons, each gorged with armchairs heavily upholstered. Besaskitov apologized for the grubbiness of the hangings; the coach, he believed, had formerly been used by the Archduke Nikolas, and his staff had treated it rather badly. . . . Another prisoner-train came in, fifteen coaches long, and by the laborious manœuvres of the shunting engine we were attached to its rear. Besaskitov then put his head out

of the window, yelled for the stationmaster, and heavily cursed him: how the devil did the stationmaster think we were going to get any steam in our pipes at that distance from the engine? We were taken off, and shunted to another line, and brought round to the front of the train, and coupled up with the tender. "Ah!" said Besaskitov, shutting all the windows, "conditions are now reasonable, and the war, as far as I am concerned, may proceed." But no one could dislike the man, with the impudent humour in his dark-browed, crescent eyes, and in the nose like a plunging fist. He introduced me briefly to his companions, young men with "staff appointment" all over their bored faces, "Captain Deskin, Lieutenant Podsolki, and that autumn beer-root bedded out in the corner is, or was, General Czayniki—a cigarette, General? No answer! He will wake, messieurs, for the last judgement. Tell me, Otraveskov, what takes you to Petrograd, or is it terribly secret? You don't surely mean to tell us you're on leave?"

"No," I said, "it's business."

"Ah, business!" Besaskitov said darkly, and Lieutenant Podsolki murmured sagely, "Ah yes, business, of course."

"I've come from Mariki-Matesk," I told them, "and I'm going to see about medical supplies. We've come to such a state——"

"Ah yes, medical supplies; Mariki-Matesk, yes!" Podsolki purred.

But I could see that he had never heard of Mariki and I had no wish to go into details of my mission. For it had started in a violent altercation with Colonel Vestil. We were losing lives through the shortage of medicine and appliances; Anton believed that we should get help from his father-in-law, who was a member of the Military Industrial Committee, if our case were put to him personally; and I had asked leave to make an expedition to Petrograd for this purpose. At first Vestil had obstinately refused; then Anton himself had paid a visit and stayed with him for an hour, during which (as I read between the lines) he had threatened exposure of Vestil's negligence. At seven on the following morning Vestil had sent for me and, with no very good humour, had signed my leave, only insisting that I should return within eighteen days.

"I don't want to be discouraging," Deskin said from a little hole in the corner of his mouth, "but I can't see you getting much medicine from Petrograd. We've tried—haven't we, Fifi?—to get things out of those people. And we've come to the conclusion now that the best way to run a war is to treat Petrograd as if it didn't exist."

Besaskitov nodded. "Petrograd having long since treated us as if we didn't exist," he said.

"What is happening to the war?" I asked. (Not that I cared, just then.) "At Mariki we get no first-hand news."

Besaskitov leant forward. "The war is all right," he said, "it's coming along nicely, the war'll do fine if people will only stop interfering with it."

Podsolki shook his head. "They don't interfere enough. If they'd interfere to the extent of giving us all four months' leave——"

"I don't mean those people," Besaskitov said shortly, "I mean the Porazhentsi.—You, Otraveskov, you don't know how things have got with the army while you've been enjoying your rest-cure. In your day we used to have soldiers, they weren't great thinking men, they weren't asked to think, the bargain was that we clever fellows should do the thinking for them so long as they had the right thoughts about the Germans, *videlicet,* that the Germans had to be skewered. Now we don't have soldiers, we have nothing but a set of grisly metaphysicians. God alone knows how they get like that, and before they skewer a German they want to know just what sort of a creature he is and how he feels about it. If I had my way——"

"No, Fifi, you're wrong!" Podsolki interrupted. "The soldiers are just the same, they're still quite content to have their thinking done for them, but they have a different set of people to do it, Jews and Germans, Greeks and Ephesians, and red-bearded gentry from the parts of Libya about Cyrene——"

"Well, that may be——"

"The trouble with this war . . ." Deskin began sleepily.

The saloon was nicely warmed now, and the fifteen coaches behind seems to keep ours steady. Lolling in our chairs we rolled smoothly northwards.

"You're married, aren't you?" Besaskitov asked me, when the others were asleep. "What've you done with your wife?"

"I left her at Voepensk."

"Voepensk?"

"It's about sixty versts from Petrograd," I told him.

"Oh, then you'll see her?"

I said: "I hope so."

I cleared a spy-hole in the steam on the window and drowsily watched the scraggy trees stuck out like spars of sunken ships from the flowing waste of snow. I wanted to escape my anxious thoughts in sleep, but in spite of my weariness I could not become unconscious, and I knew that when I slept Natalia's image would pursue me, her voice pitifully calling my name. The train ran well, not fast,

but very steadily. Once it pulled up with a jerk, the General woke for the first time and rang for his batman to bring him coffee; but long before the coffee came he had fallen asleep. We waited for twenty minutes or more; one of the Austrians, it seemed, had thrown himself out of the train, and they were arguing as to what should be done with his remains; when the train started, and the General woke again, his coffee was quite cold. It was part of the spirit of slackness which had crept into the army, the General said, that the fellow could not even bring him luke-warm coffee. The train settled down again to its easy gait, and we passed through Ovrutch without stopping. In the late afternoon the sun broke from the curded sky, spreading a yellow sheen across the snow and inking-in our monstrous, jiggling shadow. Then the snow faded as swiftly as if a grey blind had been dropped across the daylight, the gas in the saloon was lit, I no longer saw anything but a single face dried up with hoping, and that was my own.

"I'll tell you someone you might see in Petrograd," Besaskitov said as we parted at Mozir, "there's a man called Sopojnikin with the General Staff, an old friend of mine, he's rather dour, but he might help you if you mention my name, with perhaps a little *baksheesh*. . . . Only too glad, my dear chap! You must come and see us at my place at Kremeskaya, it's delicious in the summer. As soon as this war's over. . . ."

§

After only an hour's wait at Mozir I found standing-space in a coach, crowded with civilians, which went through to Petrograd. I got there late the next evening.

I drove at once to the Nikolas station, hoping to catch a train for Voepensk; but there was none that night. With my bag between my feet I stood in the middle of the station hall, curiously faint, ready to weep with disappointment. In the train it had been hot, if only from the press of human bodies; here the quick air of Petrograd whipped about you at every turn, clouding the eyes, and the brilliant lights of the city reeling past the misted windows of the cab had left me bewildered. I had no idea what to do next, I could not remember the name of a single hotel. At last it occurred to me that my sister Catherine might be at her flat in town. I hailed another cab and directed the driver to Novaya Derevnya.

Mme Milutine was at home, the dvornik said, but she had company; if it were a business matter I should do better to come in the morning . . . or well, just as I pleased!

Pulling myself up the stairs with one hand on the iron rail, smelling the special compound of Belgian soap and damp distemper which belonged to this place, I felt for a moment as if time, having lagged behind, had overtaken me. The door to the little entrance hall was open, I went inside, and there, like properties which the foreman of stage has arranged exactly for the rise of the curtain, I saw the familiar manifestations of my sister's respectable taste: the Riesener marquetry table covered with a yellow crocheted napkin and bearing the St. Petersburg directory of 1910; the barometer in a frame of fretwork; the Psyche copied from one of the Florentine museums and ingeniously adapted to hold a clothes-brush; the half-length portrait, too large to hang elsewhere, of my grandfather in his Grenederski uniform. I opened the door on the right and went into the long drawing-room.

As far as I could see, in the blue haze, Catherine was not there. But one of her visitors, hearing the click of the door, turned round and saw me.

"Are you looking for Katie Alexeievna?" he asked. "She'll be back in a moment, she's gone to give Pavel his medicine—she's looking after him, you know. Sit down, won't you?—You were saying, Vladimir——?"

The man who answered was a slight, consumptive-looking creature with Mongolian eyes, so quick and certain in their movement that I shall always be able to picture them, though I no longer see in solid the high, round forehead, the moustache curled down at the ends of the wide, close mouth, the spoon-shaped, lank-furred chin. His suit, a little shiny, was that of a government clerk in the middle grade.

"I was explaining," he said in his precise, rather feminine voice, "that what you call 'the individual' must, for political purposes, be considered mathematically. All men are not alike, no—I agree with you there! But every effective political organization must be based on exact mathematics, and to bring the individual into the political focus one has to treat him as a sum of positive and negative qualities, such as power to produce, desire of possession, and so forth, which can serve as basis for mathematical calculation."

The pale young man with a student's moustache who had spoken to me disagreed with him.

"No," he said seriously, "the individual must be eliminated, he must be cut out altogether." He turned to me. "You will smoke, sir? Catherine will have tea for us presently.—How in the world, Vladimir, can you think politically at all if you are trying to envisage some hundred million separate personalities, even if you codify them as

x plus y or δ minus θ? Even supposing you have ten thousand clerks with ten thousand slide-rules. . . ."

In the wicker chair on the other side of the room a vast paunch, scarcely held in bounds by a silver chain, heaved slowly over, and from a cloud of smoke a chesty voice said: "Even supposing you had ten thousand nincompoops with forty thousand hairs on their upper lips! Don't you see, Sasha, that he's pulling your leg?"

"Of course he is!" This was the Jewish woman who sat knitting by Sasha's side. "You know perfectly well that Vladimir doesn't believe in the individual at all, he's only trying——"

"Oh, but wait a minute, Rosa, wait a minute!" Vladimir murmured affably, wriggling a middle finger through his beard. "I have never denied the individual personality—you can go through every book I've ever written——"

The Jewess turned on him sharply.

"I know, I know, but you deny any value in the individual, and that amounts to the same thing."

"Now listen, Rosa——"

But she would not be interrupted.

"You've never had to manage a family, Volodya—oh no you haven't, you leave it all to your wife. What do you think would happen if I tried to look after Jakob and Sergei and Vava and Julia by means of a mathematical formula? What if——"

"It would be very much better," Sasha said swiftly. "Everyone knows that you spoil your family."

The man in the wicker chair pushed up his weeping moustache to give egress to an opinion.

"I don't see why Rosa shouldn't weigh Jakob and Julia and feed them on a percentage basis," he said sombrely. "Julia of course would score because of her huge posterior."

"Be quiet, Andrey!"

"We shall get nowhere," Sasha said wearily.

"Do we want to get anywhere?" Andrey asked.

"I imagine Volodya does."

The man with the curious eyes moved across to the stove, where he turned to warm his back and smiled serenely.

"No," he said, "I have nowhere further to go. I know my position exactly."

I wandered over to the bookshelf in the window corner and picked out—I knew exactly where it was—a volume of Solovyov's poems; considering, as I had done so often, why so prosaic a bourgeoise as Catherine should choose to mix with the shabby, half-baked intellectuals who always flocked here. They supplied, I sup-

posed, some kind of compensation for which she hungered since her husband's desertion; they were, despite their execrable manners, as respectable as they had to be for Katie's orthodoxy, and they gave her at the same time the sense of distinction which comes from an intimacy with some kind of naughtiness. On the floors below they said, no doubt, that Mme. Milutine was a very advanced woman; and the thought of how these people would have shocked my mother may have glowed as a tiny lamp of satisfaction in poor Katie's queer, grey mind. I was longing to see her now, for I held her in some affection, and since I said good-bye to Anton at the Paulskov station I had felt a loneliness which the presence of strangers only increased. But the talk, a little faded like the European furniture they sell in the Moscow bazaars, ran smoothly on, it was a long time before Katie came.

At last there were sharp steps on the hall parquet, and I should have known it was Katie coming by the way she pushed the door before turning the handle.

"Sasha, you must go and knock up a chemist," Katie said, as she came in, "I must have some bromide of potassium."

She was tired, and older, I thought, with already a little grey in her thin, bunned hair; her eyes moistly bright, and the brush-stroke of crimson in her cheeks enlarged to a smudge of scarlet. She crossed swiftly to the little table close to Andrey, put down the tumbler and the book she was carrying, pulled up a chair and began to write.

"We've been having a very interesting talk, Catherine Alexeievna," Andrey said, "most interesting to a man like me with no university education. Vladimir has been persuading us that human beings can be represented as figures in Euclid. It would be instructive to see a diagram of Rosa there."

"I don't want to see any diagrams," Catherine said curtly. "I want to see the minutes of Tuesday's meeting. Have you done them yet?"

Andrey sighed. "Catherine, darling lady, how can I do minutes when Sasha here keeps talking? And besides, there's something wrong with my pen."

"You'll find a good pen on the bookshelf over there.—Sasha, do take this, will you, to Rugol in Samotechnaya and tell him you must have the mixture at once."

The youth with the white face and grey lips unfolded himself from the sofa and yawned.

"How is Pavel getting on?" he asked.

Catherine said, still writing: "He's slightly delirious. Do hurry

with this, there's a good fellow.—Yes, Andrey, you shall have your tea in a few minutes."

Sasha took the note and wandered to the door. Catching sight of me, he said:

"Oh, I'd forgotten, this gentleman wants to see you."

Katie stopped writing and blinked at me over the table-lamp.

"Who is that?" she asked. "I don't think I——"

"It's only Alexei," I said, going towards her. "I didn't want to bother you, only——"

"Alexei!"

She ran into my arms and embraced me with a warmth I had never expected.

"Alexei, darling! Oh, you precious thing!" Her eyes were crying, and she held my hand. "Tell me, Alexei, tell me, when did you last have something to eat?"

For a moment I could not remember. Then I said, through the storm of Andrey's laughter: "I had a meal at Mozir. That was last night. And I got some biscuits——"

"But you must be dead!" She stopped short, and folded her lips. Then she said in an odd voice, a little huskily: "I heard you were—Vassili wrote to me—and here you are, alive and—but what's wrong with that leg?—Rosa, get him something, will you dear! In the kitchen, there's some stock you can heat up, what I left on Sunday.—But Alexei, what did you do to it—it isn't bad, is it?"

In a minute she had the fat Rosa plunging among the kitchen crockery and Andrey cutting slices from a potato cake, while Vladimir was sent to sit on Pavel's chest if he tried to get out of bed, and Sasha shooed off to the chemist's. And all the time she was talking to me in broken sentences, fingering my hand. I heard very little of what she said, for my weakness, now that I realized its cause, had a firmer hold on me. I was straining to ask her about Natalia, but my salt mouth would not shape the question; I knew that I could not say Natalia's name without weeping, and I would not weep before a stranger.

When some scraps had been collected for me Katie's visitors sat around and watched me eat, with a certain scientific interest, taking it in turns to go and look after Pavel. They asked me polite questions, which I judged to be intelligent, about the conduct of operations at Bukovina; but I was still too much bemused by travelling to answer coherently, even had I been well-informed, and they drifted presently to their own topics. Towards two o'clock in the morning the man they called Vladimir said he had work to do and

departed energetically. "You will have another batch of galley-proofs to do tomorrow," he said to Katie, as he went out. One by one the others followed, but even then I could not get Katie's attention, for her love of neatness, which seemed to have been suspended, reappeared; she hustled about the room to tidy it, fumblingly, in the manner of the short-sighted, and grumbling at her friends—"The mess he makes, that Andrey! I can't teach him to be tidy. . . ." Then Pavel, in the bedroom, started singing, and she ran to quiet him. When she came back she thrust a sheaf of manuscript into my hands and bade me be kind enough to read it aloud while she checked a printed proof. "You don't know how good it is to see you, Alexei!" she said from time to time, as she turned on to the next slip. "I quite thought I had lost you . . . yes, go on, *'control of all currency issue immediately upon the assumption of power. . . .'* " At last, when she went back to Pavel, and stayed with him for a long time, I followed her there.

We sat on either side of the bed, wearing our overcoats, for in this room it was not too warm, and talked across the corpse-white, twitching face which lay embedded like a plum-stone in the striped pillow. "Pavel has been in prison," was all she told me about him. Her eyes were on Pavel's face, she did not look at me at all.

I got it out at last. My voice was very shaky.

"Tell me, Katie, what has happened to Natalia?"

For a moment her glance came up to my face, and her eyes, I thought, were guilty.

"Natalia? I don't know. Isn't she—? I don't know, I haven't seen her for a long time, some months." Then, before I could say anything, she rushed on: "I'm sorry, Alexei, I can't tell you how sorry I am, but I've been so busy, I do—well, work of various kinds, I've not had time to see anyone, I've given up visiting altogether."

"When did you last see her?" I asked plainly.

"In May, I think it was—I'm not sure. Yes, it must have been May. She came to see me here."

"Was she all right then?"

"Not very well. At least, I don't know. She didn't seem to me very well. She was worried."

"Worried?"

"You hadn't sent her any letters, not for some time. She wanted to know if I'd heard from you. Of course I hadn't—you never write to me, do you?"

"You're sure about that?" I asked, "that she had been without letters from me?"

"Quite sure."

"And you haven't been in touch with her since?"

"No."

"Or heard anything about her?"

"No. Oh, I did hear that she was ill. It was—yes, it was Lydia Kotsivé who told me."

"Was Lydia looking after her?"

"No, no I don't think so. No, I remember, Lydia was on her way back to Moscow, she had to meet Boris there."

"So she asked you to do something about it?"

Catherine hesitated.

"Alexei, you don't know what it's been like all these months, with Pavel here to look after, and all kinds of things—I thought Natalia would write if she wanted to see me, and of course she must have friends at Voepensk, any of them would have written. . . . But she's all right now, isn't she? You haven't heard anything?"

"No," I said, "I haven't heard anything. That's just it; I haven't heard anything at all."

I suppose my voice was chafed, though I did not intend that; for Catherine grew red, and I thought she would speak angrily. But just then Pavel opened his eyes and tried to sit up. "Listen Maria Mavrikievna," he said soberly, "I want you to get me pen and paper, there's plenty of paper in the drawer of the sideboard, I'm going to write to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, then I shall go and attend Mass at the Assumption." His voice suddenly rose. "Leave go, you! Who's holding me? Who's that over there, that tall man?" I stole away into the drawing-room and hunted till I found a railway time-table. I arrived at the page for the Voepensk trains, but the long columns confused me, and when Katie found me I was fast asleep, leaning over the back of a chair.

"You must go to bed," she said with tenderness. "Just wait a minute, I'll make you up a bed on the sofa."

"But where are you going to sleep?" I asked confusedly.

She was almost as sleepy as I. She said, gathering cushions to make my bed, "Oh, I sleep in the kitchen, I've got a folding-bed there. . . . No, I shan't be sleeping tonight, I have Andrey's proofs to finish off, and I must keep an eye on Pavel."

I am not sure if I argued. But when I next became fully conscious I was on the sofa, the daylight had grown strong enough to pale the gas-lamp which was still burning, a glass of tea was on the floor beside me, and Katie, seated at her table, with her hair tidy and her face very prim, was steadily working.

8

That city has two skies, and the one that is metallic and Scandinavian gives a chilly dignity to its finer streets and to the palaces along the Neva. Today, it carried, as they say, its brown umbrella. The snow on the roads was brown, and on the window-sills the damp white snow perched raggedly, too spare to camouflage the dismal ugliness of soiled, pretentious building. In those streets you were shut away from any natural colour, and the low, dead sky gave no relief from the dun stone. I had always hated this mock-European capital, and this morning it seemed to me more foreign, more lonely than Krozkohl. It had made for itself a special kind of citizen, men and women with aiguille cheekbones who seemed to be always stooping, as if gold might lurk in the gutters, and who wore instead of cheap Russian clothes the once-smart European suits which were hung from end to end of the Lomondsov market, filled in with patched grey shawls and woollen scarves, sometimes a shabby piece of fur; while often, in place of sabots, you saw on their feet old German military boots, worn without laces, or glacé shoes with the uppers flapping at the toe, or velvet dancing slippers tied on with a strip of bandage.

It was early, for the Voepensk train went at a quarter to eight, and growing impatient I had set off to walk to the station. But those who belonged to the city had started their day long since, and the fresh snow that had fallen overnight was already pocked with the spoors of that various footgear. In the Naberezhnaya an untidy queue stretched for a hundred yards or more along the footway; chiefly of women, who leant against the shop-fronts or squatted on the kerb, some with infants bound like a monstrous deformity to hip or shoulder, some knitting, with blunt red fingers that moved like an engine's cams; they did not seem to feel the cold, or to be stiff from standing. A man, here and there, with his hands pushed inside his jacket, his legs apart, his mouth tight shut, looked sullen and depressed; the women talked, and smiled to a friend who came by, and passed a tousled newspaper up and down the line; this was routine, and today, by God's grace, it was not snowing. A shrunken girl of seven or so, standing barefoot at her place in the line, threw a rubber ball against the wall beside her and caught it very neatly in her shopping bag, again, over and over again; while a child still smaller, supposed to be in her care, sat booted but trouserless in the gutter, dismally coughing. Of the children, who were mostly in their mother's charge until the schools opened, many were ill-clad and

woe-begone; but I saw two little boys who seemed to enjoy the leisure of these hours, talking together with the seriousness of working men, lighting each other's cigarettes, cheerfully spitting and swearing. They had neither a shirt, these two, only a man's jacket tacked up at the sleeve; but they were of Petrograd, they did not mind. The queue's head was opposite Bekmurza's bakery, where two bored privates from the Moskovski barracks were on guard with fixed bayonets, and a notice in the window said that bread would be on sale at 10.30. It was curious, at that hour in the morning, to see a crowd of people who appeared to wear a whole day's tiredness.

Nearly every side street that I passed had its ragged queue, and it seemed as if the entire population were standing on the pavements. But the Kamennostrovski Prospekt was almost deserted, and I crossed the Troitski Bridge into a city that was half-asleep. I had still thirty minutes to catch my train, but in spite of the pain it gave me I walked as fast as I could, trying by my own exertion to make time race me. The women scooping horse-dung from the roadway unbent to stare, dourly amused that a tall, lame officer should go afoot and in such a breathless hurry.

I was not too early, for the Voepensk train had only two coaches, and when I reached it both were already full. We did not start till half-past nine; the signals, someone said, were against us; but the crowded carriage with the windows shut and three men smoking had the illusion of warmth, and the underfed are seldom in a hurry. As we jolted through the suburbs the woman pressed against my side talked in the low, slithering voice of Petrograd about the scarlet-fever epidemic; how in one family all the children would die and from another, in the same house, not one be taken. It was God's will, she supposed, and that was what the pope had said to the vaccination officer. The rest in the carriage were silent and dull-eyed, as if the train were carrying them to an unknown, dreaded country.

§

When you have travelled a long way, and time has passed slowly, you are always surprised to find so little change in the place you left. It had been late summer when I went away from Voepensk, I had never seen it under snow: but my memory had carried a picture of the road leading away from the station, the market stalls in the Lowicz Square, the arc of yews, and the little fountain in the Nikolaieffsky Gardens; these things in recollection had become as the objects of a remembered dream, and when I found them solid I seemed to have lost my own reality.

Over there, where a little grocer's shop leant forward across the footpath, I had stopped the droshki in the shade of the cypresses while Natalia leaned over to make Vava more comfortable as he lay on the other seat. I remembered exactly the sound of her voice as she said, "Yes, this is the place, we must find a house here, this is where I shall wait till you come back from the war." I had thought it would be lonely, but Natalia did not mind that; it made her shy, she said, to be in Petrograd or Moscow after so long an absence, to be meeting friends whose lives had progressed apart from hers and who spoke to her with pity in their voices. "I shall get to know people here," she said, "and when the war is over we can go on living here, and sometimes we shall take the train to Petrograd to sell your pictures." We had driven on slowly till we came to an empty villa, in the French style, on the other side of the gardens. "There!" she had said. "Look, Alexei! That is just the house for Vava and me, it is not too big." I had lifted Vava to see, he had said it was a nice house, he would like to live there.

I saw that villa now as I limped across the gardens, and the shutters were fastened over, as when we had first seen it. No one could be living there, but without stopping to think I went up the tufted path and tried the door. Of course it was locked. I heard a creak above me; one of the shutters was loose and I thought for a moment that someone watched me from that window; but that was illusion, there was no one there. A house stood some fifty yards away and I seemed to remember that a Mme Bremer owned it. I went across and rang the bell. Yes, Mme Bremer lived in this house, the servant told me, but she had gone to Petrograd for the day. I asked if by any chance she could give me the address of a Mme Otraveskov, who had formerly lived in that house over there. The servant was stupid and very deaf, I had to shout the name into her ear several times before she understood me.

"No," she said at last, "Mme Otraveskov—no one knows what's happened to her."

"When did she go?" I asked.

"What?"

"When did she go?"

"Go? Who? Mme Otraveskov? I can't remember."

Mercifully a man came to the door then, and pushed the woman firmly aside, saying that Jehovah himself would have to scream to make her hear. Mme Otraveskov had been gone some time, he told me; since July, he thought. Yes she had been ill, and for a long time no one saw her about. Then one day she had sent for a droshki to take her and the little boy to the station—for Petrograd it was

assumed. Since then, she had not been seen. I asked who had the key of the house. He was not sure, but he thought the police had taken it.

At the police-office I gave my name to the officer in charge, and showed him my papers. I understood, I said, that Mme Otraveskov had left the key of the house in charge of the police. No, he replied, the police had found the house empty and had locked it up. At any rate, he had the key? Yes, he had the key. Then I should like to have it, please!

"If you will wait a few moments, barin, I will instruct one of my men to conduct you."

"No," I said. "I want the key of my house, I don't want to be conducted."

He gave me the key.

At least the police had not interfered with the house. When I got inside (not easily, for the door had swollen and stuck) and folded back the shutters, I found that the furniture had been neither moved nor covered. The chairs, thick with dust and joined by cobwebs, stood to face each other as if set for an afternoon party. The low, bog-wood table, one of the few things we had brought from Krasnyesk, was in the place in the window-bay that I myself had chosen for it, covered with oddments: Natalia's working-basket, a cot-spread that belonged to Vava, a box half full of cigarettes, an illustrated magazine or two, a volume of De Vigny—one I had given to Natalia—held open by a coffee-glass at *La Bouteille à la Mer*. No one had touched these things, they were only crimped and sallow with the damp, grey as if with the dust of ages. I went through to the kitchen, and found there china which had been washed up but not put away; no food; the mice, whose droppings covered everything, had taken every scrap of it, had even gnawed the pages of a Danish cooking-book which lay on the plate-rack above the Haubold stove. Upstairs I found Vava's cot made up for him, with a warming-jar left inside; but Natalia's own bed, save for the dirt and spiders' webs, was as if she had just got out of it, with the pillow pushed to one side and crumpled so that I saw exactly how her head had lain. I realize now it was only in imagination that, when I pressed my face there, I could smell her hair and skin.

For a long time I wandered about the house, opening windows, looking at things and fingering them foolishly, as tourists do in a museum. I found Natalia's writing-desk open, but there was not much there, only receipts and bills, a shopping list, some labels. A letter had fallen to the floor, I picked it up and saw that it was in

her hand, addressed to Boris Konstantinovitch, her brother. There was only half a page, and it stopped in the middle of a sentence.

"I cannot write very much now," I read, "Vava is poorly, I have been up late with him and I am very tired. There is still no news, no news, nothing at all. Dear Konstantin, surely you know somebody with influence at the General Staff, someone there must know what has happened to him! Why do they send such cold and meaningless letters? Why does God treat me so, without showing me how I have sinned? . . . I am making some new stockings for Vava. In the autumn——"

I put that sheet of paper in my pocket. I closed all the windows again then, and fastened the shutters.

It was rather difficult to leave the house; I wanted to set it in order, and I had the feeling that if I stayed long enough, Natalia would come back to me here. But after a time I conquered that foolishness, and having found some water, and washed away the marks of my distress, I locked the house again and left it, giving no backward glance as I returned to the police-office.

There the same man was still on duty. I did not want to question him; in a small place like Voepensk you feel that everyone is watching and listening; and yet I could not leave without asking anything.

"You say," I asked, "that Mme Otraveskov gave you no instructions about the house?"

"We know nothing about Mme Otraveskov," he said rather sulkily. "It was reported that the house was empty and we locked it up."

I had to give up all pretence then.

"But surely you made some inquiry about where Mme Otraveskov had got to?"

"It was not our business to inquire. We sent a full report to headquarters at Petrograd, there was nothing more to do until we had instructions from them. Inquiries were made, no doubt, at Petrograd." Suddenly he became sympathetic. "It's hard for you, barin, I know how it is. When I had been married only a few months my wife ran away from me, it cost me over a hundred roubles to get her back again, I was so feeble from anxiety and sleeplessness I gave her only half the thrashing she deserved. . . . Now if you should care to put this matter in my hands—me personally—to act in the strictest confidence——"

"I am not in need of the slightest assistance," I said.

I went back by the next train to Petrograd.

§

At the department of police, when I had waited for an hour in one big, stoveless room, and for twenty minutes in a smaller room on the second floor, and had placed my business before three officials in turn, I was informed that the Missing Persons Bureau was housed separately in the Gorokhovaya. There I found, cut off from the outer world by an arena of dusty clerks, a dropsical old man who told me that M. Sinebrukhov was away from the capital but would be back on Friday; if I liked to fill up a blue form, giving particulars of my inquiry, this would be brought to M. Sinebrukhov's notice as soon as he returned. Was there no one, I asked, who in M. Sinebrukhov's absence could deal with the affairs of this office? Oh but yes, assuredly, he, Grigory Danilov, dealt with all matters while his chief was in the country, but the undertaking of special inquiries was not, obviously, within the competence of anyone but M. Sinebrukhov himself. As delicately as possible I pushed a note for ten roubles under the triptych of inkwells. Would M. Danilov be so kind as to examine his records for me?—that was all I wanted. M. Danilov was sorry, he would have been delighted to oblige me, but M. Sinebrukhov always took with him the key of the office where records were kept.

"You will excuse my asking, M. Danilov, but just what is the work of this office in M. Sinebrukhov's absence?"

He was not at all offended.

"We make new records," he said. "Your visit, for example, will have to be recorded."

I must wait, then, till Friday, when M. Sinebrukhov would return with the key. Friday, just over three days, say eighty-nine hours, more than five thousand minutes, five thousand minutes to go by before I could be told if Natalia was still alive. But to M. Danilov it was only three days, and surely a man could be patient as long as that. His would be the general verdict, that a man was unreasonable if he could not wait a matter of three days to hear what had happened to his wife. They had other things to do, these people, in Petrograd they had not much time for a stray soldier with a gammy leg who said that his wife was missing. The matter would be dealt with according to the usual procedure. Petrograd was very busy, everyone was much occupied, though I had not yet discovered what they were occupied about. The lady would turn up in due course, no doubt, and in the meantime one must make allowance for the impatience of the anxious officer, one must treat him with the greatest politeness and pass him on to someone else. A woman's disappearance might at certain times and places be accounted a matter of some importance; in Petrograd a dozen women were disap-

pearing every day, in a city of three million souls it was nonsense, it was beyond all reason, it was a waste of time to trouble about any of them.

§

What hurt me most, squeezing and stretching in my dark mind as I turned and sweated on Katie's sofa through the night's middle hours, was that since the spring she had received no word from me. I had suffered it myself, the torture of waiting for a letter; it was bitter to know that she had endured the same slow pain, that in moments when it was hardly bearable she must have blamed me.

I found myself crying, part with pain and part in anger. My brain, moving like a spindle which winds the thread into a ball but never catches the end of it, would not arrive at any answer; but I knew that this shuttering of our correspondence could not have come by chance, I yearned to find and punish those creatures who had ordered it.

9

I must hold myself, and ignore the mind's high fever, till Friday came I must find an anodyne in occupation. It was military business that had brought me here; that seemed so far behind I had almost forgotten it, but now there was no excuse for not attending to my mission.

I went first to the office of the General Staff, intending to find Sopojnikin, the man Besaskitov had mentioned. The office was closed: not a clerk, not a General in the whole building. I asked a man on duty at the gate if the war was over now or if it had been postponed. It was the festival of St. Elizabeth, he told me, and a public holiday. Sopojnikin's name, however, was in the telephone book, I went at once to his house in the Pougatchevski Boulevard and sent up my card with "recommandé par Col. Besaskitov" across the corner. He saw me immediately.

"So Besaskitov is still alive!" he said. "God, I suppose, has been bearing in mind the terrible reproaches He would suffer from all the pretty ladies in the Kitai Gorod if anything should happen to the man. Otherwise I see no reason for his surviving Tannenberg."

He was not at all as Besaskitov had described him, this General Sopojnikin, but a man young for sixty, slight, brown-skinned, dressed as for the country but with a Petersburg distinction in manners, rather tired and sorrowful in his eyes but with a mouth fashioned for mimicry; and the fact that he was lame gave me a certain

sense of kinship. He put me into his best chair and sent for tea, he would not let his servant light my cigar but held the match himself. His air was that of the old-fashioned Petersburg society, giving the impression that he had nothing to do all day but enjoy my company.

I found, however, that his pleasantness would not get me very far. He was sympathetic when I described the plight of Mariki-Matesk, but he did not think that anything could be done. As to medical supplies, that was undoubtedly the business of the Military Industrial Committee, and if I could win the interest of Prince Roumaniev I should certainly have made some headway.

"Roumaniev is the only man in Petrograd who can really help you—if he wants to. But I must warn you that he may say it's impossible to do anything before the spring. I have found that myself, that the Military Industrial Committee can never do anything before the spring. In fact, if you were to cut open any one of its members, you would probably find the words *'non possumus,'* with one or two trifling errors in spelling, graven across his heart. . . . The trouble, you see, is the shortage of rolling-stock. We are all of us fighting all the time for trucks. The Industrial Committee say that they must have an unlimited number of wagons at their disposal before they can begin to do their work properly. We, on the other hand, say that the movement of troops must come first; the whole of our strategy will collapse—has, in fact, collapsed over and over again—through lack of the means to move men quickly. In the meantime the department of the Interior is saying all day long that there are not enough trains to bring food to Petrograd. And a man like yourself—very reasonably, quite understandably—would like the loan of some trains and engines for a week or two to shift a few thousand men who are tired of Mariki-Matesk and anxious for a holiday. I will confess that when Leitzov, of Communications, who is the most bumptious and the least efficient official in Petrograd, threatens to lock up all the locomotives for a month and let us cool our heads, I have a good deal of sympathy with the little squirt."

His voice was charming, dry and low; his eyes showed an almost lugubrious disapproval of what he recounted, and only occasionally, when he stole a glance at me above his spectacles, did they betray his vast delight. He described one after another the departments with which he had to deal, their obduracy, their craft, their indolence. "It is terribly disappointing," he said, "one is driven to despair . . . often I am tempted to break down and sob like a child . . ." and I could see that life, let alone the war, would not be long enough for this man's enjoyment.

". . . and then there is the Bureau of Information," he said mournfully, "that is perhaps the best of all our departments, it is the most efficient in the world, once a week they burn every single paper they've got in case some information should leak out through the cleaners who come in on Saturday. It is astonishing, I tell you it takes my breath away, the amount of secret intelligence those fellows get hold of. They can tell you how many thousand miles of railroad there are in America, and the date when gunpowder was invented, and what the German Emperor is going to get for luncheon on Thursday, and when the wife of Ludendorff's batman is going to have a baby. I doubt, in fact, if there is any subject on earth, except the disposition of the enemy's guns and troops, on which they cannot give you the latest intelligence. They work with sixteen different cyphers, and at this moment they have lost the keys of twelve of them."

There was an opening here which I could not miss.

"Is it true," I asked, "that they have the habit of stopping certain officers' letters?"

He nodded. "But yes, that is routine, it is done in every army." He was quite serious now. "We know that certain officers are sending through information which gets back to Germany, we suspect that others are, and letters of that sort have to be stopped. It's unpleasant, of course——"

"How is it done?" I asked him.

He looked at me with a trace of curiosity. Why should I be so much interested?

"Done? Simply enough! They go through the bags for certain sub-districts at the main sorting-offices—here, Moscow, Nijni Novgorod, wherever it may be."

"And are the letters kept?"

"It all depends. . . ."

I could see no harm in being plain with a person so friendly. I told him briefly the facts about myself, that I had been a political exile in Siberia up till 1915, when I was allowed to return with a "conditional pardon" for military service; that since a short time before my capture and imprisonment in Austria my wife had received none of my letters.

"Do you remember putting anything in those letters which might be classed as military information?" he asked.

"No, I'm sure I didn't. I was, after all, trained as a soldier——"

"Yes yes, quite! But are you sure there was nothing which could be interpreted as disloyalty? Some criticism of a superior officer, for instance?"

"Well, that's possible. . . . And I remember saying something about the Empress being a German."

He stroked his chin with two fingers, as if trying to work it into the shape of a cruiser's bows.

"That might be sufficient to start the trouble," he said. "You see, owing to your record—your being on what is called the Green List—your letters would probably be intercepted and passed to one of the political departments for scrutiny. So long as nothing questionable was found, the letters would be re-sealed (they do it very cleverly, those people) and sent on to destination. But directly something cropped up that they didn't like the look of—or did like the look of, you can put it that way—your subsequent letters might be retained as evidence against you. The man responsible would be exceeding his instructions, but that, I'm afraid, is not an unlikely state of affairs. Over-conscientiousness is something of a standard vice with our friends in the political department—they have the Okhranha mentality."

His tone was matter-of-fact, without colour. He looked at the end of his cigar as he was talking.

"Do you know," I said, trying to speak calmly, "that before I was released from exile I took a special solemn oath of loyalty to the Emperor personally as well as to the Crown?"

"I'm afraid," he said, "that in the political department they do not expect anyone to have nice feelings in the matter of oaths. . . . If you'd like me to do so, I can make inquiries through friends of mine——"

I said: "No, it doesn't matter. . . . I suppose the letters I sent from Austria would have been treated in the same way?"

"They may not have got through at all—I was told the machinery works very badly, letters from some places get stuck in the neutral transit area."

"So that my wife would have no idea at all what had become of me?"

"You must have been posted as missing. There are lists in *Russkoe Slovo* every day, you know. Unless they suspected you of desertion, in which case you would not, of course, be posted."

He pressed the butt of his cigar into the ash-bowl, and twisted it as if he wanted to bore a hole through the table.

I said: "I begin to understand."

He shook his head.

"I doubt it! You have been out of the world so long, I doubt if you have even begun to understand what our Russia of today is like. How can I picture it? It's like a family deserted by its parents, a

family of children who are not naturally vicious, but depraved by neglect, who will leave all the household jobs undone to devote their time to bickering and intrigue. . . . The war has got beyond us, it is a European affair which we do not properly understand and we have never been quite able to keep abreast of it; so we devote ourselves with inexhaustible vigour and genius to harrying a man who was once pronounced to be dangerous. It seems a pity to devote so much time to this pursuit, but we must have some outlet for our energies. . . ."

"And where will all this lead to?" I asked. "What is going to be done? If Russia is like this, what is going to happen to it?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know. We shall go on, I suppose, until something happens. . . . You'll stay and have luncheon with us, won't you? My wife adores meeting any friend of Besaskitov's—she sleeps with his photograph pinned inside her night-gown."

I excused myself and said good-bye. I wanted to see Roumaniev and get that over.

§

The Petrograd office of the Military Industrial Committee, in the Nevski Prospekt, was actually open; but I was informed that Prince Roumaniev was in conference and would be leaving the office as soon as that was over—he could see no one that day. "I have instructions," the dvornik said with a faint smile, "that if the Emperor himself should call he must be asked to come back tomorrow." The Emperor, I reflected, would be unlikely in those circumstances to give the dvornik two roubles; and knowing better than he, I did so. "I shall wait here," I said, "and see Prince Roumaniev as soon as the conference is over." The dvornik took my card, to which I had attached one of Anton Scheffler's. "It is most unlikely," he said, "that His Excellency will see you."

He went off along the corridor with that curious, sidelong, donkey movement, a mime of lassitude, which was habitual to government door-servants. But in five minutes he was back, and bade me follow him.

I was shown into a fine, panelled board-room, where half a dozen gentlemen, all elderly, it seemed, and all bearded, were sitting at the elliptical walnut table. The chairman rose as I entered and came towards me.

"I am Roumaniev," he said with a friendly smile, squeezing my hand between both of his. "Look here, Captain, I simply cannot see

you, I'm sorry, but there it is, I—simply—cannot—see—anyone in the world this morning."

I wished that Anton had prepared me for his father-in-law's physique. The man was gigantic. His height, as I judge it in memory, was not less than six-foot-four; his shoulders were broad as a milk-yoke; his jacket, cut long and very square with five buttons, hung straight down at the sides, at the front sloping a little forwards, and nowhere, as far as I was able to see, could you have slipped a paper-knife inside it. I should have taken him, I think, for a merchant of the old school, for his clothes, and the neat, sharp cut of his grey beard, had the shape of commercial importance; but instead of the serious probity by which great fortunes are built, his eyes showed only an unbounded humour.

"Do you know," he was saying, "we have twenty-two items on our agenda for this morning, and so far we have only got through seven of them. Fifteen items to get thrashed out before we can have a morsel of lunch!"

He still had my hand between his own cushion-like paws, he drew me towards the table and pushed me into an empty chair.

"Look at this!" he said, sliding his hand under a pile of flimsies and scattering them like hay, "all these papers, we've got to deal with the whole lot of them this morning, and I've not yet the faintest idea what they're about." He turned to his colleagues, and said with a touch of ceremony. "Allow me, gentlemen, to present to you Captain Otraveskov. This is a friend of my son-in-law's—you remember Anton Antonovitch, of course? Yes yes, the poor boy went as a soldier, and the Austrians nabbed him. I was afraid all along that would happen. Tell me, Captain, is Anton all right now? None the worse for the experience? You must look after him, you know, he's a fellow who wants looking after, it would be a great comfort to me—and of course to Yelisaveta—if we knew that a capable officer was keeping an eye on him. Now look here, sir, I cannot, I simply cannot see you this morning. You will understand, won't you? It's not that I don't want to see you, but the amount of business we have to get through is simply incredible. Listen! Will you take luncheon with me? I shall be lunching at the English Club at exactly half-past two. Can you manage to be there? You can? Excellent! Splendid! Really that settles everything, I can't tell you how glad I am! At half-past two, then, and if I'm not there you must tell the waiter to take you to my usual table."

I was there at two o'clock, to be on the safe side; but Prince Roumaniev, the steward told me, had arrived twenty minutes before me. I found him in the card-room, with two or three men to whom

he rapidly introduced me: "General Shcherbatov, Prince Mihail Krasnovitch, Father Engilchev—— Sit down, my dear Otraveskov, sit down and make yourself comfortable, I'm so glad you've come, I thought you might forget, wait a moment and I'll get you something to drink, I'll get you what we call a Number Five, you needn't ask me what it is but you'll find it's quite all right.—Waiter! a Number Five for Captain Otraveskov!" He plunged his hand into one of his vast outer pockets and pulled out an envelope. "A most extraordinary thing!" he said. "I've just had a letter from Anton, enclosing this one for you. He tells me that you've come to wheedle something out of me—well well, I suppose that's what I was born for, all day long I do nothing but interview people who want to get something out of me." He caught hold of my shoulder and shook me playfully. "Here's another of them!" he said to Krasnovitch. "This young man, bless his heart, thinks that I go about with my pockets full of medicine and bandages."

Krasnovitch examined me with raised and sorrowful eyebrows.

"Accept my sympathies!" he said. "No one has ever yet got anything out of Akiniev Mihailovitch."

"I have been trying for ten years," Father Engilchev added in his bleak, feminine voice, "to get a donation towards my rebuilding fund——"

"He comes of an old Pskoff family," Shcherbatov said gravely. "That explains everything."

"That isn't true, Toni," Roumaniev protested, "you know perfectly well it isn't. My family came away from Pskoff in the seventeenth century."

Shcherbatov nodded. "Yes, it became too hot for them."

"As to my notorious intractability, you know as well as I do that I can stir neither hand nor foot without the consent of the Moscow Committee. And even when they agree to give me something I ask for I can't get the stuff shifted."

"I was talking this morning," I said, "to a man called Sopojnikin, who belongs to the General Staff. He was telling me that he finds difficulty with the transport people——"

"He was telling you lies," Shcherbatov said smoothly. "I know that Sopojnikin—his wife is a friend of my wife's—he's as cunning as a fox and twice as unscrupulous, I've never known Sopojnikin to have the smallest difficulty in getting what he wanted out of Communications or anyone else. I believe if he wanted to he'd get a truck-load of rifles out of Roumaniev here."

"I defy any man on earth," Roumaniev said thoughtfully, "to get wagons away from Leitzov."

"Leitzov never has any wagons," said Krasnovitch, without lowering his glass. "I've never yet known him confess that there was a single wagon in Russia. If you ask Leitzov about wagons, he'll probably request you to sketch one so that he can see what you mean."

"Neither," said Roumaniev, "has he any locomotives. Never! All the locomotives in Russia are under repair, he says. And yet, do you know, I slipped down once to the railway yard at Stangridov, without letting anyone know I was coming, and I found—this is perfectly honest, gospel truth—I found no fewer than seventeen heavy-class locomotives standing in the sheds there. 'What's wrong with these?' I asked the foreman. 'Nothing, sir. They've all been overhauled, they're ready to go out any minute.' 'Then what are they waiting here for?' 'Well, sir, this is what we call the emergency line. They're here in case they should be wanted for something special.' 'And are there always seventeen?' 'Oh, never less, sir!' What I want to know, is: just what kind of emergency will make Leitzov part with one of these engines? Come on and have some lunch!"

"It isn't Leitzov's affair," Shcherbatov said when we were seated in the dining-room. "Leitzov couldn't get you an engine however much he wanted to, because he simply doesn't know where they are. The man who's got the engines between his two fingers is Halzfein. He and Leitzov are not on speaking terms."

"And how do you deal with Halzfein?"

Shcherbatov unfolded his napkin and examined it carefully to make sure that it was spotless.

"I'll tell you," he said. "I got this from Leon Asilki. Leon had a train-load of fancy goods, silk scarves and things, that he wanted to get through from Novotcherkask. He made the usual applications, nothing happened. After a month or two he had an official letter to say that owing to the heavy demand for rolling-stock for military purposes his stuff must stay where it was—presumably till the end of the war. But by the same post he received an appeal from the Society for the Preservation of National Masterpieces, and he noticed that Halzfein was honorary treasurer. He sent a cheque for five hundred roubles as a donation to the Society. A fortnight later half his silks arrived. He waited a month or so, and then sent another five hundred. After precisely the same interval the rest of his stuff turned up. Since then he's been doing it on a scientific basis: for every one wagon he wants to get through he contributes a hundred roubles to the National Masterpieces."

Krasnovitch shook his head disapprovingly.

"It seems so clumsy to me!" he said. "One can admire a man like Galatzitch, who got thirty thousand roubles at one go for ap-

plying an invisible anti-rot solution to all the telegraph-poles between here and Moscow—that is what I call making big money in an artistic way. I hate the fellow who lives on pourboires of a hundred roubles."

"Can nothing be done to get rid of this Halzfein?" Engilchev asked.

"Get rid of Halzfein!"

Krasnovitch was shocked.

Roumaniev began to weep with laughter.

"My dear Engilchev, Halzfein is one of the greatest friends of Our Friend. Our Friend thinks very highly of Halzfein!"

A man lunching at the next table turned round to speak to us.

"You've heard, I suppose, that Our Friend was thrown out of Boyzin's early this morning?"

"My dear Nikolai, you're making that up!"

"Making it up? All right, you can ask Sergei Ivanovitch." He called to a man who was leaving the room. "Sergei! Come here! Isn't it true that Our Friend has been flung out of Boyzin's?"

Sergei Ivanovitch came over and leant on the back of Engilchev's chair.

"I was there myself," he said, slowly and dyspeptically. "It was about three this morning. Our Friend had arrived at the last stages, he started to celebrate Mass in the Florence Room, using two girls from the cabaret as Servers. Marguerite sent for the police—he is very pious, you know, in his Roman way, and it shocked him horribly."

Krasnovitch sighed. "Somebody will get into trouble," he pronounced. "It must have been some junior man on duty at the police-office. Dolorkin told me that as far as he was concerned Our Friend might commit murder, rape and arson in broad daylight in the middle of the Millionnaya—Dolorkin wouldn't be such a fool as to interfere."

"Well, whoever it is will lose his job," Shcherbatov said equably, "and he'll find it exceedingly hard to get another one. Do you know, I've sent in the name of young Bariatinski at least three times for various posts—he's a brilliant youth, as you know, Akiniev—and each time it's the same answer, 'Captain Bariatinski's name cannot be favourably considered by the Imperial Government.' That's because of the article on bogus mysticism which he wrote for *Niva* when he was still in the Corps des Pages."

"It's all your own fault!" Roumaniev said cheerfully. "You don't know how to go about things. For my part, I never have the slightest difficulty with the Court. I send up a small bunch of flowers to

Viribova once a year, on her birthday, with 'From an unknown admirer' written on the back of my visiting card. Such a little act of Christianity goes a long way." He turned to me. "Always remember that, flowers to Viribova, tulips for preference, and if that doesn't work, try slipping a ten-rouble note between the petals. Now come along to the card-room and we'll have a nice talk about medicine and bandages. What did you say this place of yours is called? Mariki-Matesk? You must show it to me on the map."

He cleaned his moustaches with a vigorous, sawing movement of his napkin, and got up. But another friend came up to speak to him, and yet another; the conversation came round to the Romanov railway, the indignation over the lack of progress was general, it was thought that the prisoners worked abominably, Shcherbatov was in favour of drafting a labour corps from Turkestan. "If only Akiniev Mihailovitch could be put in charge!" Engilchev said smoothly. "My dear Engilchev," Roumaniev answered, "I should take it over tomorrow if only I could find the time." Nikolai lit a new cigar. "I'll tell you what I should do! I should hand the whole thing over to a German contractor—it would be quite easy to make arrangements through the Swedish Embassy—and he'd get the job finished in half the time. . . ." It was after four o'clock when, in full verbal spate, Roumaniev led his flock back to the card-room.

"Now come over here in the corner," he said to me kindly, "we'll be quite quiet here, and you can tell me just what your trouble is. Would you mind just getting a cushion from that other chair, over there—I'm not as young as I was, I get very stiff after meals. *Mille remercîments!* And if you'd just push up that stool. Thank you, that's splendid! Now I'm ready to listen to the troubles of the whole world."

I gave him the facts as concisely as I could. I described briefly the conditions at Mariki—the idleness and boredom; the overcrowding in the huts, the impossibility of segregating infectious cases, the shortage of medical staff, the utter inadequacy of sanitation. "We have typhoid already," I told him, "it's spreading very rapidly, and there is bound to be worse trouble ahead, since there seems to be no possibility of the station being broken up within the next few weeks. Already we are tearing out the linings of tunics to use as bandages, and our chemical supplies are practically exhausted. I've got here a list of one month's minimum requirements drawn up by the senior medical officer on the station. . . ."

He had started listening with his eyes fixed on my face. He nodded intelligently. "Yes . . . yes . . . dear dear! . . . yes, I quite understand!" Presently his eyes closed, as if in concentration. He went

on nodding. "Yes . . . yes . . . yes. . . ." But the "yes" grew fainter, at length his head dropped over on to the wing of the chair and his mouth fell open.

He woke at half-past five, saw the time, and jumped up as if I had pricked his posterior.

"Good gracious! I promised to be with Helen Makushin at five o'clock! Why didn't somebody wake me?—Here, Pistchik, get me my coat, will you!—Look here, Otraveskov, we shall have to finish our talk another time. Can you get to Les Lutins at nine o'clock? I'm dining there with some delightful people—my wife among others, my wife's quite an interesting woman. . . . All right, then, I'll see you at Les Lutins!"

§

As soon as I was alone I opened Anton's note. I read:

"It is only a few hours since you left, but already I miss you horribly. There is no one in the mess that one can talk to, and with nobody to listen to my grumbles I find Mariki more depressing than ever before. It tortures me to be so helpless, no use to anyone. We are so much abandoned that I almost wonder if God Himself has forgotten us.

"But this is selfish. I should be thinking of you and the unbearable anxiety which you have been suffering. Perhaps by the time this reaches you that trouble will be over, you will be reunited with your Wife and in that happiness everything will be forgotten. That is what I hope and pray—you know how earnestly.

"Do not, whatever happens, forget me, Alexei! I am an awkward fellow, and often you must have found me troublesome, with my moods and bad temper. But the day will come when we are no longer oppressed by the intolerable compulsions of warfare, and in the Russia I look for, our friendship will become what it was meant to be.

"If you should see Yelisaveta, and she should ask about me, I should like you to tell her that I am well, and to give her a message of affection.

"God bless you!"

He had written that note in the mess, and the paper had caught the cheesy smell of the place. It was curious how far away in time as well as distance Mariki seemed now, and how vividly that whiff brought it back to me: the pot-holed Paulskov road, the dingy huts, the men standing all day long, hardly talking, in a line by the or-

chard-wall. And in every sentence of his letter I heard Anton's little stammer, I saw his face, with the quiet and humble eyes which were always ready to flare into anger. When we said good-bye I had been think of Natalia, counting that I would find her at the other end of my journey. Now I felt as if I had jumped too carelessly from a boat which carried me well, pursuing with enfeebled strokes a ship that had drifted out of sight. I was tired, and the task of being patient was made too hard by loneliness. In sickness I had got used to Anton's warm presence, his friendly hands, the unwavering steadiness of his reason; I was not yet well enough to do without him.

§

I borrowed an old dress-suit which Katie was keeping for my brother Vassili. I could just make it fit me by letting down my braces to their farthest point and getting Katie to shift three of the buttons. In the brilliant light of Les Lutins I was acutely conscious of its awkwardness.

Prince Roumaniev's party had arrived already, I was told. They were in the Hungarian room.

I had hardly reached the top of the staircase when Roumaniev, from a distant corner, caught sight of me. He rose and hurried to meet me, his cheeks new-shaved and shining, his vast shirt-front bulging like a galleon's mainsail. "So nice of you!" he shouted from three tables off. "I thought you might feel you'd given me enough of your time. My wife's so pleased—I told her you were a friend of Anton's." He took my arm and turned about and shouted back to his wife, "He's come, here he is!—No no, my dear fellow, you're not a bit late, it's we who are early. Come along! You must have a Petit Bougeoir to start off with." He bent and whispered in my ear. "Just one thing—don't say anything about the war! It's taboo in Petrograd nowadays."

"It was sweet of you to come!" the Princess said warmly. "Akiniev has told us all about you, and now I want to hear all the news about poor Anton. Oh yes, I kept this chair for you specially.—Garçon, take this away and hang it up somewhere, will you, I don't really want it, it's so warm in here."

She must have noticed my dreadful clothes, but her expression never betrayed it. She looked into my face as if she found it deeply interesting, she seemed to have forgotten everything else about her. "Are you sure you'll be quite comfortable there—you've room for your bad leg?—Oh, perhaps you haven't met Darlynia Antonovna Selikhanichev—and the Countess Kotchoubey—Mme Grodziejowska

—Colonel Oscar Astanovitch.—Julia dear, Captain Otraveskov is a friend of poor Anton's—you remember Count Scheffler, my son-in-law?—of course, yes, you were with us that day at the tournament."

The Countess Kotchoubey cocked a wary eye at me, and then examined her long finger-nails one by one. "Of course I know Count Scheffler—don't you remember?—I tried to get him to take up my divorce case, but he wouldn't touch it. I don't know why it was—I think he thought my adultery wasn't absolutely intact, lawyers always fuss about that so terribly."

Colonel Astanovitch pushed the end of his cigarette into a bowl of narcissi.

"That must be the only doubtful case that Scheffler ever refused to handle. It was most extraordinary, I believe that whenever someone offered him a brief he asked just one question: 'Is there the slightest, remotest chance that any lawyer in the world could get this man off? No? All right, I'll defend him.' "

Mme Kotchoubey nodded. "I don't remember him ever winning anything."

"And yet, you know, he wasn't a bad lawyer," Roumaniev said into his soup.

"On the contrary," Astanovitch pronounced, "he was a superb lawyer—I went to hear him myself when he was defending the Volotchok strikers, I was much impressed with him, he was riding the other fellow on to the rails all the time. But it's like everything else, you've got to get a sound nag to carry you; if you always pick a broken-winded ten-year-old because it's got a nice, kind face you can't really expect it to win you money."

"We must celebrate with capercailzie à la financière," Roumaniev said enthusiastically.

Darlynia Antonovna, the white-faced girl who sat almost under Astanovitch's arm, had dropped her cigarette into his soup and was idly chivvying it with a piece of bread. "Anton Antonovitch was a nice man," she said in her tinkling treble, "he was always very sweet to me, he was never sarcastic and horrid."

"Why did he go soldiering?" Mme Kotchoubey demanded. "I should have thought he was the last person in the world to care for that sort of thing."

"You mean, I suppose, that he seemed to have too much brains?" Astanovitch asked.

"Parfaitement!"

The Colonel turned to me. "How does that strike you, Captain?"

"You mustn't take any notice of Julia," the Princess said sweetly, "she's always very naughty about the army—her last husband was

a soldier." She leant her beautiful silver head towards me, and I was embarrassingly conscious of her bosom. "No one will believe me," she said, "when I say that Anton is a true patriot. But he is, isn't he?"

There was a note of appeal in her voice; and her eyes were deep and solemn, as if Anton were her own son and his honour meant everything to her.

"It is perhaps a special kind of patriotism," I said awkwardly.

"I had a post all ready for him in the Directorate of Munitions," Roumaniev said, with his mouth full of bread. He laughed boyishly, choked, and flushed his throat with Sauterne. "But he turned it down on the singular ground that there was no work attached. . . . What's that? There is no capercailzie? By my dear Yefim, that's quite absurd, how can we celebrate Captain Otraveskov's visit without capercailzie? No no, you must send someone to hunt about the town, if need be you must take your gun into the forest and shoot the bird. . . . No, I could never understand Anton's lust for battle."

"I should have thought," said Darlynia idly, "that Yelisaveta could have persuaded him to take the job if she had really tried."

I saw the Princess switch her eyes at the girl as a man points a revolver. But it was Mme Grodziejowska, the dumpy little woman sitting half-asleep on my right. who said swiftly:

"There were other ladies no doubt who would have preferred Count Scheffler to remain in Petrograd."

Darlynia yawned.

"Oh, he wasn't that sort of man at all. That was what I liked about him, you always felt so safe." She turned a radiant smile on the Princess and said blithely: "I expect that's how Yelisaveta feels about him."

With her napkin held to her lips Mme Kotchoubey said in audible English: "The little bitch would contrive to be unsafe in a nunnery."

"I can't think why it is," Roumaniev said cheerfully, "that they don't have capercailzie all ready when they hear I'm coming to this place. They must know by now that I invariably celebrate with capercailzie. It seems to me that the whole organization is breaking down."

Mme Grodziejowska jumped to life as if her name nad been called.

"Petrograd is impossible!" she said, with her lips vibrating like the wings of a wasp, "I cannot imagine why one continues to live here. This morning my cook was out for three hours, three whole hours, trying to get a case of Shetland herrings." She turned to

the Princess. "Why can't your husband do something about it? He's supposed to look after supplies and things, isn't he?"

Roumaniev drank off a glass of Moselle, wiped his moustaches, sighed deeply, and pointed his forefinger at Mme Grodziejowska. "All day long," he said solemnly, "I work in my stuffy office, I write letters, conduct meetings, exhaust my natural forces, wear myself to a skeleton in the national interest. And you, Maria Vassilievna, because your cook is too stupid or too lazy to find you a case of herrings, come and accuse me of idleness."

"You see," said the Princess pacifically, "it isn't exactly Akiniev's job to go after herrings for the civil population——"

"And since when have I been the civil population?"

"Nobody knows," said Mme Kotchoubey, "what Akiniev Mihailovitch really does do. I've heard it said that they have a kind of séance, they put all the inkwells in a circle in the middle of the table and call up the spirits of departed ladies."

"Or ladies who haven't departed very far——"

"Really, Julia Petrovna, upon my sacred conscience——."

"You confuse him with Our Friend," Astanovitch said with severity.

"Oh, is it true," Darlynia asked abruptly, "that Viribova always goes about with a live snake underneath her stays? I expect you can tell me, Maria Vassilievna—a man I danced with last night said——"

"Well, he was quite wrong!" Mme Kotchoubey said authoritatively. "It's a dead snake."

"Oh, how frightfully clammy!"

The place was crowded now, and drowsily warm in spite of the fans; behind the tattered uproar of forks and voices the Szeczeny orchestra wove a pale and mottled curtain of sound, and whichever way I looked my eyes were dazzled by the electric chandeliers, which poured a merciless light on skin and napery, on the flying, swerving, twisting figures of the waiters. I was growing sleepy. The Princess, aware of my dullness to the topics flicked by the battledores about the table, her temperature high with kindness, was constantly attentive; I tried, without looking too caninely into her handsome eyes or letting my glance fall dangerously towards the unguarded vastness of her breast, to show some kind of grateful intelligence; and all the time I was trying to map my opening for a fresh assault on Roumaniev directly the chance occurred. She spoke, I was vaguely aware, of her daughter; the girl was highly strung, she said; she had distinctive talents which had never yet found sufficient outlet. "In Europe it is quite easy for a young woman of fine temper to dis-

cover her métier, her niche. In Petrograd we are cursed with an incurable provincialism, however we may try to paint it over." And Anton, clever and so lovable as he was, was not altogether an easy person to manage; he lacked, perhaps, that quality in a man which makes him to one woman the representative of all men. Yelisaveta, of course, had never spoken of any such deficiency; but a mother could not help having certain intuitions. . . . I smiled and nodded, nodded and smiled. When she let my eyes escape for a moment I saw by the blue clock which the Griseau cherubs fondled on the wall that it was past eleven. "Well, Tasha," I heard Roumaniev say, "where shall we spend the evening?" "I told Yelisaveta," the Princess said, "that she'd probably find us at St. Vaudrin's, if she felt like coming."

"Don't you think that Tasha Vascovna is wonderful?" Mme Kotchoubey said to me as we trooped in a body down the stairs, with Roumaniev frisking and laughing and scattering pourboires behind us. "Sixty-three—you'd never guess it, would you? And such an active mind—she can still remember almost everything she learnt at the Obolenskaya. . . ."

For a moment, as the porter ushered us across the pavement, I felt the refreshment of an icy wind driving in from the Neva. Then we bundled into the two motors which were waiting, and were driven fast with squealing horns and headlamps leaping on the snow, along Morsakaya, and put into the Nevski. "Now here," said Roumaniev, seizing my arm as he swept the women before him into the ruby front of the café lights, "here I can give you something worth drinking. The wine at Les Lutins is dreadful, one can hardly get it down, I only go to that place because they know how to make coffee." We passed through the heavy curtains into a narrow wilderness of silver-shaded tables and a high thresh of violins. Darlynia, laughing and shouting with Astanovitch at her heels, danced ahead to throw herself on the corner-settee. We sank into the cushions and the waiters flitting like dolphins from the swirl blockaded us about with tables.

"And you, M. le Capitaine, are you blessed with a wife?" Mme Grodziejowska asked.

"Yes, I've been married several years."

"But Mme Otraveskov is not in Petrograd?"

"Not at present," I said. "Our home is at Voepensk."

"Voepensk? Oh yes, of course, a sweet place, the little park is so attractive. I sat there once for a whole hour while my husband was interviewing somebody—really I'm a great lover of the country, you've no idea how dull Petrograd has become with the German

singers all gone. Of course our own contraltos are superb, but we've no such thing as a tenor. But doesn't your wife find the social life a little—restricted?"

"She has our son to look after," I said. "The little boy is an invalid, he has a disease of the spine."

Mme Grodziejowska nodded sympathetically.

"Ah well, that would give her an interest. (Have you such a thing as——? Oh, thank you so much, how sweet of you!) Of course we haven't all got the maternal instinct, but for those who have I always think it must be so inspiring. Tasha, now, she's a wonderful mother, she has really given her whole life to that girl of hers. Oh my dear, look who's going to sing! It's that extraordinary Metzikoshenka. Do you know, she's in her seventh month, and her voice gets better and better."

I found, a moment afterwards, that repenting Providence had given this woman an ear for song. For the voice of Metzikoshenka, which the Salzbürgers themselves had extolled for its maîtrise, had the grandeur and sweetness of Italian summer. Even Darlynia, lolling with a foot tucked under her thigh and her head on Astanovitch's shoulder, stopped giggling and closed her eyes, while the ash of her cigarette lengthened and fell in a shower across her frock; and a tall girl of imperious presence, breaking like a sword between the portières, stopped, and stood fast against the azure sweep of velvet, her hands in her naked armpits, her splendid head thrown back, intently listening. For me, it was peace and courage, to release my weighted eyelids, to have the chatter silenced and the vast vulgarity obscured, to let that spirit wrapped in sound flow through my arteries and lift me dreaming into a wide, heroic country.

Kehr ein bei mir
Und schliesse Du
Still hinter Dir
Die Pforten zu!

She sang as if only for herself, as if the heat and tenderness of sound had grown too urgent to be kept within her. When the song was finished she turned to face her audience, and bowed her head very slightly, but her serious eyes never seemed to reach us. They called her back and she sang again, and yet once more. But it had to end, and when another burst of clapping flooded the silence she had left I opened my eyes to find that she had gone.

"A little bronchial on the low F, nowadays," Astanovitch said.

I looked towards the portière and saw that the girl who had

entered as the songs began remained quite motionless, as if forgetting where she was. But a moment later she broke from her trance and came quickly across to our table. I was able to watch her as she came, for her eyes were towards Roumaniev, as if he were all she saw; and I noticed that in spite of her regal carriage she moved with the quick, light step of a petite, steering her way through the archipelago of tables with a ballerina's grace. Living so long in soldiers' company I had forgotten the excitement there could be in watching a woman pass through a crowded room. She dropped rather wearily beside Roumaniev, took out the silver case from his vest pocket, and lit a cigarette. "How has it been?" Roumaniev asked, and she answered, "Dreadful! I've been dining with Dorothea; she keeps on trying to make me come and do jobs in her hospital. Oh, I know it's fashionable now, and poor Dorothea glows with pride about it—you've no idea how she can glow—but surely there's no need for the whole of Petrograd to wallow in scabs and lysol."

"Wouldn't you be less bored if you had something regular for the mornings?" Roumaniev asked mildly.

"Boredom—it's not a disease you can cure by occupation," she said carelessly. Her voice, taut and rather soldierly, was free from the mannerism of Darlynia's, but it had no warmth or colour, only a crisp, impatient energy. "What did you think of Metzikoshenka just now?" she asked. Then she caught sight of Astanovitch. "I saw Varvara Feodorovna," she called to him, "she sent a kiss to you."

"You didn't wear that dress at Mme Tarkovsky's last night?" the Princess asked.

"But of course! And there were half a dozen there much more nude than this. I told Mme Tarkovsky I thought it was quite shocking. She seemed rather surprised."

"Zosia ought to give you more room at the hips," the Princess said in the level tones of connoisseurship, "of course the bodice doesn't matter nowadays. . . . Oh, I forgot, I haven't introduced you. This is Captain Alexei Alexeivitch Otraveskov: my daughter Yelisaveta. Captain Otraveskov is a friend of Anton's, darling. I expect you've heard of him."

The Countess Scheffler put out her hand, but only glanced at my face. Unlike her mother, she could not conceal her observation of my clothes. "Oh indeed I have!" she said, with a smile that came and went as if its switch were jogged by a careless elbow. "But Anton is not a great correspondent. Are you in Petrograd long?"

"Only a few days," I told her.

"You are lucky!" she said, and smiled again, and turned to Mme Kotchoubey. "The Cherbrov boy is making himself very tiresome with Varvara. Do you think you could tackle his mother. . . .?"

The orchestra started again.

I found that Mme Grodziejowska had picked up the thread of her conversation and was once more talking steadily at my chin. But there seemed no need to listen, for like every Pole she was satisfied if her partner did not actually clap his hand across her mouth. It was enough to say "Mais oui . . . mais oui . . . parfaitement," and I was able, across the top of Mme Grodziejowska's fuzzy head, to watch the slight, sharp gestures of Anton's wife. Mme Kotchoubey was talking volubly; Yelisaveta's head, which I saw in profile, was turned a little towards her, but her eyes moved widely across the room as if she were looking for some friend, and her nod, made for politeness, seemed to me to show chiefly a vast impatience. From time to time the Princess leaned across to speak to her, and she answered with a short, quick sentence, delivered as a child tips marbles out of a bag. Presently she rose, without apology, and darted across to speak to a man on the other side of the room. She returned, and sat for a few moments working a bracelet over her elbow, and was off again. It was curious that she had this single thing in common with Anton, a nervous restlessness; for he, when he was talking or writing, would twist a button of his tunic, would flick imaginary flies from his chin, and start if I dropped a pencil. But in Anton those tricks seemed natural, for physically he was an unfinished creature, and careless of the impression he made; in his wife you expected every movement to be exact and leisured, for her body, which the evening dress concealed so little, was graceful as an Ionic column, her arms and torso formed more perfectly than I had ever seen in nature, her pale face, for all the femineity of its inclines and surface, as steadfast in structure as the face of Lotto's Julian. She should have stayed, I thought, as when I had seen her first, standing rapt against the curtain. There she had been brave and young; and now, seen close, her mouth was shaped by discontent, and her eyes uneasy; as if the nicotine which stained her fingers had entered and dulled and whole of her, she no longer challenged circumstance but fidgeted within it.

Astanovitch had grown sleepy under his wine. Darlynia, still at her normal semi-wakefulness, grew tired of trying to rouse him by pricking his neck with her long nails and said that she must make him dance. Dance? Roumaniev thought the notion splendid, the elderly kittens beside him wearily agreed, Astanovitch was dragged to his feet and wrapped in his shuba and shepherded into

the car. We drove to the Warsaw Club. I should have slipped away, but the Princess had got me under her elbow again and was talking with intensive charm about her husband. I must not think, she said, that the Prince was really frivolous about his duties because he spoke of them lightly; that was only his manner, he had never quite grown up; he could, of course, have occupied an important post in the General Staff, but he had preferred to give his talent and experience where he thought the need was greatest. . . . Yelisaveta was looking tired, tonight, as I had no doubt noticed. It was a pity, she really tried to crowd too much into her day. The Princess wished that I had seen her daughter at the Hospitals Ball, when she had really looked so very charming.

The club was crowded, here the air was no less thick with smoke than the air of St. Vaudrin's, and strident with Strauss and Rubinstein. Roumaniev's feet began to twinkle as soon as he entered the hall, in a moment he had slid into the whirlpool of dancers with Mme Grodziejowska in his arms. "You will excuse me?" the Princess said, "I see General Pahlen over there, I ought to speak to him." Mme Kotchoubey had disappeared, the wretched Astanovitch was being dragged about the floor by Darlynia, who incessantly pinched his arms and kicked him with her sharp little toes when he fell down.

"I am sorry," I said to Yelisaveta, "that I cannot ask for the pleasure of a dance. With this leg of mine——"

"Thank you," she said abruptly, with her eyes on the dancers, "but I don't want to dance, not in all that scramble. . . . Of course Darlynia Antonovna adores this place, she's always happy when she's jumbled up with the scum of Petrograd."

That was all; and she was so aloof that I made no attempt at conversation. But presently, turning and looking at my shirt, she spoke again.

"My husband is fairly well now?" she asked.

"Fairly well," I said, "but of course—ennuyé."

"Oh? I didn't think he was ever bored, with so many intellectual interests."

"He sent his love to you," I said boldly.

She glanced up to my face then, but only for a moment.

"Oh—thank you." Her voice was nervous, and a little softer. "That was kind of him," she said, "he is really a very kind person, though often so hard to understand."

She stopped abruptly, as if she had said already more than she wished. But a moment later she spoke again.

"Did Anton tell you," she asked tautly, "that it was I who made him go to the war?"

"Your husband joined the army," I said bluntly, "because of his sympathy with conscript soldiers."

She looked at me obliquely.

"No," she said, as one so accustomed to contradict that she could do it without rudeness, "no, that was only part of the reason. But it's true that Anton's actions are governed very largely by his mystical conceptions—he's of the Roman persuasion, of course. Once in his life" (there was a hint of bitterness in her voice now) "he did act on other than moral grounds—still, I suppose we must all be inconsistent at some time or another." Once again she jerked the bracelet roughly over her elbow. "Oh, the noise in this place!" she said vehemently, "it drives me mad."

"Would you like me to take you home?" I asked.

"Yes. No, not home. I shall go to Meta Makovna's, it's often amusing there."

"Shall I ask the Princess——?"

"No, it doesn't matter, she won't notice you've gone, she's the least observant woman in Russia."

We went out together. I told the footman to summon the Countess Scheffler's car and helped her into her furs. She said, as I handed her into the car:

"Really there's no need to come if you don't want to. My driver finds his way about the town quite wonderfully."

I could not interpret from that bluntness whether she wanted me to come. But the alternative, or so I thought, was to return to the company of the Princess and Mme Kotchoubey, and I had long since given up all hope of tackling Roumaniev again that night.

"I shall escort you to your friend's house," I said without enthusiasm.

The scene in the car, as I think of it now, had the facile absurdity of Palais-Royal farce; with Yelisaveta stretched across the back seat, myself decorously perched on one of the occasional seats and leaning forward, from sheer fatigue, with my cheeks in my hands. I had only one wish: to get rid of this butterfly and go to bed.

"Tell me," she said, without opening her eyes, "are you married?"

Again that question!

"Yes," I said.

"And your wife, who is she? I mean, who was she?"

I answered, like a schoolboy in the classroom: "Natalia Konstantinovna Lusanov."

She opened her eyes.

"Lusanov? Oh, but I know her. She used to stay with the Baronovikis."

"A long time ago," I said.

"And surely she has spoken of me?"

I remembered: "that squirmy Roumaniev girl."

"I'm afraid I don't recollect it," I answered.

"She is not in Petrograd now?"

"No, she is elsewhere."

That was sufficient. "I used to be sorry for her," Yelisaveta said, "she was teased a great deal." And she closed her eyes again.

We drew up at a big Empire house in the Shrunovaya.

"No," Yelisaveta said, "I don't feel in the mood for Meta, her face always reminds me of a Chinese monk. Tell Emelian, will you please, to take us to the Lyetniyi Sad and drive round a little."

I gave the order and we went on.

With no further pretence of politeness I shut my eyes and leant back against the door of the car, with as much comfort as that position would give me.

"You're tired!" she said presently, with an unexpected gentleness. "Why don't you sit here with me, it's much more comfortable."

She moved her legs and I took the space beside her. The absurdity was still greater now, as we sat side by side in total silence driving round and round the Lyetniyi Sad; but I was far too sleepy to be aware of it.

"How does Anton like being in the war?" she asked at length. "Does he make a good soldier?"

"In some ways," I said slowly, "he is the best officer I have ever known. As a fighter, I can't tell you——"

She stopped me. "No no," she said, "I don't want to hear about that, I don't want to hear about the war. He was wounded, was he not?—yes, yes, of course, he told me all about that; he wrote me a long letter from that place—where was it, in Austria?—the letter came to me through the Danish consulate. That was so kind of him, I thought, to write me such a long letter when he was a prisoner. But don't let us talk about the war, I find nothing amusing in blood and funerals."

"Would you like me to give any message when I go back?"

"A message? Yes, I should like you to tell him—no, why should I trouble you, when there's always the post? I can write anything I want to say."

"Very well!"

But she came back to the subject.

"Tell me, is there anything that Anton wants? He never speaks of anything. I should like to send him anything he wants, an oil-stove, or clothes or something. I don't like him to be uncomfortable; in the house we lived in everything was very cosy. I'll make something—I could learn how to knit, I'd knit something if I knew what he wanted."

"What we all want," I told her, "is medical supplies—bandages, antitoxins, everything like that. I've been trying all day to get a chance of persuading your father——"

"Father is quite useless!" she said. "If you want bandages and things I'll tell Julia Petrovna to send them, she lords it over the Odoevski depôt. You'd better send me the list of what you want—send it round to my house—and I'll arrange that. Oh yes, Julia has a warehouse full of bandages, she never knows what to do with them."

I could not take this seriously; no doubt she imagined that what I required would go into a couple of tea-chests; but I thanked her as graciously as I could.

"And you will tell Anton," she said, "that I arranged it?"

"Of course I will."

She pushed herself further into the corner and pulled her furs more tightly round her.

"I want to know—does Anton ever talk about me now?"

I hesitated, and she said impatiently: "Oh, it doesn't matter! . . . Is he a great friend of yours?"

Again I had no time to answer, for she went on: "You were with him just after he was wounded, weren't you? Was he in great pain then, was it a very painful wound?"

"He is not a man who makes a great show of suffering," I answered. "The ligaments of his shoulder joint were ripped, and the clavicle——"

"No no, I don't want to hear about that!"

"Would you like to go home now?" I asked.

"No, I think I'll go back to Meta's, there may be someone interesting there. You can leave me at Meta's. Tell Emelian, will you!"

We went back to the Shrunovaya, where another car drew up behind us. As I helped her down a voice called, "Look, there's Yelisaveta!" and two girls, hysterical with laughter, ran up to join her. "Do you know what Grisha Jakovlievitch has been saying about Varvara?" I heard one of them spluttering. They went up the steps together, and Yelisaveta was joining in their laughter; but I could not help thinking that with her height and her hardening maturity she matched them oddly.

At the door of the house she remembered me and ran down again.

"Tell Emelian," she said, "to take you wherever you want to go. You'll remember, won't you, to send me the list of what you want —Byeloselski forty-nine—and I'll see Julia about it. Oh, and if you think of anything for Anton himself you'll tell me, won't you?" She put out her hand. "Thank you so very much! You've been so kind!"

It was just on two o'clock. I asked Emelian to take me to Katie's flat.

§

The drawing-room was in darkness, but I saw a light from the bedroom and when I called to her Katie came in. She looked at me in a distant, melancholy way, murmuring "Is that you, Alexei?"

"I'm sorry to be so late," I said, taking off my coat.

"It doesn't matter," she answered wearily. "But wait—before you take off your coat—I want you, if you will, just to take this batch round to Vladimir's house. It's not very far—just behind the Sestroryetzk station, above Yudin the baker. I'd have gone myself, but Pavel can't be left, he's bad tonight."

"But must it go tonight?" I asked.

"Oh yes, I promised Vladimir. It's holding him up. You aren't too tired, are you?"

She seemed so close to tears that I could not make any protest. I took the package and limped down the stairs again.

It was only two versts or so, and the house quite easy to find. There was no bell, but the door at the side of the shop was ajar. I went straight up the stairs and knocked on the door at the top. A woman's voice told me to come in.

The room I entered was lit by one unshaded electric bulb which hung in the centre. It was crammed with furniture: a big table bearing the refuse of a meal, a sideboard covered with plates, two sofas, unframed pictures standing against the wall, books and tumblers and shoes and children's clothes and napkins everywhere. The woman who had answered my knock stood barefoot, with a soldier's coat on top of her nightgown, leaning over the side of a crib which stood just inside the door. She was singing, in the soft and plaintive voice of peasants harvesting; to no purpose, as it seemed to me, for the child whining in the cot could not possibly have heard her. The door that faced me was open, and from the room to which it led I heard the sound of another child petulantly crying. A man, fully dressed but for collar and tie, lay snoring on one of the sofas,

and I recognized him as the Sasha I had seen in Katie's drawing-room.

Vladimir sat at the far end of the table, where he had pushed the plates away and was working furiously on a Blickensderfer. He did not at once notice me, but when I went towards him he rose, threw away his cigarette, and shook my hand with great friendliness.

"Sit down, sit down!" he said. "Wait, I'll just wipe that chair, the children have spilt kash all over it. How good of you to visit us!—Nikita, this is the brother of Catherine Alexievna, Captain Otraveskov." His eyes were wandering rather humorously over my suit. "You must excuse our being rather *en famille!* Had I known you were coming we should have put on our best clothes."

I told him, as soon as I could, that I had only come as Katie's messenger with some proofs. But he would not let me put them down and go, he insisted that I must stay for a while and drink a glass of tea. "We are not often visited by the gentry," he said, without any malice. "And Nikita likes to see new people, don't you, my heart? Wait a minute, I'll get some water for the little one, he's thirsty, that's all it is."

I sat down; I had to because of my leg.

Vladimir went into the next room, where I heard him speak soothingly to the child awake there, and he came back with a cup of water.

"Water's not good for him!" his wife said. She had not spoken before.

"It's out of the kettle, it's been boiled," he answered. Without roughness he pushed the woman aside, poured a little of the water into a teaspoon, raised the shoulders of the fretful child and patiently dropped the water into his mouth. He was right: the child stopped crying.

"It will do him no good," Nikita said.

Vladimir drew two glasses of tea and sat down, pushing the typewriter to one side.

"You will smoke a cigarette? These are American, cheap stuff, but one can smoke them." He smiled, and his smile was charming, so honest and friendly. "I am so very sorry," he said, "that you have had the trouble of bringing these proofs. I shouldn't have bothered Catherine Alexievna about them if I'd known it meant your turning out so late. The fact is, I suffer from a positive disease of being in a hurry. I have a weak chest, you see—oh, it's nothing very serious, I may live to be sixty, but when there's a danger of one's life being short one is always hurrying to get everything possible into it. I am always impatient for events to most faster, so that I may live to see

them developing as I require; and then, on the other hand, I feel all the time that events are moving too fast, I cannot keep up with them, there's a danger of my being late." He paused, as if short of breath, and put out the cigarette he had just lit. "I smoke too much, it's a bad habit. . . . Yes, you see I have to work at Talberg's factory in the day-time. That's to support my family—parenthood is really too great a luxury for a man who wants to do anything. That means that nine or ten hours in every twenty-four are wasted; and I have to sleep four hours, I can't do with less."

"Then I won't waste any more of them for you——"

He pushed me back into my chair, smiling.

"No no, it's nice to have a break, I'm really nothing but a boastful slacker. I was wondering if you could tell me anything authentic about the war—being in Petrograd one has to depend on the newspapers, and you know yourself how much they can be trusted."

"I'm afraid the war is not my province," I told him. "At present I'm posted at a clearing-station for prisoners, and before that I was a prisoner in Austria."

"In Austria? Did they treat you well? I myself," he said reminiscently, "have been a civil prisoner in various countries, but never in Austria. England is the worst, they have a kind of moralistic atmosphere in their prisons which is most depressing. But tell me, do you feel that our soldiers are still quite contented with the war? They don't find the failures discouraging?"

"Officially," I said, "there are no failures, there are only essential sacrifices and strategic refirements."

He nodded.

"Of course I myself feel that the war has been a valuable experience—for Russia as a whole, I mean. It has made everything so clear. We see exactly now—it is written across the sky—what the State has always stood for and what it is ready to pay for its objective. In a way it would have been still better if Russia could have won the war. We should have seen then what the rewards were and how they were shared out."

"It may happen still," I suggested.

He made a curious grimace, squeezing all his features together as if a hand were pressing down on the top of his head.

"The fatal error has already been made," he said with oldmaidish precision. "If Russia simply had to fight someone, she should not have chosen Germany. It is really quite useless for a bunch of enthusiastic amateurs to tackle the professional. Any historian would have told Nikolas that, but he didn't ask the historians, he asked the generals."

I did not find this quite so amusing as he did.

"So you think," I said (without much spirit, for I was heavy with sleep), "that every Russian being lost over there is a life utterly wasted?"

"No!" he said eagerly, "no, I don't think that. In the course of evolution much life appears to be wasted; species die out, tribes are exterminated, nations are lost. But you cannot rightly call that 'waste,' it is simply a clearing of the stage for the next act. The philosophy of history——"

"So you are a predestinationist?"

"No, that is exactly what I am not!" He got up and began to walk up and down at the other side of the table with his hands stretching out his trouser pockets, sometimes glancing shrewdly at my face and sometimes talking as if to himself. "I believe in destiny, yes! I believe in destiny as the main force which has brought man to his present stage. But man has been growing slowly stronger, slowly a little more reasoning, already he has tried in a feeble, half-hearted hand-to-mouth kind of way to interfere with history's course. We have had Alexander of Macedonia, we have had our own Piotr, there was Metternich, there was Bismarck. But all these men were to a great extent opportunists, by which I mean that they adapted certain large theories to opportunity as and when the opportunity was presented. And that is not really facing what I call 'destiny' squarely. We have arrived now at that stage where man is sufficiently equipped to take the initiative into his own hands. But we can only do so if we know exactly—to the fourth place of decimals, as it were—what we intend to do at the moment when the opportunity presents itself."

"And if the opportunity does not present itself?"

"It will, it must. One can watch it coming. But don't misunderstand me! In history opportunities do not come ready-made. They come as a combination of causes with one cause missing, and that has to be supplied. It's like working in a factory: you want a better position, you wait for it, it may never come; but if you keep your ears open you hear that a new floor is going to be put in operation, a foreman will be required, you may get the job except for the existence of one other man whose service is longer. What do you do? You ask that man to look at your machine, where there is something wrong; by a piece of carelessness you jog the start-lever when his hands are inside. You are terribly sorry. . . . That's the sort of thing I mean."

The man on the sofa behind me turned over, brought up a chestful of wind and opened one eye.

"Must you keep talking, Volodya? It's impossible to sleep."

"You don't deserve any sleep," Vladimir retorted curtly. "I told you to get out a capacity estimate of the printing-presses in the Smolensk Government, and you haven't so much as begun it."

"It can wait!" said Sasha, turning over again.

"It cannot wait. Nothing can wait. I suppose I shall have to do it myself." He turned to me. "What was I saying? Oh yes, about opportunity——"

"You don't, of course, believe in God?" I asked rhetorically.

He sat down, as if he were suddenly tired, and leant his forehead against his wrists.

"In God? Yes—in God or in destiny, I don't mind which name you use, but 'destiny' seems to me more polite. It is 'God,' if you prefer that word, who has conducted the affairs of mankind up till now, God who with infinite slowness and cynical indifference has been working out what the theologians call 'His Purpose,' vague as that purpose seems to be: century after century, age after age, million upon million of sentient beings struggling to keep alive, suffering, mating, spawning, crowding each other into the world's most intolerable spaces, fighting for a meaningless existence, holding together a few years of scanty life, miserably dying and leaving no trace. That is the way God works, that is the toll he requires for his organizing ability." He got up and leaned toward me over the table, his eyes alight with religious fire, his narrow, shabby body grown huge and menacing. "God is the supreme evil, the eternal enemy, eternally regretting that he gave man Reason with which to oppose his callous plans. That is what we are fighting, that is the task of our generation: to fight against God, to thwart him and turn him out."

For a few moments he stood still in that position, looking over my shoulder, and I could feel the table shaking with his excitement. Then he sat down again, rather limply, and smiled in his shy, attractive way, and pushed his cigarettes across the table. "What do you think of the new hats the Petrograd ladies are wearing?" he asked. "For myself, I find them charming, I should buy one for Nikita only I've no time for shopping."

As he said her name, his wife came in again from the other room. Tonya, she said, was awake once more, and would not go to sleep till her father had told her a story.

Vladimir's gesture of impatience broke up into another smile.

"They are all like that, the girl children," he said to me. "They hunger for romance."

I used that opportunity to say good-night and get away.

As I closed the door behind me I heard Vladimir's voice, very

gentle and sing-song: ". . . so the good fairy said, 'Well, Chechesna, if you can't eat your porridge I'll change it into barley-sugar for you.' So Chechesna gave all her porridge to the good fairy. . . ." On the pavement outside a dozen women were leaning against the shop-window: the beginning of next day's queue.

10

Curiously, when my heart was so heavy, I was troubled in conscience because I had not been able to show more friendship to Anton's wife. He would ask me whether I had seen her, whether I had given his message, what she had said; I should have to answer that we had sat together for an hour or more, and had said almost nothing at all.

I had sent her, as I had promised, the list of our medical requirements at Mariki; with a note asking that, if the Countess Kotchoubey proved unable to supply so large and varied a consignment, she would try to press the matter with her father on my behalf. I added, in rather stiff phraseology, a paragraph to apologize for my inattentive behaviour on the night before, explaining that I was not yet fully recovered from a recent illness and that I had grown unaccustomed to city life. By the same messenger I sent an apology to the Princess Roumaniev for failing to take proper leave.

In the afternoon, as I was resting in Katie's drawing-room, the driver Emelian came with a request that I should visit Mme Scheffler at her house and take tea with her. He had the car ready.

§

I did not want to go, I was tired and my head was aching. All morning I had wandered about the city, trying in a helpless, feverish way to pick up some trace. I had called again at the Missing Persons Bureau and begged M. Danilov to try and get in touch with his chief; but it was quite impossible, he said, and after all, M. Sinebrukhov would be back on Friday. I went to hospitals, where I was treated by secretaries and matrons with everything between a hearty politeness and a bored contempt. I returned to the central police-office and asked for an interview with the supervising secretary, but it could not be granted; I must apply by letter, they said. At the library in the Gorokhovaya I went through files of the local papers, on the slender chance that my eye would pick up some clue. There was nothing there. And I felt increasingly as a lost dog must feel

in a strange town, bewildered by the crossing scents and hustling feet, seeing only faces that neither recognize nor understand him.

The news-sheets were gaudy with local excitement: the discovery of a man's body in the Neva had started the wildest speculations; a shift of stokers had rioted in the Hoelsdik factory and shots had been fired; in one of the outer suburbs a band of women had looted a wholesaler's warehouse. But I saw no trace of these disturbances, only the endless meat-and-sugar queues, the pitching tramcars, the dour faces of men and women absorbed in their own affairs. Perhaps it was nothing but loneliness, and the low, thick sky, which made me feel that day that all the friendship there ever was had departed from this place. With my bad leg I walked clumsily, and once or twice collided with someone on the pavement; when I apologized the man merely grunted and went on. I bought a few thirsty flowers for Katie from a boy on the kerb; he neither said a word nor smiled. Only an old and ragged Sart in the Rizhski Prospekt wished me good-morning. Russia was tired, I thought, and virtue had gone out of her. In a little church near the Ermitage I stood before the Barkul Ikon, to me the most moving of all, and tried for half an hour to pray. But I could not come to God, for my longing intervened; my desire for Natalia's voice and touch was like a thirst so ardent that it swept away all other thought, all feeling. My reason said that she no longer lived; for our parting had almost overcome her valiant heart, and the long and darkening silence of her beloved must have forced despair beyond endurance. That, I believed, was what had happened: she could no longer suffer life and she had destroyed it. And had that been quite certain, I should perhaps have found an outer skin of fortitude to armour me against the blizzard of my grief. But my heart would not, would not accept it. That she who had been so close, who had read my thoughts from a movement of my eyes, who had been content in the endless winter of Krasnyesk to find her life in mine—that she could have gone beyond recovering without a last good-bye. No: with that duel in my thoughts I could not go to God with prayer's humility. I could only let the tears flow into my covering hands and hope that He would see them.

§

Emelian, standing in the doorway with his fur cap in his hands, waited patiently while I sought a polite excuse. "You mustn't think it rude of the little princess to ask you all in a moment like this," the old man said gravely. "She's always like that with her friends, she only shows her best manners to people she can't bear the sight

of." His big and simple eyes, the eyes of a man who is a friend of horses, pleaded with me as if for a personal favour. I should have resisted, saying that I had engaged myself elsewhere; but Katie, everlastingly busy with her invalid, her hasty and passionate housekeeping, the errands of her motley friends, was finding me like a loved and valued heirloom which gets in the way whenever a woman is dusting. I could get no rest here, I might as well go.

At Yelisaveta's house I was taken upstairs and shown into an empty drawing-room which might have been furnished from wedding gifts; everything was new, expensive and foreign; the room had an open fireplace in the European style; the decoration, plainly by Kresterstein, was completely without tradition. The Countess had gone out for a few minutes, the servants said, but would be back almost immediately. I sat on the Kresterstein sofa and cursed my folly in letting this woman get hold of me again.

"It was nice of you to accept my invitation," she said as she came in. "I should have been all by myself, and I cannot bear that. . . . You'll find that chair more comfortable than the sofa. . . . What was it? Oh yes—I wanted to ask you—I noticed you were lame last night—I was going to ask you if it's anything serious. I know some good doctors here, I could introduce you to someone if you like."

I told her that nothing could be done about the leg; it was not very bad, but the tibia was damaged and unrepairable. "It's thanks to your husband," I said, "that I have the leg at all."

She raised her narrow eyebrows. "Oh? Why?"

"They wanted to cut it off," I said, "but Anton Antonovitch stopped them."

"To cut it off? Who did?"

"An Austrian surgeon. He was in a hurry, he had to do the best he could for all of us——"

"You're always talking about surgery!" she said impatiently. "All my life I've been haunted by two kinds of people, radical idealists and people who get their small-talk from the operating theatre. I don't know which I find less sympathetic. . . . No no, you mustn't take me so seriously! I understand, of course I understand, that a man who's been surrounded by bits of bodies for the last two years gets it on his brain. I don't really mind the medical gossips half as much as the moralists. No, you wouldn't know what I mean. I mean there's a kind of person—and Russia's full of them—who think of everything in terms of their own idealist outlook. Directly you talk of things which have no moral or political interest their minds drift away, they look at you with a higher-educated, religious kind of expression, as if you were not so much wicked as ignorant and

childish. It's that look—oh, you don't know what it's like!—that makes me want to run away screaming." She smiled suddenly; and the smile alone would have explained why the "idealists" looked at her so unsympathetically. "So you see," she said, "I don't want to hear anything more about limbs or about goodness in any shape or form."

Trying to answer her smile, I said: "I suppose I mayn't even ask about that list I sent you?"

"That list? Oh but yes, I took it round to Julia Petrovna this morning as soon as I got it. And I saw the things off myself this afternoon—fifty-five cases, Julia had them all ready, she's good at that kind of thing. And I've told Grigori Halzfein he must get it through quickly—he's the railway man, you know, and a great admirer of my hips, the little swine."

I started to try and thank her, but she would not let me.

"—Oh, I'm glad to do something for Anton—if that's really what he wants. Tell me, what are you going to do now, if that's what you came for? Is your leave nearly over?"

"I've a few more days."

"Then you'll be going to see your wife, I suppose? What a pretty girl Natalia Konstantinovna was! She's in Moscow, you said——?"

The question came so suddenly that I was unprepared for it. I said without thinking:

"I don't know where she is."

She looked, not at me, but into the fire. She said:

"Oh, it's like that? . . . No no, you needn't tell me about it, I can understand. I'm old enough to know that people are not made to fit each other just by a religious ceremony. . . ."

That was a horrifying idea: that Natalia and I had ceased to love each other. "It isn't that," I said quickly. "No, you have misunderstood me." Then I started to tell her what happened. I had not wished to parade my trouble, least of all before so shallow a spectator; and yet there was relief, like the lancing of a boil, in putting that misery into words. I gave her the whole history, trying to tell it as dispassionately as if it belonged to someone else; and I was surprised to hear it sounding so low in pitch, so commonplace. ". . . You see, I cannot even be certain that she came to Petrograd that day, she may have gone somewhere else. I can only start my search here. And Petrograd is a big place to search in—and everyone is rather busy. That is my difficulty."

I had kept my eyes away from hers. When I looked up I saw that she was watching my face, but she instantly turned away. I said:

"Perhaps I'd better go now. I am very poor company with this on my mind."

"No, don't go!" she said quickly. "Who was it, tell me, who was it who stopped your letters?"

"I don't know. It's not even proved that they were stopped."

"Of course they were stopped! It's always happening, Varvara Feodorovna went through exactly the same thing. If you could find out who it was I might be able to have him dismissed—not for that, of course, but for something or other."

"I'm afraid it wouldn't do much good."

"No, I suppose it wouldn't. . . . What do you say the excuse was at the Missing Persons Bureau? Someone away? What nonsense that is!"

She went to the telephone which stood on the grand piano and asked for the central police-office.

"You shouldn't trouble about my affairs!" I said. "I've only another day to wait now, I've screwed myself up for that."

"Why must you be like that?" she said brusquely. "I hate stoicism and patience and all those apostolic virtues. You remind me of . . . Police? Connect me, please, with M. Zorovitchenski . . . Countess Scheffler . . . I can't help that, he must be called out of the meeting." She turned to me again. "I can't think why you imagine that anything's to be gained by patience. Have you never been in Petrograd before?"

"I've been tramping from one place to another all morning."

"With that leg of yours? You should make other people tramp . . . Andrey? Yelisaveta Akinievna. Do you realize, Andrey, that the man in charge of your Missing Persons Bureau is away, that he's left his office in charge of a nincompoop, that callers are being treated with abominable rudeness? No, Andrey, I'm not joking this time. A friend of mine, Mme Otraveskov, has disappeared since last May or June, I'm not quite sure when. I went round to the Gorokhovaya and a man called—what was his name, Captain?—a man called Danilov was abominably rude to me. What? Oh you can sack him or not, just as you please, I don't care two straws about that, but I want my inquiry dealt with immediately, you must go into it yourself. Andrey darling, you will, won't you! Yes, I know you're busy, but—What? Oh, very well! Only you'll have to find someone else for dinner on Sunday, I'm afraid I can't spare the time." She put down the receiver, but almost at once the bell rang and she picked it up again. "Yes, Andrey? . . . Yes? . . . That seems all right. No, I won't make any promises, not until you've produced something definite. Yes, 'Otraveskov.' Good-bye!"

"Unless you make yourself unpleasant," she said to me, "you'll never get what you want in Petrograd." She picked up her glass and drank off the rest of her tea. "You're very fond of her?" she asked. "You love her as people do in books?" Then, before I could reply, "What do you think has happened, what do you really think?"

I said: "I don't know. But I think she's dead."

"And the little boy?"

"I don't know. I can't—think of that."

"It's foolish to love so much!" she said with sudden vehemence. "It only brings suffering."

"But those who don't love also suffer," I answered.

"Why do you say that?"

I was taken aback by the sharpness of the question. I said, hesitating: "I don't think I was ever really happy before I loved."

Looking at me with curiosity, she said: "But you weren't as unhappy as you are now?"

"I should only bore you if I tried to explain——"

"No no, it doesn't bore me, I'm interested in this. You say that you can find happiness in love—that you have found it. Well, why can't—anyone who loves? Oh, it's no good telling me those who don't are not real lovers, I can't believe that, it isn't true."

She was dead in earnest, and one more skilled that I in conversation would have found it difficult to answer. I said evasively: "They say that love can only find its fullest strength in sacrifice——"

"Yes, yes," she said, "I knew you would say that, you bring it down to the moral argument like everyone else. What you mean is that only the good can enjoy love or any other kind of happiness——"

"I didn't say that——"

"No but——"

"—and the wicked seem to get on pretty well, as far as I can observe."

She began to laugh, without much gaiety.

"At last," she said, "I've succeeded in making you cynical and insincere. Oh, what a relief! I never made Anton insincere. Let's go somewhere now, while you're in the mood. That idiotic Rayedski is holding a meeting in the Oltic Museum, let's go and laugh at him! What? Don't you want to? Oh, why to God do I never find anyone who wants to do what I want, except the nickywits from the General Staff Office? Don't you see that you're only making yourself wretched by brooding? You'd much better think of something else, do something. What, do you want to go home al-

ready? But you've only just finished your tea! You know, I can really be nice when you get me in the right mood, don't you think it would be worth trying?"

I had my lie all ready now; I said that I should have liked to stop longer, if only to thank her for her kindness, but an old friend was coming in from Tosna and I had promised to meet him at the station.

She rang for her servant and told him to bring my coat.

"Of course—if you've promised! Emelian will take you to the station."

I realized that I had expressed no gratitude for what she had done, and I tried, as I was getting into my coat, to say something gracious which would yet not offend her brittle mood. But she would not have it.

"A telephone conversation—what is that? . . . You won't stop and talk to me for a little, if I try to be nice? . . . But no, how can you listen to me when you have that trouble!" She waved to the servant to go away and pushed the door shut with her foot. "You mustn't worry, you mustn't go on worrying, really you mustn't!" She caught hold of my hand. "You know, I remember now just what she was like, such a sweet girl, such a darling. We shall find her, Alexei Alexeivitch, yes, we'll find her."

She went to the window.

"All right—there's Emelian all ready for you."

§

Next morning Emelian arrived again, bringing a note. I was sure that it meant another invitation, and as I opened it I was wondering how, without seeming ungrateful for what Yelisaveta had done, I could refuse it.

But the letter inside was addressed not to me but to Yelisaveta herself. It had the heading of the Central Police Office.

"My dear Yelisaveta Akinievna: I have ascertained that the lady in whom you are interested, Mme Otraveskov, is in the Euphrosina hospital in the Yeskolov arrondissement. You may or may not be aware that her husband, Captain Alexei Alexeivitch Otraveskov, was formerly implicated in the revolutionary activities of the Dombrowa-Radzikov society, and that his name therefore appears on the Green List. (I have not succeeded in obtaining any definite information as to his present whereabouts, but it seems probable, from a file at the General Staff office, that he

deserted from the army last April.) I just mention these facts so that you may know (if you have not found out before) what kind of people you are dealing with. Occasionally our impulsive nature may lead us into queer places, may it not?

I shall expect you at eight o'clock on Sunday. Claudia will be here, but I shall get rid of her as soon as dinner's over. . . .

ANDREY F. ZOROVITCHENSKI."

Across the top, Yelisaveta had written:

"Emelian will take you there. Blessings. Y. A."

Katie, sitting at the table, was watching me as I read the letter. But I did not speak to her. With the letter still open in my hand I went downstairs to the street, Emelian following me, and across the pavement and into the car. "Where to, barin?" Emelian asked. The letter had become blurred, I could not read it, I gave it to Emelian. "I'm sorry," he said, "but I'm not a scholar." He stopped a woman who was passing and she read the letter for us. It was the Euphrosina hospital which was mentioned, the Euphrosina at Yeskolov. I whispered, "That's where I want to go. Drive quickly, please!"

All the way there I held the letter in my hand, trying to get the words in focus, running the edge of the paper across my palm to give myself the certainty that it existed. My hands were very cold, I was shivering. Twice I had to stop the car for relief.

I got no impression of what the outside of the hospital was like, except that it was very large and square. Emelian helped me out of the car, I went up the steps and into the hospital on his arm. There was a little window in the vestibule, Emelian knocked on it, a man came and asked me what I wanted. But I could not tell him; something salt had got under my tongue and my voice was soundless. Emelian took the letter from me and showed it to the man. He nodded then. "I'll find the Superintendent," he said. He took me into a small room which had a table and one chair and one settee, and left me there.

I sat upright and stiffly on the chair, like a man having his photograph taken, the letter lying on my knees. The only happiness of which I was conscious then was the happiness of having the letter back; I had felt alarmed and jealous during those moments when Emelian had taken it from me. My sight grew better as I waited, I could see by degrees the separate objects in the room, the clock on the wall, a notice about spitting. I believe that I waited a long time, but

in that period I was not impatient, for my consciousness seemed not to travel forward through the moments, but rather to remain in one unfinished moment. I think it was just midday, for I have a picture of the clock with the two hands merged together, when the door opened and the Superintendent came in.

He was a shabby, pedagogic creature, his brown shoe-beard uncouthly trimmed, his frayed serge jacket shiny and spotted with acids. Not realizing at once who he was, I had the feeling that I ought to be kind to him, as to a child or invalid. I stared foolishly at the knitted tie which drooped an inch below his collar-stud, and he must have been talking for several moments in his slipshod, undulating voice before I had any idea what he was saying.

". . . apologize most sincerely for not letting you know that Mme Otraveskov was here. Indeed, I addressed a letter to the care of the General Staff Office as soon as Mme Otraveskov's identity was established, but it came back with a message that it could not be forwarded. I should no doubt have made further efforts, but . . . terribly understaffed . . . most of our nurses drafted to the military hospitals . . . hardly time to get round the wards . . ."

My voice was coming back. I whispered:

"Where is my wife?"

I suppose he misunderstood me. I heard him saying:

". . . found Mme Otraveskov in the Botanical Gardens—so I understood from the police . . . exposure . . . pulmonary complications. I assure you, Captain Otraveskov, we did everything possible when she was brought to us. Since the beginning of the war we have been seriously understaffed——"

"Do you mean she's dead?" I asked faintly. Then, loudly and viciously, "Why can't you tell me if she's dead?"

He blinked at me in a frightened way.

"Dead? Oh no, oh no—who can have told you?—oh no! But you mustn't expect to find her just as she was formerly. It's a question of time, in a case like this one cannot——"

"Where is she?" I asked again. "Why don't you take me to her?"

"I'll take you upstairs now," he said. "But you may have to—wait a little."

He led me out into the vestibule and up two flights of stone stairs. He walked very slowly; his boots were too big for him, or else the laces were broken. He was still talking, more to himself than to me, and from the snatches I caught it seemed that he was going into abstruse technicalities; but I heard hardly anything, for I walked behind him, and though I wanted to ask him a hundred questions my fear did not allow me. The ascent of those stairs,

with the Superintendent's bent and shiny shoulders in front, his amorphous, crinkled footgear flapping and whining on the stone, occupies in recollection a very long time. We traversed a corridor that seemed endless at the same tortoise pace, turned left, and came to a door marked "Ward III." But when we went inside we were still in no ward, only an ante-room, a region of wheeling-trays and cupboards and autoclaves and sinks, which had the familiar Krozkohl smell of carbolic and iodine. An old woman who was scrubbing the floor regarded us with mild hostility.

"The matron will be with you in a minute," the Superintendent said; and left me.

I stood looking at the door which led into the ward; a high door painted green, with a stain on the upper panel that was comically like a goose smoking a cigar.

Natalia: perhaps in there.

And I could have thrown open the door and marched inside, but my fear was now greater than impatience, I felt that I could screw myself more easily to jump from the window than to go in and see her.

The old woman dropped her brush into the pail and sat back on her heels.

"What good is this war going to do?" she asked me.

"What? I don't know."

"Food's been getting dearer and dearer ever since it started."

"Yes."

"Sasha has gone to the war."

"Yes?"

"It has made a great difference. The day after he left Yeskolov the Russians won a battle."

"Yes?"

"But I shall not go to live in Germany even if the Russians conquer it. In Germany they eat mincemeat made out of little boys' bodies. It would be bad for Pipikita. And there is no God there, or truth or holiness. I should be hungry in my bowels for beloved Russia."

"Yes. Oh, yes."

The door of the ward opened. I caught a glimpse of a red baize screen and the ends of iron bedsteads. In one of those, perhaps— A rosy girl came out and smiled at me as if she were the hostess at a children's party.

"Mme Ivanov will not be long now!" she said heartily.

"Mme Ivanov?"

"The matron."

Impatience boiled again in my chest and forehead. My voice, pulling at the string of my control, asked: "Can I not see my wife now?"

"As soon as Mme Ivanov comes!" she answered sponsorially.

(I see her now: the nurse's jaunty head-dress, the virgo-maternal eyes, the wide, ingratiating, histrionic smile in which her mineral teeth glistened like pave-stones after rain.)

"Would you like me to bring you a chair?" she asked.

That made me realize that my muscles had become slack and my head unsteady.

"Yes, please."

She brought the chair and I sat down. "He's the colour of ice," the old woman said with interest. I took out my cigarettes. "Smoking is not allowed here!" the nurse said. The nurse went away, leaving me to stare at the goose on the green door.

"Have you been at the war?" the old woman asked, spreading a lake of wetness all around my chair.

"At the war? Oh, yes."

"Did you kill any people?"

"What? I don't remember."

"It would feel funny, I should think, to put your bayonet in a man's stomach and feel the warm blood come running over your hands."

"What? Yes, I expect so."

"But Sasha wouldn't mind, he'd do that sort of thing as well as any. Get up, please, barin."

"What?"

"Get up!"

I stood up and she moved my chair to the area she had already flooded. "All right, barin, you can sit down again. You had better put your feet up on the rungs so as they don't get wet. A sister of mine died that way."

I sat with my feet on the rungs, staring at the green door and trying to pray. At last Mme Ivanov came.

"You will be able to see Mme Otraveskov in a few moments," she said.

Her voice was a eunuch's treble, grotesquely high and thin for so vast a woman, and I had the impression of a ventriloquist speaking behind a monstrous marionette. In her grey uniform, and the vast head-dress which looked as permanent as the clothes of a cheap doll, I could not recognize her as a woman, only as the embodiment of patience and slowness, of authority and routine; yet I saw when my eyes fell that her lusty ankles were in loose, black stockings, cheap and homely, and in the ancient slippers she wore a hole had

been cut out for one of her toes. Her body was miraculously still as she stood there. Only her little eyes moved, watching me as if I were an animal not yet fully tamed.

"Nurse is getting her ready," she said.

I was angry now; partly because she spoke as if Natalia were her property, a portion of the hospital equipment; but chiefly with a purely physical anger.

"Why have I been made to wait all this time?" I barked at her.

She was quite unmoved. She answered slowly, economizing her breath like a flutist:

"I thought it would be better for Mme Otraveskov to be moved to a special room for you to visit her. You will be more private there. You will not be able to stay very long. You will have to be very careful, very careful and very gentle. You must talk about commonplace things, about the weather or the view from the window, things like that. You mustn't say anything to make her excited or rouse her emotions."

"Yes," I said, with my voice uncannily quiet, "I shall talk about the weather."

I was collecting my tumbled wits to ask her questions. But the nurse arrived then, effulgent with virtue, to say that Mme Otraveskov was ready.

"I'll take you to her now," the matron said.

At that moment I did not want to go. The time that had looked so far away from Krozkohl, the faint objective of a tired, insistent dream, was terrifying now that it stood so close in this uncertain shape. "I should like some water," I said. They brought me some boiled water in a tumbler which was rather warm. I drank only a little, but it enabled me to move the iron-cold muscles in my legs. I said, standing up, "All right, I'm ready now."

It seemed to be necessary to traverse another corridor; perhaps more than one—I do not remember. Mme Ivanov and the nurse walked on either side of me like warders. I had the familiar sensation of having lived through this before, and as we stopped at the last door in the passage I realized what was the occasion: the long corridors of the Skoropadski Palace, the last day of my trial. My mind, running loose and headlong then, caught up the links of circumstance, and I thought, staring at the faked grain of the pale-brown door, "That was how this began." The door was opening now, with the hinges making a plaintive, stammering noise. I saw nothing inside but the inevitable screen.

"You can only have a few minutes," Mme Ivanov whispered.

I was in the room, and the door had closed behind me. I was quite alone, except for someone on the other side whom the screen was hiding.

§

I should have let the first impulse carry me, and gone boldly to the other side of the screen. But I hesitated, trying to get the phlegm into my throat and mouth so that I could speak more easily, trying to master the furious vibration of my knees. That hesitation was foolish, for I grew no better, and as I waited the action of my heart became still more troublesome, giving me physical pain. I wanted very much to vomit. I do not think that at any other time I have known the sensations of fear so intimately as I knew them in those few minutes (few seconds?—I cannot be certain) when I stood in front of that screen.

Then I heard a faint voice: "Who is that? Is somebody there?"

My body moved by itself, carrying me forward into the room. I saw, in the poor light filtered by a yellow blind, a wicker chair with many pillows. And she was sitting there.

Her eyes were turned towards the window. I did not speak, I did not run to take her in my arms. In terror of frightening her I moved forward slowly, and knelt beside the chair, and took her cold hand in one of mine, and slid my other hand behind her. I whispered, not meaning to whisper, "Natalia!" Only that, "Natalia!" I did not look at her face just then. I had my own face hidden in her dress. I said again, trying to force the words from my broken throat into her body, *"Natalia!"*

I did not hear her answer. To the pressure of my hand I felt no answering pressure.

I had thought that she would guide me; that she would have spoken or cried or drawn her hand away. Then I should have known what to do. But she did not help me like that. I moved my hand along her arm and up to her breast, feeling how thin and small she was. I let my frightened eyes come slowly up to her face, the pale, shrunk image of Natalia's face; up to her parted, unsmiling, untrembling lips; and at last to the unearthly beauty of her eyes, which were looking quietly, so serious, so patient, not at my face but at my shoulder. I should have embraced her then, but I had never embraced her when she did not invite me, and the habit held me back. I began to stroke her face and her hair, I kept on saying, as a child repeats a single word that has caught his fancy, "Natalia . . . Natalia . . ."

When I heard her voice again it was the old, deep voice; but she spoke as the dying speak, as if she were a long way off.

"Why are you crying?"

I could not tell her why. I said: "I'm not crying, really."

"Oh yes," she said, "you're crying, I can see you, I can see your face quite plainly."

She brought her hand slowly up to my face; all her movements were slow; and touched my eyelids with the tip of her finger. I took that hand and kissed it; on the fingers, on the palm, again and again. And she asked me:

"Why do you do that?"

But she did not try to pull her hand away.

I could not tell yet if she knew me; and I ached to ask her: "You know who it is?—Alexei!" But to put that doubt in words would have given it a dignity that I could not suffer. I prayed that she would use my name, if only once, that I might know our separation was over.

That was not to be; the castle was shut up, there was no light in any window, the door was locked and I could not find the keyhole. I lifted her, and slid behind her on to the chair, taking her on my thighs, where she lay back passively, as if contented. At least my fear had gone, for I knew or partly knew the deepest pain that I must suffer, and no longer had to be afraid that my coming could hurt her; at least I could hold her body against my own, trying to make its little warmth, its smell, its preciousness, suffice my hunger. It was not enough. Handling the rough material of her dress, rubbing my cheek against the elastic softness of her hair, I felt again the dreadful loneliness in which I had wandered through the villa at Voepensk. And yet I knew this vessel was not empty as the villa had been. She could not be far away, although she was hiding. In time, in time, God helping me, God hardening my patience, I should get her back.

My eyes had closed, and when I opened them I saw that Mme Ivanov stood beside the screen, watching us with a quiet curiosity. "You must come now," she said, not harshly but with finality. I told her I wasn't ready yet, but she repeated, "You must come now, you will only tire her." I said: "You will please go away!" with so much shuttered fury in my voice that she retreated.

Afterwards I wished I had not sent her away; for the strain of being so close to Natalia, in body but not in understanding, was too severe to be suffered long at this first experience. The room seemed to be stuffy, I wanted to be by myself for a while and drink fresh air.

I turned her so that I could look into her face, tightening my courage to do that; and I began, not easily, to talk to her. I said that we should have to get our villa thoroughly cleaned when we went back to live there, it was in a very dirty state; perhaps we should have new decorations. The top room, I thought, could be made into a studio; I was longing to handle my brushes again, I should find myself sorely out of practice. . . . Surely that was a new dress she had on, I hadn't seen it before. It was nicely made, but I didn't like the colour very much, I should buy her a light blue dress with white collar and cuffs, rather like the one she had when we were married. . . . Did they give her nice food in this place, or was it rather dull food? I thought that Mme Ivanov looked a capable person, though rather stodgy for my little Natalia to talk to. . . .

My voice began to come quite fluently, working almost by itself. It was like talking to a child, who will not trouble to understand you, but likes to hear your voice and know that you are talking to him. I did not speak of the war, of our separation, of all those things I had ached to melt in the warmth of our reunion; but I dared to ask her questions, patiently repeating them till I had some answer.

"Are you happy here, Natalia? Do they treat you well? Do you like to live here?"

And at last, when I had almost given up hope that she would understand, she said in a listless voice: "Yes. Oh yes. It's all right."

"But you would rather come and live with me again? Wouldn't you, chérie? You would, wouldn't you? We were always so happy, surely you would like that!"

She fingered the flap of my pocket, found a loose thread and pulled until she snapped it.

"Wouldn't you, chérie?" I asked again.

Her drifting gaze came to rest on my face, her eyes screwed up a little, as if she were making a calculation. She said slowly:

"I think—I think I have to stop here. I promised Mme Ivanov. I go in the garden sometimes, but the gate—I promised I wouldn't go through the gate."

"It will be all right when I take you," I said. "I shall speak to Mme Ivanov, she won't mind if I go with you."

She shook her head.

"Alexei—Alexei might not like it."

I had prayed that she would use my name; and now, hearing her say it. I felt as Tourov in his dream; when, as he stood beside an open grave and stretched his eyes to see whose coffin lay there, the

name he read was his own. In that moment I had to abandon caution.

"But this is Alexei," I said, "this here, me, talking to you."

"I know, I know," she said, as if I were trying to confuse her. "I mean—the other Alexei."

"But Natalia—Natalia, look at me, look!—I am the Alexei you mean. You mean Alexei your husband."

"Yes, that's who I mean," she said seriously. "My husband, Alexei, he died some time ago. It was in the war I think. Perhaps you knew him, you are like him, he had a moustache like that."

I waited then; perhaps too long. When her eyes were quite restful, I said:

"But who told you that I was dead?"

"I can't remember," she said. Her voice was tired, so tired. "I can't remember, someone told me, but I knew before that. He didn't write to me, so, I knew. . . ."

It was cruel to question her when she was so tired, so unwilling to be questioned. But I felt the chilly desperation of one who, dreaming, finds that he cannot work out a simple problem which he has often solved before. I gave her a little time, holding myself to silence. I loosened a sheaf of her hair, as I used in the old days, and wrapped it about her ear, feebly hoping that such a taste of familiarity would prick remembrance. Then I asked her:

"Tell me Natalia, Natalia my darling, who do you think I am? Look at me, Natalia, look, my darling, look and see who it is."

But she would not look at me again. She let her head slide down to the crook of my arm, her eyes were shut. She whispered "I like —having you here, because you are like Alexei. But you must go now, I want to sleep, you must go away now."

"But you'd like me to come back another time?"

As soon as I had asked that question I was sorry. For suppose she should answer "No"! But she made no answer at all, she seemed already asleep.

I stood up, still holding her in my arms. I kissed her forehead, and put her back into the chair, with her head and shoulders against the pillows. It was best for me to leave her then, but I could not get myself away so easily. Kneeling by the chair again, with my hand just touching hers, I watched her as she slept; the small body heaving, the tumbled hair, the pale, thin cheek marked by the buttons of my sleeve; as a master, coming in the first light to see the picture he has completed, will stand and wonder if a work of such perfection, found long since in his mind's seclusion, can yet have been his own. I wanted to lift her again and take her away, to

Krasnyesk, to Italy, to a quiet place where I could always watch her body, waiting for her spirit to come back to me. But she slept so quietly here, as if content to be alone.

As if I had been too long admiring a porcelain which had pleased me, I got up sharply, and swung my eyes away from Natalia, and stole out into the corridor, shutting the door behind me. And my single thought, then, as I leaned against the passage-wall, and felt for my cigarettes, was: "That much is over, over."

§

Mme Ivanov found me there, and breeding made me offer some kind of apology for my rudeness; which I at once regretted, for she took it with so much unction. "We here, we understand it all so well, every day we have to deal with people whose nerves are broken." What did she understand, that entrepreneuse of the routine of suffering?

"You will be able to visit Mme Otraveskov again tomorrow," she said indulgently. "You will be coming again tomorrow, no doubt?"

I said: "I have no plans."

11

As I was going down the stairs I found M. Torklus, the Superintendent, walking beside me again. I suppose he had joined me at the top of the stairs, or in one of the passages—I am not quite sure. I noticed him now because he was holding my arm, and I saw when I turned towards him that his face, on which I had previously noticed only a rather foolish anxiety, was sad and friendly. "You must realize," he was saying in a triste, apologetic voice, "that these pulmonary troubles often produce cerebral reactions in various ways. . . . Mme Otraveskov did not seem to you quite normal, perhaps. . . . I have a wife of my own, an invalid, so I am well able to understand. . . ." Vaguely hearing him, I thought "It is like a small boy who thinks that he can understand a railway engine because he has pulled his bicycle to pieces." I said: "I appreciate very much . . . all the trouble taken. . . ." We went on down the stairs.

I wanted to get away, but he held me with his urgent sympathy. We stood and talked in a corner of the vestibule, which was crowded now with visitors.

"My advice is that you should leave Mme Otraveskov with us for another three months," he said, "that is, unless you can provide her in your own home with a proper nurse and a trained com-

panion. It's important that she should not be troubled with a great deal of conversation, and at the same time she must not be left to brood by herself for long periods. . . ."

A frail, yellow nurse, whose lips showed a permanent truculence, pushed herself unceremoniously between us. "I am having trouble with Mme Runeska," she announced. "She refuses to believe that her daughter's trouble is rhabdosarcoma, she thinks it's simply a minor affection of the bowels, I've told her——"

"Yes yes, nurse, I will attend to that later—I'm not at all certain myself——"

"But it's down on the card as kidney. I've told Mme Runeska it's down on the card; we can't keep altering the case records——"

"Go away!" Torklus said. "Go away, please go away! *Go away!* . . . I was saying, Captain——"

An old man had detached himself from the crowd and for some time had been pulling at Torklus' sleeve. He opened his jacket and began to drag up his shirt. "The pain's come round to the other side, doctor," he said hoarsely; "it's close to my navel now, it's a funny sort of pain, it feels like a horse's neigh, *heh-heh-heh-heh-heh,* that's what it feels like." "Go away!" Torklus said. "Put your shirt back and go away! The nurse will attend to you." But as soon as he had shuffled off, a woman caught sight of Torklus and almost threw herself upon him. "I won't have any of those nurses!" she said tearfully, seizing his hand. "You must come and see Michka yourself, his voice has gone all greasy like a starved kitten's and his poor little motions are the colour of schlichi." Murmuring, "Presently, presently!" Torklus took my arm and led me away to his own room.

"I was going to ask you," he said, pulling and snapping a trouser-clip, "—we have been puzzled sometimes by Mme Otraveskov talking of a little boy. I was wondering—perhaps you could tell me——?"

In that hour, when my mind was frozen, I had forgotten Vava, forgotten him completely. And now, when the meaning of Torklus' words reached me, the first of my thoughts was: "More pain! Must I suffer still more?" He was watching me nervously, intently, and I was touched by the kindness in his anxious eyes.

"We had a child, a little boy," I told him.

"But he is dead?"

I shook my head. "I don't know. He disappeared with—with my wife. I don't know what happened." Through the frosted glass in the door I saw that someone was waiting to come in, and I prepared

to leave him. "I suppose the police said nothing about a child when they brought my wife here?"

"No," he said, "no, they told me nothing about a child. But, of course, I can make inquiries with the officer who found Mme Otraveskov—I know him quite well. If you would not object—?" Still watching me with his embarrassed eyes, he felt for the telephone, unravelled its tangled flex, and gave a number. "Will you ask M. Minkevitch, please, if he will be kind enough to speak to me—Dr. Torklus." For a long time, as it seemed, I heard from the telephone the nasal twitter faintly recognizable as human speech. Then, "M. Minkevitch is examining his records," Torklus said. "He will speak again in a few minutes. . . . You will drink a glass of wine perhaps? I have nothing very good, but if you care for a glass . . ."

I said something about not keeping him from his work. But I was very little conscious of Torklus' fluttering presence, all my mind was turned to Vava. I had thought that my heart was number, that no new grief would touch me; and now the faded picture of Vava's small and patient body had been thrown again on the screen of recollection, and the pain, that is like the opening of an oven-door between breast and throat, had started once again. "I suppose that all of us," Torklus was saying, "are hoping that the war will bring something more than victory. We cannot go back to the old Russia, surely that is impossible!" And I heard myself answer, "Some of us have worked for it a long time, the Russia that is to be." But the voice of my mind was repeating "Vava, Vava—surely God has looked after him!"

The telephone rang and the twitter started again. Torklus, writing on a note-pad, said "Yes . . . indeed? . . . possibly so . . . yes . . . yes." I walked about the room, my eyes examining the Landolt balance, the dusty shelves, the canary-cage in the window. At last he put down the receiver.

"M. Minkevitch has it recorded," he said, "that a child—a small boy—was found near to the Botanical Gardens on the day after your wife was found there. But there was nothing, he says, to connect him with Mme Otraveskov—the child only knew his first name. Possibly——"

"Was the boy an invalid?" I asked sharply.

"Yes. Yes, an invalid. M. Minkevitch said that. The poor little thing was found lying on a seat in the Odoyevski boulevard, and——"

"And what did they do with him?"

"It seems," Torklus said in his maddeningly slow voice, "that

he was taken first of all to the children's hospital on Vasili Island, but the spinal trouble was found to be incurable, the hospital could do him no good, so they found a home for him. I've written down the address."

He handed me his pad. I read: "Hilda Jakovlievna Koroschik, Mlinovakaya 22, Viborg."

"And they didn't tell you anything about finding the boy?" I asked.

"No, they said nothing to me."

"Why didn't they?" I said fiercely. "Why in God's name didn't they make proper inquiries? Why didn't they link up the police report from Voepensk? They'd found out who my wife was—why didn't they follow it up? Why?"

Torklus wriggled uncomfortably in his padded chair, as if he were trying to fold and squeeze himself through the back of it. "I don't know," he said, unscrewing one of the drawer-knobs of his desk, "I don't know. The police—I sometimes think—are interested only in crime and in politics. . . . But perhaps, if the little boy were to be brought here. . . ." He got up and came round to me with the air of a shaggy dog. "I blame myself," he said, holding my arms, "I blame myself most terribly!"

The yellow nurse came in. "Mme Runeska says that her child Tatousha's kidneys are not on any account to be tampered with. She says she will lie down on the steps and stay there till she has a signed statement. . . ."

12

I could not go alone on my search for Vava, I did not trust myself. And rather to my surprise, Katie offered to come with me. She could leave Pavel for an hour, she thought, now that he always slept in the afternoons; and she confessed that for many weeks she had not been out of the house except for hasty visits to the nearest shops and to the library.

I waited stoically for nearly half an hour while she settled Pavel and made herself ready, and when she appeared I was startled by her tidiness. She had entirely rearranged her hair and dabbed her face with powder, she wore a Paris coat of my mother's that Sooza had long ago re-modelled for her, a hat which I myself had given her just before leaving Voepensk and which still looked new, a pair of half-kid gloves with elegant embroidery at the wrists; she was the fashionable woman of St. Petersburg in 1910. She said, taking

my arm, "It is nice, Alexei, to be going out with you. No one has taken me out for such a long time."

I reproached myself for having been so full of my own affairs that I had never taken her for any little excursion; and I said that I should get a cab to take us to Viborg so that we should be in style. But she would not have that. "No," she said, "it is only the bourzhui who go in cabs, it insults the poverty of those who have to walk." So we went by the crowded tramcar, in which dear Katie sat upright like a garden flower thrown carelessly among the weeds, her arms tucked well into her sides, her lips apart in such a wistful smile as Daniel may have worn in the den of lions. I was glad to have her there, to pretend that this was only a little holiday.

Mlinovakaya runs east from the Poltsin canal, lying beside the railway. You reach it from the west side by an iron footbridge spanning the Poltsin, where there is always a mob of little boys dangling lines into the water. The left side of the street, as you see it then, is filled by the Glebov leather factory. On your right stands a repository belonging to the Preobrazhenski Barracks, a huge rectangle of dirty yellow brick which grows vaguely Byzantine towards the summit; further on there is the warehouse of a Polish meat company, and between these buildings are jammed a score of cottages, so narrow-fronted that they seem to have been squeezed together by their powerful neighbours. Twenty-two should have been on this side, but we could not find it; and at last a child who was rolling in the dirty snow told us that 22 was at the back; "You go through there," she said. We went through a dark and dripping tunnel which reeked of excrement, emerging in a passage some four yards wide between the houses and the railway. Amid the pudding of snow and rubbish which covered the slanting pave-stones a brigade of sparrows with a thrush or two were finding some kind of nourishment; and I remember wondering that these creatures should have discovered such a place as this. We asked a woman taking in her clothesline where Hilda Koroschik lived, and she told us it was the house at the end.

"But you won't find her there," she said. "She's at work now, she won't be back before nine if she goes in the bread line."

"Where does she work?" Katie asked.

"In Diatel's mill—over the other side of the canal."

"Won't anyone be in the house?"

"Only the children."

For a moment I felt the shrinking cowardice which had attacked me in the morning. Vava might be there, and I had not the strength

to see him now. But the feeling passed, and I was conscious of a new, sustaining hardness in my spirit. The long uncertainty was over; I had seen Natalia and heard her speak; my sanity had withstood that trial and there could not be such a weapon as would drive a deeper wound. "You can wait, if you like," I said to Katie, "I shall see if the children can tell me anything." But, dutifully, she came along with me, stepping daintily between the filth and litter as my mother would have done. From one of the soot-caked windows that we passed the body of a cat was hanging, with a piece of string round its neck and the eyes horribly protruding. Katie turned her face away sharply, and went very white. But she would not go back to the street as I advised her. "I want to see all this," she said faintly, "I ought to see it."

There were three steps down to the door of the house. I descended these and knocked. As is usual when one calls at the houses of poor people, it was the next door which opened. A man came out, a little, deformed creature whose features worked with a violent chorea, and told us with unnecessary truculence that Hilda Jakovlievna was away. I said that I wanted to see the children. "You can't go seeing the children when Hilda Jakovlievna isn't there!" he said; and added, "There's nothing there that you want to see." Deciding to take no notice of him, I pushed open the door and went inside, with Katie after me.

Of that dark room, which stank of garlic and urine, what I remember most vividly is the peculiar silence. For there were four, perhaps five young children sprawling on what little space of floor the furniture left, and not one of them made any noise. They stared at us solemnly as we entered, blinking a little at the light which we had let in, their mouths open, their unchildish faces without any expression. One of the smallest giggled feebly and put his face in an elder sister's skirt; but that was all. There was no stove in this room, and the floor was of brick and tile; but the children, of whom none had both stockings and knickers, did not seem to be aware of the cold. They had arrived, these thin, white creatures, at an asceticism which appeared to be quite unconscious; and as I wondered where I had seen that kind of face before, my mind ran back to the Austrian prisoners passing through Kraschev station. With my eyes confused by the darkness, as theirs by the light, I did not see at once that anyone else was in the room. But a little cough made me look to my right, where I saw the glow of a cigarette and then the outline of a woman who stood by the sink there: a woman? I cannot say even now, but her breast was a woman's, her body short

and frail as a child's, her dark hair cropped boyishly, her face more delicate and childlike than that of the infants squirming round her legs. She was washing something in the sink, and she did not stop working when she saw us; only turned her head and said sharply: "Hilda Jakovlievna is out."

"There!" said the hunchback, who had followed us in, "I told you that, didn't I?"

"There is no money in the house," the girl added, with finality.

The hunchback had caught hold of Katie's arm. "You'd better go away!" he said thickly. "You see that child, the female one, she's got the smallpox on her, you can see it coming. You'd better get out of here."

My eyes had settled to the dimness now, I could see each corner of the little room.

"Are there any other children in this house?" I asked the girl.

"Don't you answer the bastard!" the man said.

"Katie, you'd better go!" I said urgently.

She was shivering with nausea and fear. But she did not go. "You needn't be frightened of me," she said to the hunchback, "I am a friend of yours, we share a common aspiration." Her voice was so prim that even then I almost laughed aloud.

"You go to b——!" the hunchback said.

The little girl that he had pointed out began to whimper, and Katie looked more scared than ever; she had never had any feeling for babies. But she bent down to examine the child more closely.

"Has she really got smallpox?" she asked the girl. "Why don't you take her to a doctor?"

"I've no time to be running after doctors."

With sudden resolution Katie stooped to pick up the child, and held the dirty body against her dress, murmuring, "Hush, little frog, hush!"

"You put that down!" the girl ordered.

"Katie, you'd better——"

"Leave it alone!" the man said.

Inwardly cursing Katie for the stir she was making, I turned to the girl again. "I want to know if there's another child in this house —a little boy?"

"Why?"

"Don't you tell him!" the hunchback squeaked. "We don't want people of this sort here, we've enough troubles."

The child that Katie nursed was making more noise than ever, and I had to shout to make myself heard.

"Where is that boy? If you don't tell me I'll get the police."

"There!" said the hunchback, "I thought they came from the police!"

The girl was frightened now. "It's nothing to do with me!" she said angrily. She had moved closer to Katie and with a sudden grab she pulled the child away, slapped it, and put it back on the floor, where it lay on its stomach, surprised into silence. Then she turned to me. "You can ask Hilda Jakovlievna when she comes back where the boy is. And now will you go away, I've got enough to do!"

She stood before me with arms folded and her eyes brilliant with defiance. In my nervousness I could have shaken her, but I just controlled myself and spoke to her gently:

"I'm not going to hurt you. I just want to see the little boy."

She went back to the sink. "You can't see him," she said, picking up the heel of her cigarette and relighting it.

Just then the hunchback decided to change his tone.

"I could find the boy for you, perhaps," he said doubtfully.

"Where is he?" I demanded.

"It's difficult nowadays," he said inconsequently, "food's costing more every day, I tried to get a job at the Putilov Works but it wasn't any good, I have my mother living, she's eighty-six. . . ."

There was a door at the far side of the room. I went across and opened it.

"You keep out of there!" the girl screamed.

She ran towards me, but the hunchback was quicker than she. He made a dart, and had her by the arm before she could reach me; holding her dress with his left hand he swung round his right arm and got her neck into his armpit. "I'll keep her, barin!" he panted. "I'll keep her as long as you like for five roubles." "Dmitri, you festering swine, let me go!" she yelled. The children on the floor were laughing and crying, the biggest of them wriggled towards the hunchback and tried to bite his leg. "Five roubles!" Dmitri repeated hoarsely. "It isn't much.—You, N'yisha, shut your mouth or I'll flog you, you keep quiet and I'll give you a rouble for yourself.—Five roubles, barin, that's all I want!" "Alexei!" Katie called. "Alexei, you mustn't!—Let her go, you!" Upon impulse rather than determination, I slammed the door upon this turbulence, felt for the bolt and jerked it into the socket. They must settle things as best they could.

It was almost pitch-dark where I stood, but I saw a light above me, and feeling with my hands I found a flight of wooden steps, narrow and without risers. I made my way up cautiously, for here and there a step was missing, and raised the latch of the door at the

top. The door, an improvised affair, was tightly stuck in the frame. I barged it open with my shoulder and found myself in a room slightly larger than the one below, and lighter, though all the light there was came from a window some two feet square. I suppose there was nothing but a few rotted boards between the rooms upstairs and down; the noise from below still reached me clearly, and some of the rancid odour; but here the air was not so quick and pungent, it was dry and stale like the air of a tailor's workshop, still heavy with the breath of those who had slept here. In the moment, less than a moment, when this room first came into my sight I prayed that Vava should not be here: Not here, dear Christ, not in a room like this! But His image which I saw on the wall, a face grave and pitying, was too remote to give me answer; and my prayer went up without the light of faith, for I knew already, before I saw him, that Vava was there.

He was near the window, where the one great bed that almost filled the room left just the space for an oblong box which served as his cot. He lay flat on his back, as he had to lie always, his hands crossed on his forehead, his eyes loosely shut. He was not much changed; only that the lines of his face were a little hardened, and his skin, which had always been so clear, was yellow and marked with sores; his bare arms very thin, his brown hair, that Natalia had kept so carefully, long and tousled. As I bent towards him he moved convulsively, kicking away the soldier's blanket which covered him and revealing the dirty vest which he wore for nightshirt. In the picture of that moment which my mind has kept, of Vava's pinched face on the folded hessian, of the unplaned wood and the streaked distemper behind, the hesitant voice of Torklus is always joined: "So they found a home for him."

That shell which I had felt to grow about my tenderness gave me protection now. I stood outside myself; and as I watched the slight, unhappy twitching of Vava's body as he slept, as I heard the murmur of small, insistent pain which came from his lips, I watched myself also; thinking, "There I see two that have learnt to suffer and must go on suffering." And that detachment might have lasted, bringing this day within endurance; but I could not wait for his eyes to open, and I called to him softly, "Vava!" His eyelids folded as if he had not been sleeping at all, I saw his eyes, still beautiful like the Moscow sky in April, groping until they had my face in reach. I said again, "Vava! Vava, little son!" and stooped to kiss him. But his eyes shut again, he threw up his arm to keep me off, he shouted in terror, "No! *No!*"

His loneliness, in this sallow and musty room, had stirred com-

passion so acutely that the muscles of my face and throat had hurt me with their tension. His terror, not his cry but the paltry defence of his slender arm, set flame to the heat of pity and it blazed above the reach of my control. Helpless, I turned and threw myself on the bed. The tears I had restrained with so much vigilance would not relieve me now, and the hot, dry storm of passion broke out in reckless anger. Like a raging child I struck my fists against the bed, against my forehead, so crazed to answer cruelty with pain that I would wound myself if there was no one else to injure. With my mouth against the crumpled blanket I shouted curses on the whore that had so treated him, on the brutes that had sent him here, the insensate callousness of Russia. It was not enough: women and men were butts too worthless for the heat and fury of that passion, and the hatred that they could not satisfy turned towards God. I had left them in His keeping, my wife and son, and in this way He had cared for them. The blasphemy of the man they called Vladimir came back to my ears like the battle-cry of men crushed down but undefeated: *God is the supreme evil, the eternal enemy.* In the darkness of that moment I felt the exaltation of defiance, as perhaps the hunted feel when they stand at bay. But it did not last, only the darkness lasted.

§

I felt my way downstairs again and threw open the lower door. The uproar, which had fallen to an andantino of resentful argument, broke out once more when they saw me. Neighbours had been attracted by the noise, and I saw half a dozen women clustering in from the alley. Dmitri came and caught me by the sleeve. "Listen, Vashe Blagorodie, I'll make everything all right for you, just four roubles. . . ." I caught him by the collar, as I had seen my father do with a drunken peasant, and flung him back against the wall. I shouted at N'yisha, "Keep back, you, keep away!" and threw my hand towards her face with the motion of cracking a whip. I called to Katie, "Here, come here, I want you upstairs!" She hesitated for just a second and then she followed me.

Vava was crying when I got back to him, and flinched when he saw me; but the sight of Katie's gentle, troubled face did something to relieve him. I moved round to the head of his box, murmuring, "It's all right, Vava, it's all right!" and ordered Katie to take the other end.

"It won't be heavy," I said.

For her, so delicately made, it was heavy enough; but she didn't complain, and I could not spare her. With no small effort we

manoeuvred the box to the other side of the giant bed and through the narrow door to the stairs; where, descending first and backwards, I took the weight of it, feeling with a certain curious pleasure the pain it gave to my bad leg. At the bottom we got it wedged, for a long minute I had to jerk and tug at it, feeling at my back the scowl of the women watching me in dreadful silence, while Vava, still weeping, but almost soundlessly, uttered no protest at the fearful shaking. At my last tug a part of the lintel broke in splinters, the box came free with a violence that nearly sent me over. We staggered across the room and out to the alley, the angry women falling aside as they felt my vicious elbows. Along the alley they followed us, those ragged and bony creatures, N'yisha weeping and scolding behind. I could still hear Dmitri screaming curses as he lay where I had thrown him. Katie was white and out of breath, but I gave her no respite. "We must get him away!" I grunted, and that was the only thing I thought of. At the tunnel a bulky, mop-haired woman met us and added her raw voice to the din: it was Hilda Koroschik, someone had sent her word and she had come hot-foot. She tried to block our way, and as I limped backwards through the tunnel she held her weight against me, driving her fists against my back and snatching at my hair, yelling to high heaven between her oaths that I was murdering her darling, stealing her livelihood. I did not tell her who I was, I didn't trouble to give any answer. Only when she dropped on the ground and tried to hold my leg I kicked her aside and barked at her to shut her filthy mouth. In the street, which had been all but deserted, a crowd of children sprang up as if they had been hidden beneath the snow. They were quiet, they took no sides, but as we laboured on towards the canal they followed us with the tramp of a pursuing army, the blaspheming women in their midst. I felt that Katie's arm was giving, I heard her say, "Alexei, I can't, I can't!" With that unnatural strength which anger gives, I slid my left hand to the box's middle, and put my right arm across it. Like that I carried it, feeling no special strain or tiredness, across the bridge and on to the Kotsusuvoski road; and as I went, not hearing what they shouted after me, I talked to Vava, calling him my son, my little one, my precious; promising to protect him.

13

About that time a victory was reported: Benshuzov's division, in a masterly action, had taken "the town of Vemoinitz." I knew that place, for we had passed through it in October '15 as we ad-

vanced towards the Leen; a village, as I remembered it, of sixty cottages or so, many of them already destroyed by gunfire, and several blazing when I saw them, set alight by troops who had failed to find what they wanted. Families had still been living there in those days, with Polish obstinacy; patching their farms and going about their business between the tides of warfare. I had seen children squatting beside the road and gaily shouting for sweets as the liquid mud from the gun-carriage wheels splashed over them. I doubted now if the children would still be there, or a single house with four walls and a roof to it. Vemoinitz would be hardly anything but a name on the map. Still, it was a victory.

The Roumanians still retreated towards Sereth; but no one, we said, had ever put any faith in the fighting quality of Roumanians.

It stands out, in my memory of that strange, half-lit period, that I acquired so soon the Petrograd detachment from the war. It is true that war had become the frame of the city's life, chastening its stomach, haunting its consciousness with a new battalion of ghosts for every day. But here, feeling the war's tightness and its avarice, they named it still as something a long way distant, a succession of exploits vaguely understood, a diagram composed of Generals' names and wriggling contours which had no life of its own. In the restaurants of the Gorokhovaya they knew that fifteen thousand men had been thrust overnight into the Descher gap; but they could not hear the noise of tired feet pulling through the yellow Descher mud or smell the eternal stench of sweat-soaked uniform or see the pandemonium of wagons axle-bogged in the Ploeknish market square. They heard of campaigns but not of boredom, they got no picture of the zigzag wire that wandered forty versts across the treeless waste from Estaucroln to the Deuten lines, the chill of the picket-room in a broken farmhouse, the puzzled face of a horse crumpled and bleeding across a field-gun's tail. That sense of remoteness had infected me in the few days of my leave; for this new life of mine, fluid and shadowed as it was, had already assumed the shape of normalcy. I continued to be Katie's guest; not very willingly, for her flat seemed to be open day and night to every half-cooked politician in the city, and unlike these people I was always conscious of being in her way; but when I talked of moving myself to one of the hotels she answered, "Oh, Alexei, aren't you happy, aren't you comfortable with me?" So the frame through which I look back at that patch of existence is Katie's prim and faintly archaic drawing-room, with its boucherie cabinets and redundant drapery, its odour of French soap faintly tinged with that of ferns; and though the sky may have cleared some days, I think of Petrograd, the larger back-

ground of that memory, as a steady greyness where a moist wind flogged us without mercy, sweeping damp sheets of newspaper along the Kamennostrovski and a shroud of Neva mist about the palaces and fortress. In that conspectus the war has only a humble place. I knew that I still belonged to it; however lost and unregarded I might seem in Petrograd, my socket remained in the vast, unwieldy engine of the Russia which stood to arms; but until the very end of my liberty I felt as if that chaos of men and miseries was something behind, never in front of me. Indeed, I hardly looked forward at all, except that I longed to see Anton and to hear his voice again.

This, I believe, was the common sentiment of Petrograd, so general that despite my self-absorption I had to be aware of it: that the war was something out of date, that what we hoped for was rather the end of it than victory. I remember how, as I sat in a corner of the room with Katie's friends chattering all around me, I read the Emperor's immortal prikaz: *God will bless our arms: He will give us a peace worthy of your glorious deeds. Oh, my glorious troops, a peace such that generations to come will bless your sacred memory;* and how, later, I saw an old man standing in the street with tears running down his face as he read it. But the Arctic wind chilled that emotion and blew it away. Victory would give us Constantinople, they said, though it seemed to have grown less likely: Constantinople, yes; but did they make flour and meat there? and in the sobriety of early morning, was it sufficient to write beneath a soldier's portrait: "He died to get us Constantinople?" That much of the common thought I understood, hearing scraps of conversation as I sat in the waiting-room of the Euphrosina hospital; the rest was hardly closer to my comprehension than the café talk of a foreign town. They spoke of Protopopov; I knew who he was, but I did not realize why his name was pronounced with so much venom. I heard that a Moscow congress of the Union of Zemstvos had been proscribed, and the action seemed to me high-handed; but I had always thought of the Zemstvos as a mere device to vent the native eloquence of rural busybodies, I saw no special significance in the snub. Ten years before, I had listened to that kind of talk with ready ears, believing it politically important; but the winters of Krasnyesk had intervened, and now it had lost its freshness. I thought: "In a hundred years they will still be complaining, they will be talking of a Duma based on the English practice, of a liberal constitution. And the spies of the Okhranha will still be smiling as they listen."

No, the war was my place after all, if I could reach it before it was over. There men suffered together and accepted pain as the

commonplace, you looked forward to no future for the future haply was extinction. There men knew you and expected nothing but the man they knew, you had some duty for every waking hour, your mind was at rest because it was always busy. Routine, routine and weariness; no time for thought, no care for misery, no hope, no expectation. That was far better than the loneliness of pavements crammed with strangers, the Euphrosina's gaunt façade, the endless noise of troubles that I did not understand. Mariki itself was better than Petrograd; for there, in our lodging in the evenings, tired, I should listen to Anton's gentle, halting voice, or feel in his silence the sympathy I was craving. I had valued him too little before, jealous of giving away the smallest part of a heart which belonged to Natalia. In the journey from Paulskov, yearning for her, I had hardly once remembered him. But the love which was nourished in the stony soil of our captivity had gone on growing while we were parted, and now my hunger, unassuaged, turned back to him for soothing. God had deserted me, and for His callousness I had banished Him from heart and mind; leaving nothing except the bitterness of solitude.

§

I bought a dress for Natalia, a blue one with a frilly collar and big, puffed sleeves. I bought her flowers, and a copy of Goya's *Portrait of a Young Girl* which I thought might please her. She liked the flowers, smiling and pressing her face into them; and she said that the dress was pretty, "Oh, how pretty, how charming!" but she would not try it on. When I pressed her she became more serious and distant: "No no, I couldn't wear a dress that isn't mine." I tried very hard to persuade her that the dress was hers, but she would not understand that. "Oh no," she said, "no, that isn't one of my dresses. Perhaps it belongs to Mme Ivanov . . . but you must take it back to where it comes from."

At least these things gave me something to talk about. I told her that the picture was a copy made by Piatrogov, that he had sat in front of the original for week after week before he set up his easel. "Do you remember Piatrogov?—we met him once, in Moscow, not long before we were married, when we dined with Mme Shedovitch. Your father was there, and he told us about his tour in Bessarabia. Surely you remember Piatrogov!—a little fat man with a beard like a pigeon's tail. He had short, stubby fingers, and he held his fork as a child does, you wouldn't have guessed he was a painter. . . ." She never answered such a question, she only looked at my face as if I were talking in a language she did not understand. But I found

that it helped me, to speak of general, unimportant things, for I dreaded the gaps of silence, and she herself would not talk very much. She would say, "The room is rather cold. . . . I should like to go in the garden—but not now, no, not now, only when the weather is warmer. . . . It is so kind of you to come and see me, I do not have many visitors, I do not know many people in Petrograd. Perhaps you would find the other chair more comfortable. There is a newspaper over there, but I think it's an old one—I never read the newspapers, I find nothing there of any interest." Sometimes she would grow a little warmer, leaning against me on the sofa and holding my hand. "It is nice to see an old friend," she would say; and then her eyes would narrow in a puzzled way. "You knew my husband, I think you said? No no, I would rather not talk about him now, I am rather tired today. . . . I have to wait such a long time. . . . I think, perhaps, if you will go away, I will ring for Mme Ivanov and she will help me get to bed. No no, I am not ill, you mustn't think I'm ill, it's only that I get very tired, I shall feel stronger when the summer comes. . . ." And once I found her crying, but she would not tell me why she cried.

I find it hard to say clearly how I felt about those visits to the hospital. I looked forward to them with almost ungovernable impatience, starting half an hour too early, watching the sluggish minute-hand of my watch as I walked up and down in front of the building or paced the waiting-room in an agony of fidgets. Each time I was confident, each time I thought that when Natalia saw me she would run and throw herself into my arms, crying that she belonged to me and I must take her away. Even as I walked along the austere corridor which led to her room I was high in courage; this time I should have no fear of frightening her, I should talk as I had done in our first days together, holding her so close and lovingly that I should break away the fence about her spirit. "Your wife is better today," Mme Ivanov would chirp as she waddled beside me, "she has much more colour, your visits are doing her good." It was true, she seemed each time to be a little better, she gave a faint smile when she saw me now. But the smell of the room, the screen, the net curtains, seemed to form a shell about her which broke my resolution. They had given her a table-cloth to embroider for occupation, and she sat on a high-backed chair by the window, working as slowly and cautiously as a child does, her head bent very low, so that the nape of her neck showed in its gentle beauty. She had sat like that in our wooden house at Krasnyesk, with the light reflected from the snow on her slight, strong body, the delicate, determined shaping of her profile; so often, that as I watched her

now I could almost see the heavy transverse of the Krasynesk window, the tarred roof of the woodshed outside. Yes, that was how I had dreamed of her in the prisoner-train, in the pain and solitude of Krozkohl. And this was no dream, for when I bent over her I could smell her hair, I could feel her warm breath on my hand. But the low, familiar voice said, "Careful! Oh please be careful, my needle will prick you!" and I knew I was no nearer than the day before. My forehead felt cold again, I found myself saying: "Look, Natalia, I have brought you some new slippers, don't you think they're rather pretty? . . ." Then, from that moment, I longed for this visit to be over. I did not want to look at her eyes, which looked at mine so remotely. My only wish was to get away.

§

In moments it seemed impossible for me to go away from Petrograd, leaving Natalia like that. I paid another visit to General Sopojnikin, told him how I was placed, and begged him to see if he could do something for me. I was still very lame, as he could see; surely there were some means to release me altogether from active service? Sopojnikin was sympathetic, very kind; he would like to help me, but the department of personnel was one in which he commanded no influence, he doubted very much if anything could be done. "Evidently you are listed as unfit for service in the line, but as capable of routine duties with troops in support—they call it, I think, the *beta* schedule of officers in the field. Transfers are constantly made, of course, from *beta* to *alpha;* that's to say, officers recovering from wounds are passed as fit again for battle units; but the common view being that *beta* is soft enough for anyone, it's comparatively rare to get shifted from *beta* to *gamma,* unless you have an uncle in the department. At the present time, you see, officers of any experience are hard to come by; and they hate taking off a man's label, they're always afraid that he may get lost altogether in the process. In any case, an order for transfer would take a long time to get through. . . ."

I might have been resigned to that opinion, letting chance deal with me as it wished. For having lost the only things I valued, I almost saw myself with cold detachment as someone whose fate had no importance. It was only for Vava's sake that I cared what happened.

Katie had advised me to take him to a children's hospital, where he would have proper treatment. But I would not assent to that. As long as I was in Petrograd I must have him close to me, and if

Katie still wanted me in her flat she must put up with Vava too. So he lay near the window in the bedroom, in the folding bed I had bought for him. When neither Katie nor I was there he had Pavel for company; and Pavel, waking from one of his dozes, would turn on his side to see the little boy, and smile at him, and tell him long, intricate stories in a husky voice which Vava seemed to like. Katie was worried by that arrangement: it was bad for Pavel, she said, it excited him, and Pavel, who was "a hero of the oppression," ought to have peace. But she treated Vava with no less kindness, finding time to fuss about his meals, constantly re-making his bed. She never talked to him; for she, who seemed so much at ease with the gaunt and often foul-mouthed Pavel, was as shy as any man with children. She addressed him only in stiff little phrases: "Will that be enough?" "Are you quite comfortable, Vava?" But I think that, as children do, he understood her aloofness and was grateful for what she did.

Of me he was no longer frightened. I doubt if he knew at that time who I was, and I did not bother him with any explanation. He began to see that I was friendly, and that was enough for us both. He seemed to be younger than when I had left him at Voepensk, as if neglect and suffering had driven him back a little way into his childhood; certainly he was more childish than a normal boy of eight, more nervous, far slower in response. But the doctor I brought to examine him could find no sign of mental damage; the boy was highly strung, he said, as were most invalid children. His mind would work better when his body had been built up by proper feeding, I had only to take care that nothing scared or worried him. "And about the spine?" I asked, "you don't think it's possible, if I could ever take him to one of the Vienna surgeons . . .?" The old man swung the cord of his spectacles about his finger and adjusted the phlegm in his throat. He said, in the way of all doctors, "I—I hardly—think so . . . myelitis . . . possibly wrong, possibly wrong, I should not like to be definite without another opinion . . . plenty of vegetables, fresh air whenever possible. . . ." But that was secondary. I think that at this time my wish was wholly selfish, that I was not concerned with Vava's happiness but only with having a sentient object for my love. If he, growing up, could listen and talk to me, expanding to fill the monstrous void in my affection, then the spirit's life could start again.

I was not with him all the time, for I was afraid to tire him. But I fed him myself, and washed him three times a day, and dressed the impetigo sores, making him used to my presence. That was a greater delight than I had imagined: feeling his flesh, watch-

ing him smile and wriggle if I carelessly tickled him, running my fingers through his soft hair when I washed it. And it is curious to me now that his imperfections gave me so much pleasure; the inevitable dribbling over his food, the constant, unexplainable dirtiness of his hands, everything that meant more trouble in looking after him. I found out things that he liked, and on the way back from the hospital I would join a queue for eggs or butter, glad that the pain of standing would mean some enjoyment for Vava. As I walked in the streets I looked out for things that I could talk about, anything queer or funny that he would understand; and I realize now, as perhaps I did not at the time, how much my tired mind was refreshed by its occupation with these trivialities. Talking to him was never an effort, although I had to avoid all reference to things that might recall the Mlinovakaya; I talked of my own boyhood in Kursk, of Austrian children and the games I had seen them playing; I told him the simplest of the fairy-tales. As a rule he was content to be the listener, but sometimes he started a subject of his own. "Pavel was snoring again this afternoon. Why do you think he snores? Do you think it's a fly that gets into his nose when he's asleep?" And sometimes he surprised me by a certain maturity. "If I had some money I'd put it in the Vologda savings bank. That gives you the best interest, Dmitri says."

I knew that in time he would speak about Voepensk, for that period must be fresh enough in his memory. Yet it startled me when the question came: "Am I going to see Mama soon? The policeman said I would see Mama—that was a long time ago."

I told him that mama had been ill; he would see her when she was better, but he might have to wait some time.

"How long?"

A few weeks, perhaps, I really couldn't say. "Perhaps you would like me to write her a letter for you?"

"Yes—sometime. But I'd rather see her."

It came up again, and I believe he suspected that I was putting him off. That was very painful: to feel that he had reason to mistrust me; and the more so, because I had a lingering suspicion that some kind of jealousy influenced me to keep them apart. And yet I had good reason. Dragomirov, the old doctor, was sure that it would be dangerous for Vava to see his mother when she might not recognize or treat him with affection. "The boy would be very quick to see that," he said, "and a child's mind cannot be hurt more brutally than by coldness in one that he has always loved." Moreover, it was Torklus's opinion that Natalia, who no longer spoke of the child, might be harmfully shocked if she saw him so emaciated.

"You will think me a nervous old woman, no doubt, but I have seen so much of the results of what may be called shock-tactics in psychopathology. I am not a fanatical disciple of Weir-Mitchell, but I think that in general his practice is sound. I will tell you candidly, now that we know each other better—I was very much perturbed about letting you see Mme Otraveskov yourself. I might have tried to prevent you, but" (he smiled, in his sad way) "I did not want my hospital smashed up. . . . You must get the boy as well as you can, and in the meantime we must try to get Mme Otraveskov prepared." I did not altogether accept either doctor's opinion; several times I thought that I would carry Vava to the hospital and insist on taking him up to Natalia's room; but in those days I had not much will of my own, I was spiritually lazy and ready to do what solemn people told me. I slept badly, and all day I was very tired.

§

Yelisaveta, whose very existence I had almost forgotten, came to see me. She was strikingly dressed in a black coat trimmed (I think) with Taimyr fox, and she looked as alien to Katie's drawing-room as Katie herself had looked to the tramcar.

"What have I done to offend you?" she asked. "Why haven't you been to see me? I thought you would come to say thank you."

I realized that I had not been grateful enough; but her manner no longer troubled me.

"I was coming," I said, "but I have been very busy. I go to the hospital twice a day. You mustn't think——"

"No no, I don't want you to say that—you are always so serious. I only came to ask if you found the little boy. You told me, you remember——"

"You can see him," I said, "if you would like to."

Katie, who would have made a fuss, was out. I led Yelisaveta to the bedroom.

Pavel was asleep and, as usual, snoring. He lay with his yellow head dropping over the side of the bed, the front of his shirt unbuttoned, his mouth wide open. Seeing him so often in that position, I had ceased to realize what an ugly creature he was, with his long, greasy hair, his teeth black with caries, the stuggy growth on his face and chest. Yelisaveta drew back when she caught sight of him.

"Is that——?"

I smiled.

"No, that's just a friend of my sister's. He is over here."

Vava, too, was sleeping. And I thought as I watched him, with

Yelisaveta beside me, how much more peacefully he slept than when I had first seen him a few days before, how much more health there was already in his face and his outflung arms. But when I glanced at Yelisaveta's eyes I saw in them the fearful curiosity of men who watch a stable burning. She whispered: "Where did you find him? How did he get like that?"

I began to tell her how I had traced him, but Pavel woke up directly he heard me speak, and I saw at once that he was in one of his truculent moods. He stared at Yelisaveta with one bloodshot eye.

"Who is this harlot?" he demanded. "Take her away, Alexei Alexeivitch, I don't want women looking at me."

"You be quiet, whoever you are!" Yelisaveta retorted with surprising possession. She perched herself on the edge of his bed. "Go on," she said to me, "I want to hear all about it."

I told her, rather confusedly, about my visit to the Mlinovakaya, about Hilda Koroschik's household, and how I had brought Vava away. She did not seem to be listening, her eyes were steadily fixed on Vava's face.

"And now," she asked when I had finished, "what are you going to do with him when your leave is over?"

I said: "I don't know, I haven't decided. My sister, perhaps——"

"You're not going to take him to his mother?"

"Not just yet," I said. "My wife has not completely recovered yet, and——"

"I know," she broke in. "I went to the hospital to see her. No, they said that visitors were forbidden, but I wouldn't have that, I told the shabby man—Torklus, is that his name?—I told him that I should arrange for his hospital to be taken over by the General Staff for war cases unless he did what I wanted. You don't mind, do you? I just wanted to see how Natalia Konstantinovna was, I had admired her so much when we were girls, I thought it couldn't do any harm——"

I asked rather grimly: "And what did you think of her?"

She evaded the question.

"I detest hospitals!" she said. "I loathe the smell of them and the virtuous look on the nurses' faces. The Torklus man is all right, he probably knows his work, but the matron's insufferable. And in any case I cannot bear illness, illness of any kind."

"How much longer," Pavel inquired, "is this woman going to sit on my foot?"

I started to lead her back to the drawing-room, but she lingered.

"I should have liked to see the child's eyes," she said. "It al-

ways interests me to see if they have the father's colour or the mother's."

She was bending right down over Vava's bed. And I heard a chirp, as if she had kissed him.

"Oh, take the woman away!" Pavel said angrily.

She followed me, then, to the drawing-room, where I offered her tea, and we talked for a little while. But she seemed distracted; thinking, I supposed, of the next item on her crowded programme; and I found myself holding uncomfortably the reins of conversation. As she was getting ready to go, she said: "It seems to me ridiculous, you with your leg like that, having to go and leave the little boy; and Natalia too. Why do they always arrange things like that in the General Staff, have they no sense at all? (My gloves, what did I do with them? Oh, thank you!) I'll go and see General Boyanowskivitch, he may be able to do something. . . . Oh, it's no trouble. . . ."

In the moments of her generosity she was most difficult to talk to. But I felt, at this new gesture, that I had been too slow to thank her for her kindness. I tried once again:

"You know—I ought to explain—I have been rather exhausted—it's not easy to show gratitude at such a time. The shock, you see——"

"I'm not blind!" she said rather shortly, and added obliquely, "I never dwell on these things, I see no object in dwelling on them, there are too many people who adopt new miseries like new fashions in hats. . . . No no, I can find my own way downstairs." She had already turned away, and I made no attempt to understand or follow her. But when she had gone a little way down, she called back, in a rather unnatural voice and without looking round. "Does Natalia like flowers in her room? . . . Very well, I'll have some sent from my garden. . . . You are not to worry, you must try to be sensible and not worry. . . . You will please give my love to Natalia."

§

By degrees, with many little tactful hints, Katie let me know that she could not possibly keep Vava when I had gone.

"You know, Alexei, how much I should like to help you," she said when I asked her plainly, "but Vava is difficult to look after, he wants so much attention, at a children's hospital they have ever so many people to do that sort of thing. I'd be glad to do it, you know I would, Alexei, only I've got Pavel on my hands, and after all he's been through I feel he deserves the utmost I can do for him.

And then there's the work I do for Vladimir, which I feel is so important now that the crisis is so near. You do see how it is, Alexei . . .?"

I understood her, for there had been a time when I myself believed in political movements.

It was on that day, the next after I had seen Yelisaveta, that I had a note from her:

> "I have seen General Boyanowskivitch. He is being very obstinate, but I hope to make him do what I want before your time expires. *Courage!* Y. A."

§

I had not much faith in the success of Yelisaveta's intervention. True, she had managed to quicken the phlegmatic operations of the city police, but there she had only chronic laziness and indifference to deal with. The General Staff was another matter. I was not more familiar with its working than the majority of officers in the field; to me the term "General Staff" conveyed a vast building in the Nevski Prospekt, an impenetrable honeycomb of rooms and corridors, a meaningless *va-et-vient* of clerks and orderlies, a remote, unfathomable spring which belched a steady stream of unreasonable instructions; but I knew it was more than that, it was master and god, inscrutable and omnipotent, the author and arbiter of Russia in uniform. Somewhere in that labyrinthine building my name and circumstance were recorded; and a denizen of the place who might be curious would find that I was a partially disabled officer appointed to special duty at the clearing station of Mariki-Matesk, at present absent on official business. It was written. The paper, cupboarded with half a million others, might lie for weeks or years without disturbance; but never lost. As I sat here, in the low chair by Vava's cot, it seemed impossible that so small, material a thing could force on me the long, grey voyage to the desolation of Mariki. All round me, men and women were free: Katie's friends, the gross Andrey, the callow, simpering Sasha, they by reason of some ill-defined infirmity were allowed to sprawl and swallow tea, raising utopias on the cirrostratus blown from their succeeding cigarettes, until the day of judgement. Anton's wife could flit all day from drawing-room to club; Mme Ivanov with her eternal smile could make her leisured, strident progress along the Euphrosina corridors; on the evening when I left, the nightly crowd would be jostling at the doors of the Marie Theatre, where the Saxaganski Company was playing with unprecedented virtuosity. Could a piece of paper

clipped in a monstrous cabinet place me so far apart from these? Could nobody destroy it? No, as the time came near I began to see that I was altogether an alien in this place. In the food-lines the women talked to each other, sharing their wretchedness; the men sweeping snow from the pavement exchanged a shout with the izvoshtchiki; there was not much laughter in the wild, cold streets but always conversation. These, whose single shield against the winter's fierceness was their own endurance, had at least their friends; they belonged to somebody; while I, belonging to no one but a crippled child who did not realize who I was, should only breath my natural air in soldiers' company. It was something to feel that that was settled, taken away from my control. Yelisaveta could scold and posture at all the Generals in Petrograd. It would make no difference, they had me caught, they would take me away from Vava. I only wondered whether now, at last, at last, I should find myself so callous and submissive that the parting would not pierce me.

14

I found a children's home where I thought that Vava would be happy. It was close to the Krestovski Gardens, an old, tall house with a garden of its own. The matron was a Princess d'Epréville, who had once been a friend of my mother, and who gave to sick children a passionate devotion; she had only a dozen of them in her charge and her staff was excellent.

I said that I should bring Vava on Sunday afternoon and leave him with her. But when the time came I found that I could not give him up for those last few hours, and I telephoned to say that he would be there on the next day, at two o'clock; that was some ninety minutes before the time of my train. I woke, that Monday morning, with a feeling of tristesse which I could not account for; and a moment passed before the reason of my trouble rose to the level of understanding: today life ended, and I should find myself in the machine again. I went to the bedroom and saw that Vava was asleep. Well, I should not wake him yet. He slept so peacefully. Perhaps at this eleventh hour I might get a note to say that Yelisaveta had succeeded.

I went down to the dvornik's office. No, he said, there was no letter for Otraveskov.

I left quite early for the hospital, anxious to get my last visit over. The day had started with promise, a broad gusset of brilliant sky showing southward over the river; but that had gone, and the wind

freshened again, blowing clouds of dirt and paper bags along the ice, freezing the ragged children in the Kamennostrovski. The tram which I took had several windows broken—on the previous day they had chanced to drive through a food-riot, the collector told me —and I shivered all the way to Yeskolov, where I arrived before the visitors' entrance to the hospital was open. I wondered, then, whether I should go in after all, or simply leave my flowers with a message. On the previous day Natalia had been warmly friendly, I had even made her laugh a little by describing a droll collision between two barrows on the Alexander bridge. She had seemed less tired than usual; and when I left she had called me back to kiss her hand, saying, in the old-fashioned phrase, that her hand was cold and only a soldier's breath could warm it. That, unsubstantial as it was, made a memory that was easy to handle; and today, if her mood chanced to be absent and distressed, that picture might be hidden by another which in the months to come I could carry painfully. There was, besides, the dreadful danger of my trying impulsively at this last throw to stir her emotion; and I could not contemplate the pain of it, if, at this hour of parting, for but a flash of time we saw each other through the vaporous barrier. But when I went inside, the sight and smell of the place, now almost pleasantly familiar, restored my confidence. I caught sight of Torklus through the open doorway of his office and he waved me good morning. Humming a little tune I crossed the stone floor of the vestibule, and when I felt the accustomed pain of dragging my leg up the double flight of stairs I thought: "It makes no difference that this time is the last; it will be just the same."

That was right. I found her listless, hardly interested even in the flowers I had brought. She was still in her dressing-gown, they had put her coffee on the round table beside her chair, she sipped it as I talked to her and looked vaguely at my hands. I told her that I should not be able to come again for several months, and she answered "Oh, I am sorry, I have enjoyed your visits so much." That, I supposed, was what I had wanted: my departure to give her no pain, no desperation.

"You will be glad when I come back and see you again?"

"Oh yes, I should like to see you again. You remind me sometimes—yes yes, you will please come again!"

After that I did not stay long. I had watched her carefully, feeling that my picture should be firm and solid if hunger made me want to look at it: the wallpaper patterned with faded, pompous daffodils in grotesquely perfect baskets, the young body limp in the scroll-backed chair, the mask, as a flower torn from the ground,

still shaped as her lovely spirit had once moulded it; the map of rocky vein on her blood-starved hands, the white horseshoe on her thumb where once at Krasnyesk she had cut herself with a broken feeding-bottle. That was enough; I should try to let that recollection grow cool and material like the memory of soldiers seen dead in the slime of Lensie. My resolution faltered when I got to the door. I went back, and asked if I might kiss her lips, as this was to be a long farewell. She said, surprised: "Oh no, surely you don't mean that?—oh no, no." That, I think now, was fortunate. I went away quickly, down to Torklus's office, where I tried to make him promise that he would care for her faithfully; and then, my voice deserting me, back to Novaya Derevnya.

§

I had sent to Yelisaveta a letter renewing my warm thanks and wishing her good-bye; and now that there seemed to be no more hope of her success with Boyanowskivitch I did not expect to see her again. But when I arrived at Katie's house I found her man Emelian waiting for me with the car. He confessed that he had been there for an hour: the Countess wanted to see me.

Perhaps I was reprieved after all. With my packing still to be done I was short of time, but I could hardly refuse to go. "You don't know why Madame wants to see me?" "No, barin, but the message was that it's very important." "Very well, Emelian!"

When I reached the house I was told that the Countess was still in bed; she was far from well this morning, but she had given orders that I was to be taken up to her room.

It was plain enough, when I saw her, that her illness was genuine; for her face, half-buried in the pillow, was drawn and colourless, her hair had not been dressed, you had said some accident had brought a tawdry beauty of the streets to sprawl in the richly covered bed. She said: "Is that you, Alexei Alex'itch? Shut the door, will you please. You can bring up that chair—throw those things on the floor!" She had hardly opened her eyes, and her voice had none of the theatrical gaiety which she generally used for talking to me. "There are cigarettes on the toilet-table if you want one." I brought up the chair as she told me, and waited; it need not be said how impatiently. For a minute or two she was silent, and I saw from her lips that she was struggling with pain. Then, with her eyes still shut, she said in a small, tired voice:

"It's about Anton. He's making a fool of himself, he's got into trouble, I knew that would happen. Look, that letter over there,

read that and see what he says. Oh, and while you're there, will you pour me out some of that blue stuff—down to the next mark. . . ."

I gave her the medicine and began to read the letter. "My dear Yelisaveta: You will possibly be amused to hear that my life has become a little more interesting at last. . . ."

She interrupted: "No, don't bother with that, it's full of nonsense. Look at this."

She took from under the pillow a much-folded *Russkaya Volia,* in which she had marked the paragraph at the foot of a column. I read: "It is reported that strict disciplinary measures have been ordered at Mariki-Matesk, where a small body of men recently released from imprisonment in Austria, and shortly to be demobilized, have shown their high spirits in a display of insubordination. An officer of the clearing-station Staff, Lieut. A. A. Scheffler, will be interrogated in regard to these disorders."

"I suppose you can read between those lines?" Yelisaveta asked.

"Fairly easily," I said.

"Exactly, yes, that's just what I thought! It means, I suppose, that Anton's been egging the men on to some kind of defiance, and now he's to be tried, or court-martialled or whatever it is. Is that right?"

"It's not improbable. . . . And you're thinking of how the disgrace will affect you here?"

I had said that without meditation, letting my thought slip through my lips. I expected her to be angry, but she answered without any show of spirit:

"Yes, everyone talks to me like that. They know he went to the war because of me, and they imagine I don't mind what happens to him. No, never mind, I'm quite used to that sort of thing! . . . But listen, I shall have to do something for him—I don't care what you think about my reasons—it may be that money's necessary, or influence; I don't know how a man can be got out of that kind of scrape. I want you to find out, do whatever you can and send to me for any help you want, money or whatever it is. (There's an ice-bag in the basin there, give me that, will you, please?) You see, I can't do anything at this distance, I must have someone there to act for me. . . ."

I told her that she need not have troubled. Anton was my friend, I should have done everything possible to help him for my own sake.

"I know," she said wearily, "I know all that. But then you've got your own position to think of, your duty as a soldier, your honour, all that sort of thing that men of your kind take so seriously.

I want you to forget all that, you'll have to be unscrupulous, bribe people, tell as many lies as you have to. You had better try and see Anton first of all and get him into a reasonable frame of mind—I've written a note for you to give him, I don't know if that will make any difference but it's worth trying. Then——"

"But——"

"Oh yes, I was going to tell you, I've told Pyotr Boyanowskivitch that he needn't trouble about getting you released from service. I had to let him know that at once, you see, or there might have been complications. . . . I could have sent a barrister to Mariki to handle the business, but a civil lawyer gets nowhere in a military establishment, one has to work from the inside, that's why you've got to be there. And besides, you're a friend of Anton's, you may be able to bring him round, if that's what is wanted. . . ."

I felt the almost uncontrollable anger which men experience when women seem to protect themselves by their weakness or their suffering. I forgot that she had found Natalia for me, that she had been under no kind of obligation to use her influence with Boyanowskivitch. All that I saw was an animal of meretricious prettiness, conveniently in pain, and so stripped of grace that nothing was left but a fabulous selfishness. If I had not loved Anton for himself I should have told her that her husband's affairs were of no interest to me.

Gaining time to get my feelings under some control, I pulled on my gloves and went to the door. Standing there, I said: "If I find Anton Antonovitch in trouble I shall do my best to help him, in my own way. If I want any assistance I shall send to my lawyers in Moscow."

I had crossed the landing and was some way down the stairs when she called "Alexei Alex'itch! Wait!" I took no notice until I heard the sound of her bare feet; she was running after me. I had to go back then.

"Yes, of course, I have made you angry," she said thinly. She was standing up at the end of the bed, supporting herself with her stretched arms twisted round the high foot-rail. Her eyes were open and her face ugly with tears. "Why are you angry? Everyone lectures me for treating Anton badly, and now when I try to help him I make you angry, you who say you're his friend!"

"You had better get back into bed," I said.

She didn't move.

"Why are you angry?" she repeated.

I was still close to the open door; and my impulse was to put an end to this foolishness by getting out of the house as quickly

as I could. But her distraught face was so determined that I feared she would run after me again and make a scene before the servants.

"It's useless to talk about it," I said as quietly as I could. "Our outlook is quite different. You have shown me a great deal of kindness when you felt in the mood for it. Now, when you feel inclined to take an interest in Anton Antonovitch, you forget that I have any feelings at all, all you think about is the easiest way of getting what you want. You forget that I may owe something to my own friendship with Anton, you don't for a moment suspect that I have any pride, you forget at the same time that it may cost me something to leave a wife who is ill and a crippled child. Oh yes, I know quite well that you're under no obligations to me—on the contrary—I realize that. The suggestion of helping me by wire-pulling with a friend in the General Staff, that was your own idea entirely, you had every right to drop it when it ceased to be convenient. I really consider myself very lucky to have received so much already from a woman whose moral conception——"

"Oh stop that, stop that!" she said. "Do go away and leave me, I can't stand you any more, I can't stand the sound of your silly priggish voice. No! No, don't go! Stop, listen! You're not to go to Mariki-Matesk at all, I shall arrange it some other way, I shall telephone to Pyotr and tell him you're not to be sent there." Her voice got faint again, and at that moment I could see—for I suffer much from neuralgia—that she was bearing intense pain. "I didn't want to quarrel with you . . . I'd forgotten . . . I thought you didn't mind about leaving them, you didn't seem to mind. . . ."

She took a step towards me as she spoke, but the pain was too much for her; she turned and collapsed face down on the bed, shaking with her sobs.

It was difficult to leave her like that. I limped over to the bed and stood beside her. I said, when she was a little quieter: "Listen, Yelisaveta Akinievna, there's no need for all this commotion. I am going to Mariki, that is decided. I shall do everything I can for Anton if he needs help. We are both fond of him. That must be enough."

But she would not let me go. Struggling to sit up, she said weakly: "All right, yes, I suppose that's all right." Then whispering, "Tell me, what is happening to the little boy, what are you going to do with him?"

I told her that Vava was going to Princess d'Epréville.

"And what are you paying her?" she asked sharply.

"Sixty-five a week."

"That's ridiculous, that woman thinks of nothing but making

money, anyone will tell you that. Why don't you let me look after him? I could do it all right, I've got this big house, good servants. Why don't you bring him to me?"

I said: "I'm sorry. . . ."

She leant forward and seized my hand; she was oddly excited, so eager that she seemed to forget the pain in her head. "You must let me do that, you must let me. It's the only thing I can do, I can't repay you any other way. You are going to help Anton—yes, I know, but that doesn't matter, I feel that you are doing it half for my sake. If you are going to look after Anton, then I must look after Vava. You will let me, you will, won't you?"

I fumbled for words, not wishing to be rude to her again; for now she was altogether pitiable, with neither vanity nor egoism to shield her. And before I had thought what to say, she went on:

"Yes, I see what you're thinking, you think I'm the last woman in the world to be trusted with Vava. Yes yes, I'm not a fool, I see that. Listen, Alexei Alex'itch, if you'll let me have him I'll give up all my time to him, I'll do everything for him myself, I'll never be out of the house for more than two hours, and then Bajouska will look after him. And I'll go to the hospital every day to see Natalia Konstantinovnia, and if she gets better I'll bring her here, and I shall write every day to tell you how they are both getting on. If——"

"You are very kind," I said, "but I have made arrangements with Princess d'Epréville."

"That doesn't matter, I'll see her myself, I'll make it all right. Oh, why won't you let me, why will no one ever let me do anything I want to? Wouldn't you let me if I promised to do it properly? I'll get a lawyer and sign a document, if you like. I'll swear to look after him till you come back, and give him everything he wants, I'll be as kind to him as if he was my own child, I'll swear that!"

She was standing up again, and holding me with both hands, crying with pain and excitement. But she was not hysterical; I know what hysteria is like in women, and this was passion of another sort. At that moment I did not doubt that she meant once again to show me kindness. With a little resolution I might have stanched her importunity and got away. But I began to argue, to tell her how much care Vava needed, how awkward and untidy he was in habits, how much behind all other children in quickness and understanding. She hardly listened. She said: "Yes, I know, I know that. . . . No, of course not, I have had no training at all, but am I incapable of learning what other women learn? . . . Do you think, because I'm not a nurse or a nun, that I can't do anything, not even

keep my promises? . . . Do you think I can't love a child as much as Sasha d'Epréville, who has to be paid for what she does?" In the vehemence of persuading she seemed to lose sight of her pain, as a runner with his eyes on the man ahead seems oblivious of the clawing bramble; and knowing her so little then, I could not understand her passion for an object that appeared so foreign to her nature. But even when she let go my hands I had to listen, for her pleading eyes held me, and in this racked, dishevelled woman I no longer saw the florid élégant of St. Vaudrin's. Now she grew quieter and spoke more slowly, trying to match my arguments with her own. ". . . Tell me, why do you suppose that Vava will be better off where there are half a dozen women attending to him? Don't you see that they'll muddle each other and muddle him, forget things between them? None of them will get his confidence, none of them will have time to understand him properly. Surely it's better for a helpless creature to always look for one face, to have one person he knows he can trust. . . . No, I see what it is, you don't think that even a child could trust me! . . ."

I am not sure how long that wearying talk went on. I know that, with half my mind on all that I had to do before I left Petrograd, my impatience grew till I would have given a hundred roubles to get it over. In the end I made her one promise: that before I took Vava to the Kestrovski home I should bring him to see her. At that price I was able to go away.

§

In the afternoon Emelian came once again to fetch me; and he, wooing Vava with the noises he had once made to his horses, helped me to carry down the little bed and lift it bodily into the back of the car. In the same way, at Yelisaveta's house, we carried Vava and the bed together up to the drawing-room.

Yelisaveta was dressed now, though I could see that she was not much better. She did not speak to me when she came into the room, but went at once to Vava's bed and sat beside him. All that she said was: "I am a lady called Lisveta, this is my house." And she did not touch him, as another woman would have done, only put her hand on the coverlet, and held it up so that he could watch her stroking the back of a swan which was embroidered there. "If you want to smoke you must go in the other room," she said to me. And at that suggestion I left them together.

I came back after twenty minutes, and found them talking quite easily. Yelisaveta had taken off her necklace and given it to Vava to play with. I heard her saying gravely: "In the evenings I have

a different one. In the evenings, you see, I wear a low dress, it stops just about here, and the necklace lies on my skin, so it has to be a lighter colour; this one would look too dark with just my skin under it." And Vava answering: "I wouldn't wear a necklace on my bare skin, good God no! It would tickle like flies." Listening to their chatter, I realized for the first time my own inadequacy as a companion to Vava; for to me he had always been a little polite, as to a grand stranger, while I could never talk to him entirely without adult self-consciousness. And I could not help picturing poor Katie, who always looked at Vava as if he were a slightly dangerous animal, and turned away awkwardly when he came out with some coarseness picked up in the Koroschik household. Coming to the other side of the bed, I said: "Vava and I must get along now."

Yelisaveta looked up as if she had forgotten all about me. "No," she said, "no, wait a minute, I want to speak to you, we will go to the other room."

"I have very little time," I said; but I followed her.

She sat down as if she were exhausted after some great physical effort; and now she was as white as she had been in the morning, a wretched spectacle. I told her that she ought to go back to bed at once, that a doctor should be sent for; she had no right to be up at all.

"It seems to me so trivial," she answered, with a kind of exasperation. "A bad headache like this—it'll be over tomorrow. And he's got to lie like that, as if he was tied with a rope, year after year. I'd never imagined anything like that. It makes me angry, angry. . . . And you won't let me look after him!"

I left her and went back to Vava; wondering how long this whim of hers would last. I found the fat maid Bajouska kneeling by Vava's bed, smiling like Rembrandt's Hendrickje and making the little dove-like noises which peasant women use for their babies, while Vava regarded her (I thought) with a certain patronage. I smiled at the absurdity of this tableau, the small white bed with its grave invalid and the copious subfusc draperies of the homely serving-woman, set in the very centre of a rich Muskabad carpet. I said to Bajouska: "You don't often have children here, not in this beautiful room?" "It's not a beautiful room," she answered, with a note of disgust, "it's just a foreign room. For me, you can take away all this rubbish, if you leave the boy here."

Upon impulse, I said to Vava: "Would you like to stay in this house, with Bajouska to look after you, and the other lady, Lisveta?"

"Lisveta Akinievna would never do it," Bajouska said promptly.

"She has no use for children, poor little thing, she hasn't had Count Anton in her bedroom as long as I can remember."

"Would you like to?" I repeated to Vava.

"Oh yes," he said. "Only it would cost too much money."

It was no use trying to think things out; my mind was so sore and tired, and the careful plans I made never seemed to be realized. I said good-bye to Vava, in a brief and businesslike way, so frightened of my emotion that I could not even tell him how long I should be away. And then, returning to Yelisaveta, I told her that she could keep the boy till I came back if she really wanted him.

In half an hour, with my mind too numb to experience any anxiety or sorrow, I was at the Tsarskoe Station.

§

The train was full of soldiers, and the smell of their uniform gave me a sense of relief, as the prison smell is welcomed by some who have hardly lived outside that security. Here already, with the noise of engines and the warm smoke blowing across the platform, I could forget that I was in Petrograd. I would sleep now, and when I woke I should find myself in an old world that had only hardships, no uncertainties of spirit, no confusion. Katie, at some little cost of her crowded time, had come to see me off. She was saying in a melancholy voice something about fruit and books for the journey, that she would try and remember to send flowers for Natalia, that she ought to have done more to entertain me, only that life was so difficult, so full. I kissed her firmly, and at last persuaded her to go away. Then there was only the plaid of peevish voices in the carriage, where a trio of sallow girls complained unceasingly of their mother's despotism in taking them back to Gorodva.

Just before the train started I heard my name being called down the platform, and when I leant out of the window a sweating boy ran up to me with a letter. He had been to my address in Novaya Derevnya, he panted, and the dvornik had told him—and so forth. I had just time to give him a rouble before I was jerked away. When, to please the petulant ladies, I had shifted nearly every piece of luggage in the compartment, I opened the letter and held it to catch what light there was from the dirty window. It was dated from the General Staff office and signed by Sopojnikin: if I would call at the Personnel Department tomorrow, Tuesday, at ten o'clock a.m., and ask to see Colonel Tsovagrin, that officer would be glad

to consider the case for the removal of my name from the auxiliary service list.

Well, the train was thrusting ponderously through the outer suburbs now, the first stop was at Solzi, it was too late for anything to be done. No, I would not exert myself, I would let things take their course. At this stage it was pleasant to sit still, to feel the rhythmic jolt of the train's determination, to watch the flat country fading in the early dusk. By degrees the women's voices merged into a single bleer of sound, and the pain in my mind became pale and shapeless.

PART III

15

AT Mozir I was advised by a junior in the communications office to proceed by way of Bruletzau; the other line was blocked, he said, there were seven supply trains lined up and unable to move on the Kraschev section. In my short period of civilian life I had forgotten that juniors in any communications office were the last people in the world to be trusted. I went by Bruletzau.

In the late afternoon, the second after my departure from Petrograd, my train halted with an air of finality, as of a giant deserving sleep, on the outskirts of a place called Toel. Looking out of the window, I saw that at least four trains were halted in front of us, and I learnt by degrees what had happened: three versts ahead a portion of the embankment had slipped down into the canal, leaving the sleepers perched at an angle of some forty degrees below the horizontal; an engine, unable to maintain its equilibrium on this unconventional length of track, had toppled sideways into the water, dragging five trucks in its fall; and now there was a good deal of mess to be cleared up. No one was surprised: the embankment had never been trustworthy, they said, having been built with Polish labour; ever since the beginning of the war it had been getting more unstable beneath the heavy traffic; the only wonder was that it hadn't collapsed before. What was being done? Well, nothing at present. A breakdown gang arriving from Bruletzau had chosen this moment to lodge a request for a wage increase of five kopeks an hour; it was, of course, impossible to accede to a demand made in such circumstances; the men, proving obstinate, had been removed under guard to Toel, but before their arrest they had diplomatically thrown their spades and other implements into the canal. A gang of prisoners had been ordered from a camp some sixteen versts away, and it was hoped that these would arrive before very long, bringing tools with them.

In the meantime all was peace. At a guess, there were sixteen hundred able-bodied fighting men belonging to the three passenger trains. A good many had walked to the scene of the landslide to gaze with interest at the rogue engine's wheels protruding just above the surface of the water; but by groups of two and three these men were returning now to the warmth of the crowded coaches, from which

their companions had never stirred. They had nothing to eat or drink, these fellows, but they did not seem to mind. In some of the coaches they were singing.

Two trains away, I found a group of officers playing Préférence in the front compartment. The senior was an elderly Major whom I guessed from the cut of his beard to be a countryman, and from his accent to hail from Kharkov. Could he tell me, I asked, if anything was likely to be done towards getting the track repaired before tomorrow morning? Well, no, he doubted it. The prisoners had to come most of the way on foot, and it was not unlikely that they would get lost, since the track through the woods was, he understood, very confusing. I asked with the greatest politeness if he did not think that some of the men under his orders might make a start with the work. Unfortunately, no, since there were no tools. But could they not make some effort, before it got dark, to recover the tools, or at least to shift some of the débris of the wrecked wagons? At this point the old man (Major Nieswicki, I think his name was) took me into his confidence. Frankly, he thought it unwise to make the men do anything about repairing the line. After all they were, for the time being, soldiers, not labourers; they were paid to fight, not to re-construct embankments. At the present time, indeed, they were not particularly eager for the fighting, and if work of this kind were imposed on them they might be extremely resentful. Most of the other officers agreed: these men were inclined to be difficult, they had seen a great deal of fighting already on the northern front and had rather lost their appetite for military labours; they had to be handled carefully. . . . And conversation was then worked round to more general topics. The Major hoped that somehow or other they would get the war finished with before the spring, as he was most anxious to get back to his estate; his steward had written to say that a number of valuable percherons had been stolen, and he was really in a state of great anxiety.

Actually the prisoners arrived far sooner than anyone expected, but without any tools, since the telephone message had not been properly understood; and it was already dark. A long debate took place. The prisoners themselves, big, good-humoured men of the Westphalian Rifles, were pathetically eager to use their limbs after weeks of idleness, tools or no tools, and were full of intelligent suggestions. One of them was even ready to dive into the icy water in the hope of picking up a few spades. At least they could shift a part of the wreckage, working by the light of the kerosene flares which had been sent down from Toel station. But the civilian superintendent from Toel was very doubtful about this procedure. He had

asked for an engineer-inspector from Bruletzau, and he thought that the work ought not to begin until this gentleman arrived, for with inexperienced labour more harm might be done than good. The young lieutenant who had brought the prisoners was inclined to agree; the task of controlling the men when they were spread out in the darkness seemed to him too formidable. As to Nieswicki, he was very doubtful now if prisoners might legitimately be used for the job at all; candidly, he feared that it might have unhappy effect on the discipline of his own men, who had shown a good deal of sympathy with the labourers' demand for an increase in pay and might well resent the use of prisoner-labour as a weapon against their own countrymen. The ethical aspects of the matter had to be considered, Nieswicki said. The next question was what to do with the prisoners. There was no room for them to sleep on the trains, there was no accommodation in the village of Toel, and in this weather they could hardly bivouac in the marshes, where, in any case, a large picket would be required to guard them. The only solution, in fact, was to march them back to the camp they had come from. And accordingly, this order was given.

I went back to my own train, where I succeeded by strenuous abuse in getting a light for my compartment, and prepared to use up the evening as best I could with a local newspaper from Mozir and a little book of Mallarmé's poems. But presently a young officer whom I had noticed in Nieswicki's compartment came to visit me. He was not a card-player, he said, and had become bored with his colleagues. On his own responsibility he had been all down the trains to see if any of the men would volunteer for a working party, but without success; the majority were either indifferent to the delay or positively hostile to any movement for getting them into the war zone sooner than need be; the remainder lacked courage to stand apart from their fellows. "Rotten!" he said vehemently. "Russia has gone rotten, there is no discipline, no will to victory!"

He was a fine-looking man, dark, very young, and plainly of aristocratic birth, with those vital, penetrating eyes which one associates with poets but which were found quite often in cadets of the Chevaliers-Gardes. When I began to agree with his opinion, perhaps rather casually, he at once turned about and contradicted me.

"They'll be all right, these men," he said earnestly, "as soon as they smell powder again. The rottenness of Russia is all at the back, back there in Moscow and Petrograd. Our soldiers are the finest in the world, bravery is part of their nature, they have ten times more stamina than the Germans, nothing will ever stop them when they're properly led. Give me a sotnia of Ural Cossacks——"

"But are they ever properly led," I asked, "or ever likely to be?"

"Not by people like that, I grant you!" he said violently, nodding his head towards the train in front. "Those gentlemen would hardly be capable of leading a team of oxen to the drinking-pool. What right have they——?—but that doesn't matter, no, you can leave them out, there are still enough of us to finish off this job." He was moving back and forth in the brief area of the carriage gangway like a tiger in the close cage of a travelling menagerie. He said irritably: "There's always a fug in these damned trains."

I offered to take a walk with him, though my leg was not too good that day; and having locked the carriage door we stumbled down to a bullock track which followed the line towards the village.

"You must forgive me," he said, trying to match my hobble with his stride, "I should not have spoken like that about my colleagues —excellent men in many ways, humane, good-tempered. But sometimes I feel that I'm the only man left who thinks of what this war has cost us already, the devotion, the limitness endurance of our soldiers. No one seems to understand that, no one seems to realize that we're cheating the dead if we don't get the victory they fought for."

"And what of the German dead?" I asked.

But he did not hear me, for he was half a pace in front, talking as if to himself, and the wind scattered my words before they could reach him. We trudged, I think, nearly as far as the village, and then turned back, giving our faces to the wind's whip, and seeing a verst ahead the gathered lights of the lonely trains like a bracelet dropped in a dark doorway. My friend had stopped talking, and I thought for a moment that I heard, distinct from the scratch and throbbing of the wind, the faint, familiar drum-note of a distant gun. Then he went on, with his voice tighter and rather tremulous: "Victory will answer everything, it will put everything right. This poison, this canker that's creeping into us, it can only nourish itself on weakness. Russia is tired, and those who want to destroy her believe that this is their opportunity, they are hoping and working for our failure so as to infect our wounded body and pollute the whole of it. But it will not happen, I tell you the soul of Russia is great enough to carry her tired body to the glory God has prepared for her. I've seen it, I've seen our soldiers go resolutely into a hopeless attack after nine days' ceaseless battering from the Austrian guns. Men like that are never defeated. Do you know the Emperor, have you ever talked to him, have you seen the patience in those quiet eyes of his? I don't care what they say, I tell you the soul of that man is large and strong enough to carry the whole of the

burden. If he alone were all that was left of Russia's greatness, I should still believe in our triumphant destiny. So long as that man lives there will always be soldiers to fight for him, the best and bravest of them will listen to no one else. And nothing will defeat them, nothing, nothing!" In the rearmost train the men were singing again, we had come within earshot now and from the lugubrious rolling of their voices I guessed they had somehow got hold of spirits. The words were never audible, but I knew the song, for I had heard it sung at Ekaterinoslav some thirteen years before. "No!" he repeated, as if by himself he would fight his way through all the hosts of darkness, "Nothing will defeat us!" And then he was silent again, as he helped me climb the muddy flank of the embankment, and when we came to my compartment he left me.

I meant to sleep then, but tonight my mind was wakeful, and in the manifold inconvenience of that narrow room I could get no comfort. Someone had been in while I was walking, to steal my paper and my cigarettes, even the Mallarmé. He had left in exchange a single dirty sock, and the pungent smell of a dogfarm. And I dared not put out the light, for in darkness the thoughts I fled all day would catch me.

§

Arriving at Paulskov two mornings later I could find no transport and get no attention from anybody. Things were moving here: in an hour I saw some twelve or fifteen trains come in on the southern loop and draw away into the sidings, where a swarming multiture of Sarts and Khengis were feverishly unloading. The whole of the broad street which lay along the line was thick with wagons which, as soon as they were loaded, barged recklessly into the stream of traffic squeezing its way towards the Waulnitz road; while in the narrow lanes which ran between the station area and the Markosov square there were empty vehicles of every description waiting. I saw a landau, which in its better days would not have disgraced the Millionnaya, being driven up to the track and loaded to the height of the duga with cases of Lebel cartridge. A young Tartar, dragging sacks of meal along the platform bawled at me fiercely to get out of his way. I shouldered through the moving crowd of soldiers and labourers towards the station office, where a crowd of under-officers were arguing with civilian clerks and fighting for the telephones. There I stood for a quarter of an hour, half suffocated by the heat of the stale, damp air, before I could seize a telephone from a little Jew who for ten minutes past had been repeating "Four-

teen puds, I say—can't you hear me? fourteen puds, no, not forty, fourteen puds—are you there?—fourteen puds I say!" I got through to Grassogi then, and he promised to send a conveyance for me.

It reached me two hours later, on the outskirts of the town, as I was starting off to meet it: a vehicle rather like a tarantass that I had seen before only in the southern part of Bessarabia, drawn by a mule with rheumy eyes and conducted by a languid child in the uniform of the Turkestan Cossack Brigade. When I had convinced this boy that I was the officer he had been sent to fetch he turned his clumsy outfit with a good deal of skill and put down a hand for my travelling-case while I got up behind him. "You're used to mules?" I asked. No, he was used to horses, he could do anything on or with a horse, in civil life he had never handled such a contrivance as this—that was women's work in the part he came from.

"So you'd like to get back to your horses?"

"I don't mind about the horses," he said sullenly, "I just want to get back." Then, with sudden earnestness: "I tell you, Vashe Blagorodie, I always like driving into the town, because that gets me nearer where I live. This way—it's like vinegar in your belly."

"Still, it's better to be here than in Austria?"

He threw his head to one side, making the queer, peasant gesture that corresponds to a shrug of the shoulders. "I don't know. I had to lie flat there—a piece of iron in my groin, see? But the smell was better in that place. And you saw people, not just soldiers."

He cut at the mule's withers and the beast started a shambling canter which threw the tarantass into violent motion, the wheels swinging in and out on their worn seatings as they separately crashed into every pot-hole. As if he were held by some peculiar force the boy sat with his shoulders almost steady, only his buttocks trembling with the volcanic motion below him. "Up, bastard!" he shouted. "Get your legs up, curse you, show the devil and priest your tuber!" I caught his arm and told him sharply to ease up. "It shakes you?" he asked ingenuously, reining in. "The carriage is old, the axles want greasing a little. Perhaps you will stop for a time to see the view?"

But I knew that scene too well. The snow had gone here, all but the pocked and shabby drifts which the shaws defended, and had left the naked plain a shade more haemetin than green, with ragged panels of water too thick with slime to reflect the stagnant sky. Even the few huts we passed were of a tone so neutral to the fen that they seemed to grow from it, and at half a verst they hardly broke the spread of vision. The dreadful road climbed up, perhaps to a linden's height in several versts, and dropped at the same easy

slope to its former level. I never knew which rise would bring me to a view of the wooden camp.

"You'll be getting some leave," I said, when the slackened pace gave me a chance of coherence.

"Leave?" he said, as if he had never heard the word.

"You must be due for it by now?"

He answered laconically: "They say there'll be leave when the war's over."

"That won't be long," I told him; and the professional tone of confidence came to my own ears strangely after a period of disuse.

"And by then we'll all be dead," he added callously. "Yes, every harlot's son of us, that's what'll happen."

It was curious to me that a youth from fighting stock should speak of death so gloomily; for in general it is the Cossack idiosyncrasy to think of death as something which happens only to other people; but certain plants grow strangely in a foreign soil.

"Why do you worry your thick head about that?" I said lightly. "Do you think anyone'll bother to come and blow you up at Mariki?"

"At Mariki? No, at Mariki you're safe enough. But I shan't be there long. I'm well now, that's what they say."

"Then you're going back to your sotnia?"

"No, they don't sort us out. They'll send me along with a pack of razboiniki who'd try and feed a horse through his tail."

"Still, fighting's better than idleness for a man like you."

"It's not fighting! Who do you fight? You never see anyone, you stand in a trench and get killed. And you get nothing for it, no spirits, no girls, nothing. You're just in a war that goes on and on, and no one cares who wins it. . . ."

He dropped into his own patois, where I could not closely follow him; no doubt on purpose, for these people are seldom so expansive, and he felt perhaps that he had been incautious. But, liking the boy for his simplicity and the homely smell of Cossack camps which hung about him, I encouraged him to go on.

"Have a lot of men been drafted back from Mariki already?" I asked.

He nodded. "Six hundred, thereabouts."

"Gone back to the line?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you think you'll be among the next?"

"Yes, I'm in the next draft. Another three hundred going."

"When?"

He turned to look at me with that narrow, cautious expression which the Tashkent dealers show when they are not sure how far

you can be cheated over a carpet. There was almost a smile on his weather-cracked, flat face. Using a local word which is untranslatable, he said, in effect:

"It depends. . . ."

"Some difficulty in the arrangements?" I asked.

He did not quite understand me. But, "They don't want to go, some of us," he muttered vaguely.

I said boldly: "Then you're not the only one who's tired of the war?"

"They're ill," he said carelessly, "their bowels are all crumpled. You can't go fighting when your bowels are like that." Then he forgot his caution, and went on: "That was a promise, it doesn't matter what they say, they promised we should go to our own stanitzas and get ourselves all right. Then we'll come back and go on fighting. We only want to see our women and get well." His voice had become melancholy and now it took a bitter flavour. "The officer, the hetman, at Mariki, he made a speech to us, he said we were defending our country. But what's the good of that, when you've forgotten what your country looks like? I tell you we are all like that, we don't belong to each other, we've forgotten who we are and where we came from. You think of us like a brigade, but we're not like that, we're only a lot of stray dogs stuck in the same pen. It's all very well to die with your friends, that's a man's business in life. . . ."

Ashamed of this outburst, he gave vent to his temper by whipping the mule again; and in half an hour, swinging and bumping like a shovel tied to a pariah's tail, we reached the last crest and saw Mariki in the plain below.

§

I suppose the place had not changed much in the brief time of my absence, but I was struck by its vast and singular dilapidation as by something unforeseen. With fences rotting and walls broken down, with huts leaning sideways and roofs in holes, weeds all over the cinder paths and refuse pitched along the wheel-wrecked roadway, it was like a mining camp which is left to crumble when the diggers pick up their tools and hurry on to work a better vein. That impression of a township abandoned was hardly altered by the men who lounged beside the roadway, for they kept so still that they might have been standing there since I had passed them at the start of my journey three weeks before; the same men, or so I thought; long-haired, with a sack or horse-cloth to cover the gaps in their

greasy uniforms; some leaning on their crutches, some squatting on the wooden steps of the huts, a few, swaddled in blankets, lying full-length across the paths. The only difference, to my eyes, was that they all looked older. My driver, with a natural wish to show his prowess, had flogged the wretched mule into frenzied exertions as we approached the village; and there must have been some piquancy in the sight of that case-hardened boy sitting upright and self-possessed on the crazy cart, with the lean mule bounding before him and a shaken officer clinging on for dear life behind. But they stared without humour, these ghosts of soldiers, and I remember a sensation of uncanny fear as I caught a glimpse of their sallow, unshaved faces, the dull hostility in their flaccid eyes.

That was only momentary. The cart was pulled up with a violent jerk outside the cottage where I lodged with Anton, pitching my valise upside-down into the deep mud. And then, getting Mariki's smell, feeling it close about me, I experienced a kind of peacefulness. For here was a life I knew, and I could fancy that those days in Petrograd were a dream that would soon be forgotten.

§

Telling the boy to rescue and clean my bag, I rapped the cottage door and went inside without waiting, as I had been accustomed. In the low, downstairs room old Prouskov sat cuddling the stove, as he always did, and vaguely damning the German emperor who, remotely, had brought his house some measure of prosperity. His daughter, a chestless, energetic woman who had always treated me with kindness, did not come forward to greet me. Standing at her cooking table she smiled, but only faintly, and with a nervous glance pointed to the other side of the room; where, looking slightly ashamed of himself, a soldier whom I did not recognize sat on the bottom of the steps leading to my quarters, with his rifle lying on the floor between his feet.

"Is Lieutenant Scheffler upstairs?" I asked.

She said: "Yes, Captain, but——"

The soldier had wriggled on to his feet and spat out his sunflower seeds. "Lieutenant Scheffler cannot be visited," he said awkwardly. "Those are the adjutant's orders, I have to see to that."

I turned to Vetushka. "My things, are they still up there?"

"No, Captain, they were taken away, I couldn't prevent that, they've been taken to one of the huts." She wiped her hands on her skirt and moved slowly towards me in the way of country people when they come to ask a favour of their landlord. I saw then

that she had been crying. "We don't know what has happened," she said, "we have this fellow sitting here all day, and the poor Lieutenant is not allowed to go outside or to see anybody."

Prouskov turned round and looked at his daughter contemptuously.

"Women like something to cry about," he said. "I have given the Lieutenant a plan of my old farm to look at, and Vetushka herself has lent him the book of receipts the pope gave her, which she can't read. What more does he want?"

Ignoring him, Vetushka put her hand on my arm. "What will they do to him?" she said dejectedly. "You won't let them hurt him, such a gentle officer?"

"No," I said vaguely, "no, of course not." I was tired from travelling, and in some way angry with Anton for what had happened. In the homeliness of this small house, which always smelt of cooking, I had found a refuge from the military gauntness of Mariki; and at that moment I felt he had taken away the whole reward of my journey. "I shall do what I can," I said to Vetushka; and I told the Cossack curtly to find my quarters and put my bag there.

16

I went to the Mess, which I found as full and frowsty as it had always been. Its population was a good deal changed, so much that at first I saw no one whom I recognized; but not its character, for the men who lounged by the stove or sprawled across the tables were so tainted already by Mariki's lassitude that they looked like copies of their predecessors taken out of store: a boy with closely-cropped dark hair who was very like Trebouskin, a high-cheeked captain of the Tekinski whose curly beard and hairy wrists reminded me of a transport man who had died the day before I left: here, at last, was familiarity. I caught sight of Virchov in his favourite place on the other side of the stove, and he came to greet me, smiling in his rather girlish way, with his hand held up like that of a hostess in French comedy. "So you couldn't keep away!" he said; and then at large: "This gentlemen, is Otraveskov, one of the old-timers. He has been at Mariki man and boy for sixty years.—If that's the July number of *Leitopis* you've got there, Maslovitch, you'll have to give it up—that's the one Otraveskov always reads. . . . Otraveskov is a great friend of Scheffler's," he added significantly. He led me over to his own corner and brought up a chair for me, making me grateful for his friendliness. He said in a low voice: "You've heard what

Scheffler's been up to? Rather a bad business, it's awkward for all of us. A pity, when we were all so peaceful here. Still, it gives us something to talk about."

But the hint he had given in introducing me was enough to put that valued topic temporarily out of circulation. Virchov himself went on to his favourite subject, the harlot-shortage; it was scandalous, he said, that officers should have to use the same girls as sergeants and even corporals; and I did not hear Scheffler's name mentioned again that day. Dropping into routine, I went round the huts in the evening, but even the men I knew best seemed disinclined to talk to me. There was, I thought, a certain air of expectation and of secrecy; but that might have been no more than fancy.

Grassogi, who had been appointed adjutant, sent a message asking me to see him next day in his own quarters. I found him tired and abstracted, so altered from his normal self that his tunic lacked a button and he had not even shaved properly.

"I am glad you're back," he said, "very glad, very glad—we have no one left with any sense of responsibility. (A cigarette? Wait—ah, here they are!) Virchov is about the only one left of our old stagers, a nice boy, you know, but inclined to take life altogether too easily. And the new officers don't really understand Mariki-Matesk, they haven't absorbed the spirit of the place and they don't understand the work we're doing."

It amused me to find Grassogi so solemn.

"And what is the work we're doing?" I asked him.

"Why, we have here a number of sick men, war-soiled men, and our object is to set them on their feet again by sympathetic treatment and rational discipline." He stood up and leant against the wall with four of his long fingers stuck inside his collar. "That is how I should describe our job; and in my opinion it's one of the highest importance, not only for the men themselves——"

I nodded: "Yes, not only for the men themselves!"

He turned his head sharply to bear his better eye on my face, "I suppose you're not in sympathy with all this nonsense of Scheffler's?"

"What nonsense?"

"Do you mean to say——?"

I said: "Why not sit down and tell me about it quietly?"

Poor Grassogi! He was enjoying so much the new rôle of conscientious officer for which he had lately cast himself, and it hurt him to find someone refusing to take him seriously. But in half a moment he forgot his airs and became quite friendly.

He had little to tell me that I had not known or guessed. A turn-

ing movement of an Austrian division in the Jawzedoc sector had led to a shortage of men in the support lines which had at all costs to be filled immediately; such reserves as were normally stationed at Paulskov had been seriously depleted by the demands of Sluchevskiev's army as it opened southwards to its new position on the Oser; someone had heard that men were kicking their heels at Mariki, and General Z—— at Paulskov had coolly requested a thousand men, to be marched at once to the rail depôt at Propod-Czerveen. That, of course, was impossible, but a first draft of 350, passed as medically sound, had been collected and despatched straight away. "A bit of an achievement, I don't mind telling you!" Many of these men had been quite glad to go. Within three days a further draft of 250 had been despatched, under Trebouskin's command. But that had not been enough for the insatiable Z——, who had telephoned that the margin of 400 must be found at once, "and if they can't stand up, God help the bastards, they can shoot lying down." "Well," Grassogi said simply, enjoying the purr of his voice, "that is roughly where we've got to, and that's where friend Scheffler comes in.

"To begin with, you see, Scheffler was supposed to take the second draft. He had a hand in picking them. But while he was doing that he heard a good deal of grumbling—the usual sort of thing—and I suppose he rather got cold feet. Anyway, he had an interview with Vestil—what he said or what Vestil said I don't know, Scheffler's always so damned close—but the upshot was that Scheffler stood out and Trebouskin went instead. However, when it came to the next draft, Scheffler was obviously the man. If I'd gone, you see, Vestil would have been left without any senior officer to do his work for him, apart from Kyeltsi, and he's been very unsound since his dysentery—keeps saying he sees an angel of God with a flaming sword who cries 'Woe unto Babylon!' outside the men's latrines. So Scheffler it had got to be. Vestil gave the order and disappeared in his car as usual, hoping the whole thing would be over by the time he got back. But not so! Scheffler went so far as to pick about 300 men and have them medically inspected—that, he said, was the very most that could possibly be considered fit for the march to Propod. (Oh, I forgot to mention, two men in the previous draft had to be sent back, and one of them has died since; that's what's causing a good deal of the trouble.) Well, he waited till Vestil came back and then took the list to him in person, saying that he had ordered a parade for Vestil's own inspection next morning. Vestil wouldn't stand for that. He said that if Scheffler had picked the men he was perfectly ready to rely on his judgement. Scheffler replied that he wouldn't take over the draft until Vestil had inspected them. You

see how things were then? If Vestil had appealed to higher authority he could have had Scheffler's tail twisted pretty sharply; but Scheffler, who doesn't seem to care two jumps of a louse what happens to him, would have made Vestil stand in a rather poor light as having dodged his proper responsibility all along. In fact, I rather think that Scheffler's one object all the way through has been to show up Vestil's laziness. So Vestil tried to get out of the trouble once again by sending a junior man, Shibrach—who's a gunner, incidentally, and no use for anything. And the next thing was a statement from a certain Karamachik, who claims to represent the men, that not one of them will go *except* under command of Lieutenant Scheffler."

"So now?" I asked.

"So now, that's just where we are. Officially, the despatch of the next draft has been postponed till a week from today. Scheffler's confined to his quarters, and the idea is that he may see reason before the time elapses. I hope to God he does."

"And no pressure's being brought to bear on the men?"

"Their case is being treated as personal insubordination on the part of Karamachik, and he's been placed under guard. That, I think, was the most sensible course. If Vestil had taken him seriously as representing the men, well, that's mutiny. And we can't have mutiny at Mariki."

"No," I said, "we have hardly the staff to handle it."

Grassogi sighed, and began to twist a strand of his fine brown hair into a gimlet. "I am hoping myself that it will all come to nothing," he said, "Z—— has gone off to Winzlavl, and the man who's taking his place is less of a fire-eater. We've kept the whole thing beautifully hushed up.

I thought of the garbled report in *Russkaya Volia,* but I said nothing about it.

"Do you think I can see Scheffler?" I asked. "I suppose there'd be no harm——"

He shook his head. "No one's allowed to see him. Officially, that is. But if you think you could bring him round—do you think you could?"

"I want to hear his side of the story first," I said.

Grassogi stood up again. "But, my dear Otraveskov, there are no two sides to the story. I agree, it's unfortunate for the men involved, they deserve a much longer period of convalescence. But generally speaking they'll be better off doing something active than moping here—they're only to be used in support lines, you understand—and you cannot possibly carry on a war when the soldiers

decide for themselves whether to obey orders or not. That, surely, must be plain enough to anyone, let alone a professional soldier."

"Yes," I said, "that's plain as far as it goes——"

"It's not that I'm out of sympathy with the men," he went on warmly. "I've always been a liberal like yourself, I try to see the soldier's point of view and to think of his welfare whenever I can. But the principle of warfare is that everything must give way to military necessity, everything. And where there's conflict between sentiment and loyalty, loyalty is our duty. That's what Scheffler seems unable to understand. He is not, of course, pure Russian. . . ."

The telephone rang.

§

"My own opinion," Virchov said, "is that Scheffler's just bluffing. He wanted Vestil to make a report of the matter, and that would have given him a chance to get Vestil himself on the carpet. That's what he's been playing for. And as soon as he sees that Vestil won't follow him into the cage he'll walk out of it. After all, what else can he do?"

That was the general view, but it was held with some anxiety. Z—— was out of the way, at least for the time being, but no one knew what kind of man General Lyublinov, his successor, might be. If Lyublinov took up the matter and became impatient it was likely that a commission would arrive and all the bad smells in Mariki would be released. Not that anyone was to blame for conditions at Mariki; those were inherited, they were just an accident in an undertaking too large to be certainly controlled; but even the most benevolent inquirer might be forced to think that the management of the station had been a little apathetic. Mariki was a backwater, it had the dullness and also the advantage of backwaters; no one interfered. And really there had been so little trouble up to now; the men did not seem seriously discontented with their period of idleness, the supply of medical necessities had much improved, the prevalence of dysentery was gradually coming under control. As soon as a commission began to poke its nose into the station's affairs the operation of the place would have to be reorganized on more strictly military lines; everyone would have to work harder; officers who had begun to feel entirely at home in the Mess would be shifted to less constructive and more dangerous duties. . . . And Scheffler, whose eccentric obstinacy lay at the bottom of this risk, what did he really want? It was nonsense to say that the men selected for the new draft were not fit, since they had been passed by the senior medical

officer. Most of them were entirely docile, and they had stated plainly, through the very mouth of the firebrand Karamachik, that they were perfectly willing to return to active service on the simple condition that Scheffler himself would go with them; not an unreasonable demand, and one which was, in itself, entirely agreeable to Vestil. But as things were, the delay and uncertainty were making the men more restless every day. Everyone had noticed that—the habitual grumbling in the huts was beginning to sound like open insubordination. Plainly the idea had got about that the station was weakly commanded, that the officers themselves were at loggerheads and any kind of defiance was likely to be successful. . . .

"I suppose you realize," Vestil said, when I went to ask his permission to visit Anton, "that your friend Scheffler is being a great nuisance? Not that it matters to me, I've got the whole affair well in hand and I shall be sending off the next draft in a week's time, with or without him. But I've never yet had to report an officer under my command, and it looks now as if I shall be obliged to do so. If I hadn't dealt with him firmly in the first place there might have been serious consequences. Of course, I realize that Scheffler is not really fitted to be a soldier at all. He is a poet who has strayed into uniform. Unfortunately we have no machinery for handling poets in a military establishment, we can only handle soldiers. . . . No, I'm sorry, I'm afraid I can't let you see him. It's very important that he should enjoy a period of undisturbed contemplation—a man does not feel quite so large when he is all by himself. . . ."

Lieutenant Chelnovitch, who seemed to be regarded as the legal expert of the Mess, said that Scheffler did not realize the danger of his position. It was not a case of simple insubordination, it amounted to mutinous conspiracy. "Everyone knows what kind of a fellow Karamachik is. He was well known as a political agent long before the war, he's been in prison twice, they've only been waiting to catch him redhanded at his old games and make an example of him. So if Karamachik mantains an eccentric loyalty to one particular officer, and that officer does not disown him, the conclusion is fairly obvious. . . . I personally feel that Vestil has been extremely long-suffering."

"It will all come to nothing," Virchov said cheerfully. "They seem to have decided now they don't want any more soldiers, so after poor little Scheffler's eaten the bread and water of affliction for another week or so they'll tell him to be a good boy and let him out to pasture again."

Chelnovitch scratched the bridge of his thin nose and looked at Virchov over imaginary spectacles. "Some form of legal process

will be required," he said austerely. "A case like this can't unravel itself anthropomorphically."

Virchov yawned. "My dear fellow, you don't yet understand your Mariki. Everything here happens by itself—in so far as anything can be said to happen at all. The most probable solution is that all the three hundred will die. Then the question of whether they can be sent to Propod will become largely academic."

"Who was that?" Bestushev inquired. "Who's that saying those men are going to die? Are you aware, Lieutenant Virchov, that I personally have certified every one of those fellows as fit for service in the second category?"

Virchov nodded. "I'd forgotten—I remember now. And how pleased the men were when they saw the certificate! One of them dropped both his crutches in his emotion."

"I may not be a good doctor," Bestushev retorted, laughing windily through his pilous nostrils, "but I've yet to find the man who can swing the lead when I'm about. I'm a great believer in the power of mind over matter. If you tell a man he can do something, then he very soon finds he can do it——"

"Unless he drops down dead from the excitement of realizing his powers."

"If Lyublinov holds an inquiry," Chelnovitch said softly, with one eye on Bestushev, "I suppose he'll have the men re-examined by his own medical staff. That would be necessary for final proof that the men had no grounds for complaint."

Bestushev squeezed his beard together and turned it up into a fish-hook. "For my part," he said stoutly, fixing Chelnovitch's range with his huge eyebrows, "I am perfectly ready for the results of my examination to be verified by all the doctors in the Russian army. If, that is to say, you can find anyone with the impertinence to challenge them."

"From what I know of our friend Scheffler," Chelnovitch said bleakly, "I think it's just possible that he might. But don't worry, doctor! You can rely on my unqualified support."

"And mine too," Virchov said. "I shall tell them that Major Bestushev, lazy and ignorant as he is, knows how to mix you a very agreeable laxative. . . ."

In the men's quarters a silence fell whenever I entered on my inspections. My routine questions were answered in the routine manner. I asked them why they let their blankets lie about on the floor, mixed up with old newspapers and the leaves of vegetables and cigarette-ends and split schlichi; they agreed that it looked untidy. They politely accepted a suggestion that a piece of wall might be

patched with wood from one of the fallen huts, and the job was actually done. When I said that most of the bedding in one hut was to be burnt they obeyed the order quite cheerfully, and waited for my further instructions before applying for replacements. They were like children, sulky children, they would not laugh when I tried to joke with them; and God knows I did not feel like joking. As I moved about those damp, dilapidated barracks, I felt as the newly deaf must feel; not fully understanding why the silent men who had been so lovable should now appear so hostile.

Of these soldiers only one would talk to me, an elderly man from Kostroma who served me as batman. He was conscientious in his duties, never failing to put each sock and collar-stud in what he thought its proper place, so that when I came in from my morning round no single article was visible in my sleeping quarter except my travelling cases and a hairbrush on the toilet table; but very slow. I made him sit on my bed, for he always looked exhausted by the morning's work; and there, industriously rubbing an old vest of mine on already shining boots, he would let himself be slowly tickled into conversation. Yes, he was one of the next draft, he told me. The doctor had passed him, after holding the telephone for half a blink against his chest. "But nothing was wrong with that, anyway. It's my back that hurts me. I lay—how long?—two days, two whole days, and part of a third, in a ditch before they found me. My leg, you see, up here where it joins—I couldn't move. And all that time there was water running, with the snow melting on the hillside. That was at Telny, where the big gun was. It would have been all right except for the water running underneath my spine. And now I can still feel it, but it's boiling hot now. That's why I feel always tired."

I asked him why it was that the men listed for the third draft were willing to go if Lieutenant Scheffler took them. At first he would not answer that, either from caution or from sheer inability to explain. But by degrees I got it out of him.

"The soldiers, you see, they know they've got to fight when the officers tell them. That is understood, the war is like that, your own feelings don't matter, we have got quite used to it. But the officers here, they don't belong to us, we don't know them (saving yourself, Vashe Blagorodie—I don't mean . . .). It is said, you see—of course I can't help hearing what they say in the huts along there—it is said that we are sent here as a punishment, though nobody knows why it is, and Colonel Vestil and the rest have only got to see that we are punished. That's what we feel like. If the Emperor was to come here tomorrow and say, 'Go along, you lazy children, back to the line with you!' we should go without stopping to lace up our boots.

But the Emperor doesn't know about us—that's what they say—nobody knows how we feel. We've never seen the General at Paulskov, and our own colonel—we hardly know what he looks like. How are we to know he gives the right orders?"

"But if Lieutenant Scheffler——?"

"Ah, that would be different, he's a different kind altogether. If he says that we've got to go to Propod, that's all right. You see, he wouldn't say that unless it was all right."

"And that's what Karamachik says?"

He looked at me rather nervously. "It doesn't matter what Karamachik says! At least, it doesn't matter to me. If the lieutenant says we've got to go to Propod, that's good enough for us. . . . I found there was one cigarette left in the packet you threw under the bed last night. I have cleaned it and put it in your stud-box at the bottom of the green valise. . . ."

§

When two days had passed and nothing happened, no fresh order from Paulskov, no new move on the part of Vestil, I began to think the affair would peter out. It looked as if the critical demand for man-power at Jawzedoc was over, or had been satisfied from other sources. Someone, perhaps, had dropped a hint at Paulskov that withdrawal of troops from the Mariki clearing station might cause far-reaching inconvenience; Vestil himself might have told Lyublinov a plausible story. Or perhaps the prophets of the Mess were right: in a day or two the chosen men would be paraded and, having no Karamachik to exhort them, would obey the command to march. But watching the issue with something like detachment, for my period of absence had made me a stranger in Mariki, I did not come to that opinion. It could not be all in my imagination, the change I saw in the men's demeanour. I had left them bored and sullen, accepting Mariki's tedium and privations as invalids accept the hardships of a long-drawn illness; now they were angry—I caught it in every glance, in the very stillness of their voices—and an anger which had grown so quietly would not, I thought, evaporate in the gentle airs of compromise. At night, taking my walk along the Julvoi road, where the bare expanse relieved my loneliness, I passed the soldiers coming back in groups from Sindetski's farm. Sometimes I picked a scrap of their conversation, and Karamachik's name was always on their tongues. I heard besides the name of Beledsgin, and that was the man in the second draft who had died. Oddly, my mind caught then the echo of a young man's voice, a voice belonging to

no face I could remember: "I tell you nothing will stop them, nothing!"

Presently I saw that "Karamachik"—only his name, no comment—had been chalked on the walls about the station, and jack-knifed out along the sides of the huts. In one place, which you saw from the door of the Mess, they had carved "Lieutenant Scheffler."

"It's queer," Bestushev said to me, "I thought they'd forgotten all about them both."

17

I learnt from Vetushka, when I met her by chance outside the post-house, that the soldier responsible for Anton's custody went off duty at ten o'clock each night; after which hour Prouskov was held responsible for the door being kept locked until seven in the morning, when the sentry came on again. In point of fact the responsibility lay on Vetushka herself, since Prouskov fell asleep by the stove at nine or thereabouts and seldom woke before daylight. Was any inspection made at night? Yes, someone came as a rule about midnight and tried the door; but never later.

"If I were to come tonight, at about two o'clock, and tap twice at the window——?"

She was doubtful for a moment and then she nodded in her businesslike way. "It must be your affair," she said. "If it gets to be known, I shall say I supposed you had come on proper business, with permission from Colonel Vestil. . . ."

But I had not yet made up my mind; and as I lay on my bed that night, still dressed, the risks which had seemed so paltry in the daylight became more serious. Vestil, for all his waywardness, was not a fool; he knew what my previous relations with Anton had been, and he might have arranged for my quarters or the cottage itself to be under continuous observation. If it were known that I had visited Anton surreptitiously any chance I had of helping him would be gone, to say nothing of the danger to my own position. It was easier to await events, to take no risks, do nothing. A little before two I undressed and got into bed, relieved by my wise decision. Next day, however, I was troubled by the sense of a chance neglected. My fears looked foolish, and I was more than usually impatient at listening all day to every voice except the one I wanted to hear. I passed the cottage twice, and it seemed unthinkable that the one man living who could soothe my wretchedness could be kept away from me by a barrier so flimsy.

I set out from my quarters at about eleven o'clock that night, leaving the lamp on my table lit, and walked far in the direction of Paulskov, still irresolute. When my leg began to hurt me severely I turned round, and the pain, as it always does, gave me some courage. It was after one when I got back to the station, and no light showed in the men's huts, though I caught the sound of busy conversation as I passed them. The Mess was in total darkness, and so were the officers' quarters adjoining, except for my own window. I walked on into the village, which was dark and silent as a forest.

Reaching Prouskov's cottage I stood against the wall and remained for some time motionless, so that a man watching might betray himself by a cough or movement. But I heard nothing, and could see no patch of paleness in any window opposite. I moved to the window on the left side of the door and tapped on the glass with my finger-nail. There was no response. Having waited a minute or so I tapped again. Then I heard a noise, but not from inside the cottage. It was the footsteps of someone coming along the road.

Stuck back against the door, dead still, I looked towards the place where the road bent a little and saw the man's form as if it were a swinging wheatsack against the lighter wall of the house behind him; and as he came nearer I knew almost certainly from his loose, Lancer stride, that it was Vestil. He was, I think, some forty paces away when my quickened senses caught the sound of someone stirring in the room behind me.

The alarm I suffered then is something I cannot account for. Twice, in the course of a night reconnaissance, I had lain on the ground while an Austrian patrol passed close enough for me to hear their breathing; but the special kind of fear which that experience brings is one not cured by usage, and in this infinitely smaller danger I felt its symptoms no less sharply than when my life had been at issue. Vetushka, I though, might take some forty seconds, sixty at most, to put a coat about her nightclothes and reach the door; if, unguardedly, she lit a candle on her way, its light through the window would show me up no less efficiently than the beam of an arc-lamp. As I watched Vestil approaching I felt as if a brush of fine wires was being drawn along the inner wall of my chest and stomach; and when, coming level with where I stood, he stopped, a coldness like that of mountain water broke at one moment across my face and through my loins. For quite a second Vestil stood still, as if listening intently; and I thought that he must have heard the slither of Vetushka's shoes as she crossed the room inside, knocking against a chair as she went. Then he bent to light a cigarette, and I saw as the match was struck that his face was unconcerned,

his eyes pointed into his cupped hands. He moved on, and the match he had dropped lay still alight on the ground as though to beckon his attention. He was still in sight when the door behind me opened, mercifully quiet, and with a single stealthy move I slipped inside.

Vetushka had not so much as struck a match, and she shut and locked the door as silently as she had opened it. In the darkness she took my arm and guided me across to the stairs, whispering, as she felt me trembling, "It is all right, barin, it's perfectly safe." Prouskov stirred as we passed him, and said in a loud, clear voice, "You shan't have it, Pyotr Petrovitch, it's worth eighty kopeks and you shan't have it for one kopek less." "Be quiet, father!" Vetushka said firmly, "you're keeping me awake." I stumbled against the bottom step, and then, remembering exactly the shape of the little stairway and how it turned, I crept up noiselessly.

§

Anton was awake when I opened his door. I heard his whisper, "Who's that?" sharp, as if he were frightened, and the scrape of his nails as he felt for the matches. I said, "It's all right, it's Alexei, don't show a light!" He whispered: "Alexei! Alexei! Oh, how wonderful!" and I came to the side of his bed and he embraced me.

I forgot the fright I had had, as I sat beside him on the bed, holding his hand; for I was nearer to happiness then than I had been for a long time. He said, rubbing my knuckles with his thumb, "You gave me quite a fright! I thought—I've got so jumpy living all by myself, they keep me rather short of food and that puts your nerves out of order." He laughed then. "They've told you, I suppose, that I'm a bad boy? I've got to stay here till I say I'm sorry. Publicly, you know! There will have to be a parade of all troops, and I shall stand in the middle, wearing my sword between my legs, and I shall say 'Colonel Vestil, you are a great and good man, I humbly apologize for my villainous disloyalty.' But the real joke, my dear, is that Vestil doesn't know quite what to make of me. He's argued for hours and hours, and he can't see my point of view, and I keep pretending that I can't see his."

For some time he chattered like that, laughing and excited; not altogether, I thought, from the pleasure of having me again, but a little from weakness, and a good deal from genuine mischief. Then he sobered, and made me talk of my own affairs, and I found it easy in the total darkness to speak of Natalia without faltering. It was like the end of a long summer journey, when you throw off your clothes and stand with your bare feet on a cool floor; just to

let my mind's pain flow into common sentences, to feel him listening with the quietness of tender understanding. He said at last, awkwardly, with his hand in front of his mouth as if he feared to let the words escape: "It will all be altered, Alexei. . . . When we fired the barley in our retreat from Vrongered the ground looked so bare and black I thought it would never yield again. But I came to that region later on, and it was all green with the young, new corn. . . ." He could say no more than that; and to save him from the hopeless task of a comforter I set my tongue at a canter, drawing away from the track which lay in shadow.

§

". . . Yelisaveta Akinievna has been very kind to me," I told him. And he answered in a voice that I thought was rather mournful: "Yes, she can often be very kind . . . but I'm glad, I'm so glad that she helped you."

Presently he asked: "She spoke of me?" And then, before I could answer, he said, "Of course, she has many friends, ever so many friends, she can never be lonely. It's funny, you know, I never liked Yelisaveta's friends, I never understood them, I hated to see them all round her; and yet I'm so thankful that she has them, now, when I'm away. I shouldn't like her to be lonely. . . . Well, I don't know, I don't know—it's very difficult not to be selfish. But at least I'd rather she had worthless people with her than the kind of people I knew myself in Petrograd. In Petrograd—how long ago was that? Do you know, I can hardly remember what the place looks like, I believe I should lose my way between the Byeloselski and the Law Courts! Emelian is still with her, I suppose? He's a good fellow, Emelian, completely trustworthy. . . . She didn't, I suppose, give you a message for me?"

"I think she was just about to write——"

"Of course yes, yes, I have heard from her."

"Naturally she's very anxious——"

He laughed. "Anxious? Oh, nonsense! Yelisaveta has never worried about anything, she has what you might call a tough mental constitution—I'm very thankful for that, very thankful."

It was curious to hear him speak like this. For on other subjects I had never known him insincere.

"She was anxious," I repeated. "She wanted me to try and get you out of this mess, to make you see reason if I could——"

" 'See reason!' Is that how she put it?"

"I'm not sure exactly what words she used——"

"No, of course," he said soberly, "no, but I see what you mean, I quite understand how she would look at it——"

I said with some determination: "I don't think she thought about the question at all except from the point of view of your safety. Surely that's how any wife would think about it."

He agreed: "Yes, that's quite right. And not only any wife, but any woman at all, anyone who knew nothing whatever about the war or Mariki or what's been going on here." He said that bitterly; but he went on: "You musn't mind me, Alexei, you must forgive me for being so bad tempered. It's being cooped up here all day, it plays the devil with my temper. And really Vestil has been insufferable, there was bound to be a fight, I couldn't put up with his laxity any longer."

I said: "Vestil—I know so little about him——"

"There is very little to know," he said. "He comes from Jaroslav —his father, I believe, was a Marshal of the Nobility—they are enlightened landowners, Vestil himself is essentially a man of culture. I believe he plays the 'cello very well, and at the university he was a champion of sabre. You see—I am not describing an individual at all. He is simply a man of a certain class and education, even his laziness is conventional. Above all he is a loyal soldier, he doesn't ask questions, he obeys orders. And you see how that works out? Someone—he may be five hundred miles away, gives orders to the General at Paulskov. The General gives orders to Vestil, and Vestil, without stopping to think whether they're reasonable or not, passes them on to Grassogi or to me. In that way he discharges his duty, he absolves himself from all further responsibility."

Echoing the opinion of the Mess, I said: "But it's not easy to see what else Vestil could do. The order from Paulskov——"

"What else?" He was fiercely angry, I could feel the bed quivering with his excitement. But when he went on speaking his voice was quiet, betraying his temper only in a slight increase of stammer. "That man has been in command here for six or seven months. He has been autocrat, he has almost been God, to more than three thousand men—that was the number in November. And he does not know the name of one man or one corporal on the station, he doesn't know how many are living to a barrack, he doesn't know what the actual food ration is or how it compares with the regular army ration. He has no idea where our water comes from, couldn't tell you what the sanitation system is or where the medical stores are. He has implicit faith in that nancy-boy Grassogi, he told me that Bestushev, who's got the brains of a lizard and the conscience of Jenghiz Khan, was 'a thoroughly reliable doctor.' That's the man who's responsible

for the whole welfare, the very life, of those men along there. And those men, remember, have been through everything that you and I have—and a lot worse, most of them—on behalf of this vague political identity which they call Russia. Russia! What does that mean if it doesn't mean the Russian people? And these men, aren't they Russians, aren't they just as good Russians as Vestil himself, and Protopopov, and Alexandra Feodorovna? What does Vestil know about the feelings of those men, about their ignorance and wisdom, their childish faith and their hatreds, their poverty and nostalgia? How can he guess anything at all about their souls when he doesn't even distinguish between their nationalities? I tell you, Alexei, he never thinks about them at all. 'We have more men here than we can handle, the place ought to be closed down'—that's what he once said to me, and that's his one positive contribution to all the problems Mariki raises. '*More men than we can handle*'—the operative word, my dear Alexei, is 'handle.' " I wanted to interrupt him, but the stammer had almost disappeared now, and that was a warning. "You've heard about those two drafts that went to Propod? He inspected the first of those, very casually; not the second. My orders were to get the third draft off at a few hours' notice, after Bestushev's inspection. That meant, of course, that Bestushev and I were jointly responsible, Bestushev as having made the examination and I as giving the actual order to march. Bestushev, I need hardly tell you, was perfectly willing—did you know that he's totally blind in his right eye and presbyopic in the left?—but I wasn't. I told Vestil that I refused to accept a responsibility which belonged to him, that I should not take over command of the men selected until he examined every one of them individually. He knew as well as I did, I told him, that the men would not be used only in support divisions; and as he in actual fact was responsible for sending those three hundred human beings under fire, then by God Almighty he was going to see the face of every one of them first. . . . I was rather rude, I'm afraid, but the man's attitude upset me. . . . Listen, Alexei! You may not see these things as I do, but I want you to understand my moral position. You can hold what theories you like about war, its justice, its necessity. But when an order is given which means the physical anguish of sentient creatures and the snapping-off of human lives, I will not recognize that every man who passes on that order can justify himself by the duty of obedience. Someone has got to look both ways, to admit that he has a duty to humanity below as well as to authority above. That is what Vestil refused to do. He knew, he must have known, that those men were as ill-fitted as any you could find in Russia to go back into the shambles, he knew that

such insensate cruelty could not be justified except by the bloodless ethic of military expediency. And he wouldn't face that. He was content to transmit the order, he was too much a coward even to cast his eyes over the wrecks he had sentenced—yes, he, he was the man who sentenced them! He had less integrity than Pilate, who at least made a public show of washing his hands. He thought, I suppose, that I should follow his example: if Bestushev and his underlings passed the men, that would be good enough for me, I could always say I had simply obeyed instructions. And do you know, I've been so long in this environment of distorted values that I very nearly surrendered! But there has to be a break somewhere in the chain of moral amaurosis. You can say that the ethics of war are the suspension of all other ethics, but you can't keep your conscience under anaesthetic for ever and ever. What they wanted was a cork, a cork consisting of three hundred living beings, to plug the puncture in a battered cauldron; they were passing down the orders as a builder's labourers sling bricks from one to the other, and all the suffering bound up in it was meant to fall on the wretchedest of human creatures. Vestil wouldn't stop it, but it had to stop somewhere. It stopped at me."

I did not answer him; and I think a whole minute must have passed while we sat in silence and listened to Anton's breathing, like a runner's who has overspent himself and tries to hide his exhaustion. It was he who first spoke again, and now his voice was wholly gentle, tired and rather abashed.

"Alexei, you musn't listen to all my chatter. I don't want to bring you into this when you've got such a weight on your spirit already—you mustn't hurt yourself with another man's feelings. You see, it's different for me, I no longer have anything—anything to use up the tenderness that lies in us. No, Alexei, I didn't mean to drag you into my quarrels. It's only that I had to let my tongue go free. All these days I've talked to no one but Vetushka, who sympathizes without understanding, and Prouskov who lectures me on his own religion. It's harmful to keep so much anger inside one's chest, I had to let some of it escape. You do understand, you won't let yourself be caught in my entanglements?"

He had got up as he was speaking and moved to the other side of the little room, as if he were trying to loose himself from my affection. The sparse light from the small window did not reach him there, and when I tried to picture his face it would not come to me. The voice which was so familiar did not conjure the familiar, rather pedagogic body; it drew a younger and braver figure; and I felt that the darkness hiding the short legs and nervous face had become

a lens through which I saw the man himself more clearly: a lonely man, but one whose loneliness was not like mine; for while I would have taken refuge in any man's compassion, his tenuous, doughty spirit would never shape itself to the grasp of common sympathy.

". . . It's rather diverting," he went on, as if apologizing for his earnestness, "about poor Bestushev! The junior medicals are so impressed by his eyeglass and his Boyar dignity that they think he's a prodigy of learning. One of them while you were away—young Kotsubé—got a little burn on his arm, and he asked Bestushev to treat it. Bestushev, in his happy-go-lucky way, took him off to the surgery and looked at it with the wrong eye and stuck on a dressing of nitric acid instead of picric. Kotsubé ran about half-way to Pauls-kov without stopping, and when he came back Bestushev said quite calmly, 'Ah, you silly fellow, I thought you said it was a carbuncle!' . . ."

§

"You won't let yourself be caught in my entanglements?" If I had not spent that bitter fortnight in Petrograd I might have been caught already, and now I could almost wish that I were in the trap with him instead of staring uselessly from outside. With my mind so ailing, I did not want to struggle with the claims of friendship and of reason, I had rather be fixed in a groove of circumstance and forced to go where it guided me. But how could I go with Anton along the track he was cutting, when only a spirit like his own would have taken me? And how could I turn away without betraying him? That issue worked in my mind like a trite tune of which the last few notes are missing, as we talked shallowly of things in our common experience, of the Krozkohl days, of the pattern of life in Petrograd. I think, though I cannot be certain, that I heard a clock strike three before I forced myself to try to describe my ground. I said, haltingly:

". . . It is partly selfishness, but I don't want you to think me altogether selfish. I know it would be different if I had no Vava to think of, and if Natalia were dead; if I had no one but myself——"

He said, "Alexei, I don't want you——"

"Listen!" I begged, "Anton, listen! You may be right—yes, I think you're right—to go as your moral sense tells you. (It's difficult for me to grasp that. I was trained as a soldier, you see, I was taught to think of a soldier's duty as having a kind of religious sanction. I've always regarded my oath as more binding than the tie of marriage. But I don't want to argue that, I'm not clearheaded tonight.) No, it isn't that which keeps me from joining you. It's simply that

my heart's like a stream run almost dry, like a mere trickle along the river's bed, I've lost all capacity for tenderness. I can love the things I've got used to loving, my love for you hasn't got smaller. But I see the rest as men who cannot matter, I've no more care for them than I have for the flies circling round a horse's ears. It's useless trying to interrupt the course of things unless you are carried by a fervent passion, you do no good by joining in a battle if your feelings are those of a mere spectator. And that's how I feel. I've watched the way things go so long, I've seen so much of senselessness and cruelty, I no longer believe that human intervention can serve any purpose. You stanch the blood-flow somewhere, it breaks out somewhere else. It's like putting plasters on a dog's leg when his belly's been ripped in two. No, Anton, I'm not disparaging your faith, I'm only describing my own moral exhaustion. If I were to stand beside you I should feel like a man who shouts 'Stop! Stop!' to a crowd flying from an earthquake into a flooded river. I was ready to do that once—I used to think that resistance had some kind of mystical virtue. But I've lost that faith, I've lost all will to struggle. It seems to me now that the human herd only wants to hurt itself, and no man on earth will prevent it. You, if you could save those poor devils from being pushed back into the furnace, you'd perform a miracle of reason and kindness. But they'll find three hundred others just as wretched to take their place. It's only a question of who gets whipped today and who tomorrow. . . . For me the tide's too strong, my spirit's too tired to stand against it. I'd join you, Anton, oh, how thankfully I'd join you, if I could only believe that resistance is the slightest use. But I don't believe that any longer. We can do nothing but make a pathetic gesture, we are no less helpless in the stream than the rest of our kind, we protest but we have no power. . . ."

For a moment he did not answer, and then his voice from the darkness was tense and positive:

"No, but God has."

I told him by degrees, not without embarrassment, that for me God had ceased to be a reality; that if God were any personality He belonged to the other side, that the power which drove men tethered through unlifting darkness could not be in conflict with itself, could never act as rescuer. He listened to me patiently, and only when my words gave out he asked in his most ordinary voice:

"And Jesus—what do you think about Him?"

"He proved," I said, "that God takes no interest. Jesus was man's virtue and man's courage raised to the highest degree that has ever

been recorded. And when he was being slowly tortured to death he shouted for God to help him: and God, if there was any God, looked the other way."

§

He did not pursue me. I heard him whisper, "Alexei, I feel so sorry, so sorry . . ." and after that we did not talk very much, though I stayed for perhaps an hour more, till I grew cold and overtired. I wanted to light a candle and see his face at least for a few moments, but he did not think it prudent. And although I had sat beside him for so long I felt dissatisfied, as if we had not really been in company but had spoken to each other across many miles of telephone. That sense of incompleteness lasts, and when I look back at the panorama of our friendship that meeting does not fit into its place. I remembered how the dark room felt, its dampness, the draught from the window which would never quite shut, the iron frame of the little bed biting into my thigh. I remember Anton's disembodied voice, and the roughness of his hand resting on my wrist. But those sensations have not joined to make a steady picture, and I find it hard to bring within one focus the restless, shabby prisoner of Krozkohl and the man who talked to me that night in darkness. I do not think that our affection weakened in that sightless meeting, for when we said good-bye he was just as warm as he had ever been; but I knew, then, that the part I cherished was much smaller than the whole of him, that he dwarfed himself to come within my compass. I said before I left him, "You know that I'll do whatever I can. . . ." But I do not think he heard me, for his answer, said so low and sadly that I barely caught it, was: "I shall pray for you, Alexei!"

§

Prouskov did not stir as I stole across his room; and I hardly heard or saw Vetushka as she tiptoed to the door and let me out. I tried to put a rouble in her hand, but she would not take that. She whispered: "No, it was for kindness, and so easy."

I walked boldly, letting my boots crack on the cobbled footpath, too tired for caution. But the village was fast in its early morning sleep, and no one challenged me when I turned on to the ashpath which led around the Mess to my quarters. Within my weariness I felt faintly a kind of exhilaration: the reflection, it must have been, of Anton's spirit. The lamp on my table was still alight, and I found beneath it a note: "The Commanding Officer wishes to see Capt.

Otraveskov tomorrow morning, the 12th inst., at nine o'clock." But I did not trouble myself about its implications. Only, lying half-undressed on my folding-bed, I wondered whether my love for men must needs grow pale instead of brighter with my love for God extinguished.

Next day I wrote at length to Yelisaveta.

18

To my surprise I found Vestil in an affable mood. Fresh, beautifully shaved (except Grassogi he was the only man on the station who troubled about his appearance), he had just finished his coffee and was in the first half-inch of his cigar. All the time he was talking to me he walked up and down the room with a jaunty stride, heaving at his pockets in the way of cavalrymen, who seem to be never satisfied with the fit of their breeches in the crutch.

"The upsetting thing about Scheffler," he said amiably, "is that I like the fellow. In civilian life I believe I should find him charming. The whole trouble is that he's quite unfitted for soldiering, he has never grasped the fact that the welfare of the whole army—taking the wider view—rests on a resolute efficiency of command. You and I have been educated to understand that, we know that directly an officer shows signs of weakness the men will lose confidence in him, and that loss of trust in time of war may have tragic consequences to the men themselves; but a man who lacks the regular military training is constantly diverted from his proper duty by small sympathies, by considerations of the moment. And you know, Ostraveskov, that kind of thing is very serious at the present time. We have not yet won the war. And in a long struggle the maintenance of morale becomes increasingly difficult, especially when there are known to be agitators in German pay in nearly every Company. . . . I've been wondering if you could not persuade Scheffler to take a more rational view? It would make me much happier if this business could be cleared up without recourse to special measures—and I don't see why it shouldn't be. For my part, I'm perfectly willing to let Scheffler's insubordination be forgotten—irregular as that would be. If you could only convince him that the men are entirely willing to obey their orders, and are only demonstrating against the loss of a popular officer. . . ."

I said: "I'm afraid I could hardly convince him of that, since it's not my own opinion."

He stared at my chin; he would never look at your eyes unless they were averted—the trick was always embarrassing and probably meant to be.

"What do you think they do want?" he asked bluntly.

"At this stage," I said, "I think they will probably demand the release of Karamachik as well as Scheffler. They will almost certainly want to be examined by a medical officer from Paulskov—they regard Bestushev as an ignoramus or worse—and they may insist on some form of assurance that they are only to be used in support. You will realize that there has been some stiffening——"

"You seem to know their terms very exactly!"

"I've taken some trouble to get what information I could."

"Then who's at the bottom of it?" he asked angrily. "This kind of thing doesn't happen in the Russian army unless someone is working it from underneath. I thought with Karamachik out of the way there'd be an end to all this nonsense."

I said: "Perhaps if you were to conduct an inquiry among the men——"

"That's impossible now," he said briefly. (I wondered if he realized the significance of "now.") "The men's attitude is mutinous, to invite their views would be condoning it. Surely you can see that!"

"Then, sir, you will simply appoint another officer to command the contingent and repeat the original order?"

"And supposing they refuse?"

"It would be advisable, I suppose, to have troops from Paulskov to stand by——"

"A very sensible suggestion! You are under the impression, I take it, that there is simply nothing else in the world for troops to do except to perform police duty at a backstage clearing station? The war, of course, can wait!"

I had not meant to provoke him. I saw him now as a rather pathetic creature of a type I knew well, essentially simple beneath his swagger, who only wanted someone to find a way out for him. But his loss of temper was hardening me; I was not accustomed to be talked to like a subaltern by a luck-jumped Lancer. I said, restraining my impatience:

"I suppose it is so vitally important that we contribute a further supply of men? I should have thought that the matter of a half-battalion——'

"I promised General Z——to supply them!" he said decisively. "In any case I'm not accustomed to having my orders treated as polite suggestions. And what do you think we've been keeping these

men here for, all this time? That's the question that someone's going to ask sometime."

Presumably, I said, the men had been kept at Mariki because the General Staff had no other plans for them. It was not our responsibility.

He opened a drawer and took out a paper. "You will see," he said, passing it across to me, "that this place is referred to by the powers-that-be as a 'reconditioning establishment.' And it was estimated in September last that we should be able to supply two battalions in good condition for a March offensive. How does that strike you?"

"It strikes me as nonsense."

"Yes, quite! But you constantly forget, Captain, that we are engaged upon the largest war in the world's history and that men have to be found somewhere or other to fight in it. And they depend on people like me to find them. . . . I have—though I hate to mention it—a certain reputation as a soldier. And somehow I should not find it very pleasant to go to General Lyublinov and say, 'I am so sorry, but the men under my command are homesick, and not in the mood for fighting.' You yourself, no doubt, would make such an admission quite cheerfully."

I did not answer that, and he became uncomfortable. "No, no, Otraveskov, you mustn't take me so seriously, I was only joking. I simply wanted to know how you yourself regard the situation, having a far greater professional experience than a man like Grassogi, for example. . . . You don't feel, then, that you would have any influence with Scheffler?"

I said that Scheffler, as I knew him, was not a man to be influenced easily.

"Suppose," he said, walking away to the window, "suppose I were to present the issue as one in which Karamachik was the person chiefly concerned? Suppose that Scheffler were persuaded to realize how much more dangerous Karamachik's position is than his own. . . . Well, no, that perhaps is a line which requires more careful thought." He came back to the table and began to fiddle negligently with his papers, pushing a bundle into one drawer and shutting it with his knee. "Well, I expect you have plenty to do, I won't keep you. You may have some suggestion to make when you've thought this matter over. In any case I expect you to keep me informed of anything you learn, any change in the—feeling of the men. . . . You might tell Grassogi, if he's in the Mess, that I want to see him straight away."

Outside his door I hesitated and thought of going back. This ex-

quisite wanted advice, and I could easily have given it to him instead of being as unhelpful as possible. But no, he hadn't asked for it, he had simply tried in a maladroit way to make use of me, retaining every cubic inch of what he supposed to be his dignity. Dignity: I had still a trifle of my own. Besides, it was no good. A man who had got himself into such a predicament would never get out of it in any sensible way. I thought of other men I had served under: Zegelov and Liaoyang; Tagancheiev the Transbaikal Cossack, so sensitive about others' suffering that he had sent his carriage fifteen miles for a dentist to attend to a corporal's toothache; Schevkin, the most accomplished disciplinarian of them all, who was always smiling and who never raised his voice: I could imagine none of those in such a contemptible position. But their kind seemed to be dropping out; too many had been written off at Osterode and in the bloody snows of Lodz.

§

Sergeant Mariosik came to report to me that two of his men were missing, and that one had attempted suicide. I listened patiently, asking the obvious questions, and tried to share the old man's deep concern. He was a likeable soldier of the old school, Mariosik, he had served with Kuropatkin at Heikoutai; and that two men in his charge should even have thought of cutting loose was a reflection on his competence. If he knew, as we all did, that thousands had deserted from every part of the front, it made no difference; such a thing should never have happened in his platoon. "They were fit men?" I asked. Well, no, he couldn't exactly say that; Boldyrev, as I knew, had no control over his bowels, and the other man could only carry a rifle on his right shoulder; but they had both passed for the new draft by Captain Bestushev. Mariosik thought they were strong enough to work their way through the forest to Propod, where they would doubtless try to smuggle themselves into a freight-truck. They would never be caught at Propod, where no one had any sense. The only thing was to take a search party by lorry to Chotnje and spread a line through the forest there.

"And what about the man who tried to shoot himself?"

"Ah, that was Strupati, I've dealt with him already."

"He didn't make a good job of it?"

"No, Vashe Blagorodie, on the contrary, sir, all he did was to blow off a lot of his hand. The bastard had got a Kropatchek rifle, stolen from the quartermaster-sergeant's store in Seventeen Barrack, and the shatterpated noodle tried to fire it with Lebel cartridge. The

state of that rifle now, it would make you wince to see it, sir. The quartermaster-sergeant's raising stinking hell about it.

"Do you know why he did it?"

He shrugged his shoulders contemptuously. "He says that Mariki's dull, sir. He was sick of the place."

"Where does he come from?"

"Somewhere in Akmolinsk. . . . The men are getting very difficult to handle, sir. It's partly their being odd batches—half of them can't understand what you say when you talk good Russian, and how are you to keep a pinch on them like that, if you see what I mean, sir?—and it's partly the food being so bad, and partly their not having enough to do. If the officers (asking your pardon, Vashe Blagorodie) would treat the station more like a regular military establishment, with regular parades, like the ones Lieutenant Scheffler was giving to 'C' Company just before you came back—there's nothing like drill to keep the men contented, sir, all but Karamachik and bastards of that kidney, who do no good to you or me or anyone else——"

"But what about the sick men, Sergeant?"

"I'd put the whole lot on repair fatigue—those that can get about. The rest I'd send off to a proper hospital somewhere, they're only a nuisance here."

I had some sympathy with his heroic plan for scouring the Augean stable with a drill-book and dish-clout; but I doubted its success. I told him that I should at once consult Captain Grassogi about the two deserters, and sent him away.

There was not much general interest in the deserters except as a topic of conversation. A party of about 150 men was sent round to Chotnje to comb the forest eastwards from that point as Mariosik had suggested; but it was not supposed that they either could or wanted to be successful. When Grassogi telephoned to Propod-Czerveen he was told with damp politeness that there were known to be some 700 deserters in and about the town, and unless our particular protégés had distinctive birth-marks on their foreheads they were unlikely to be picked from the scrimmage. Meanwhile, a universal sympathy for the truants was blatant throughout the station. In that island news of any kind was priced in roubles, and the fact that two of its inhabitants had broken loose produced a remarkable good-humour. Here and there, as I made my morning round, I was decorously asked if the men had been traced; there was no manifest disappointment when I answered briefly that they hadn't. In a hut populated largely by Orenburg Cossacks, who are a law unto themselves, a man lacking both his arms told me bluntly there was not a

chance of catching them. "And I wish I were with them!" he said. "I'd sooner be starving in the forest over there than eating the hog-wash we get in this place." I pretended not to hear him and went on to the next barrack, and thence to the kitchens; where the squad of Kalmuks who worked all day in an atmosphere of steam and grease and putrid odours had always seemed to me something short of human, with their recondite speech, their complete indifference to the men and scene around them. Today I caught them looking at me and smiling, if the Kalmuk can be said to smile. And limping back along the main avenue I fancied there was triumph as well as pleasure in the faces of the loungers tardily saluting: we, the men above, had been given a taste of their determination. That symptom, I thought, might belong to an epidemic wider than the local malady, and I did not care for it; seeing nothing to anyone's advantage in an army bled of responsibility.

In the Mess, however, my friends were cheerful. The desertion was a bad business, and the N.C.O.s were greatly to blame; it was much to be hoped that the men would be caught and punished as rigorously as possible—that might improve the general discipline of the station. Yet no one could hide a certain sympathy with men who had shown their loathing for Mariki in so practical a way. "Those two poor devils": that was the phrase inevitably used. "Those two poor devils will get their spines stripped when Mariosik gets his claws on them"; while young Maslovitch, offering seven to one against the chances of their capture, found no one would take him on. At all events the news of the escapade, reaching the Paulskov authorities, might draw attention to the wretched conditions prevailing at Mariki, where the officers' food was brought from the common kitchens ninety yards away. That was Grassogi's suggestion—excitement always made him rather gay and optimistic. And in the meantime, Vestil having disappeared, he gave the order that till further notice men below the rank of corporal were not to be out of quarters after nine o'clock. "I fancy that's a wise precaution," he told me, "though on the whole I think the spirit of the station is improving now that—yes, it seems to me to have improved."

A cluster of seven huts, standing some distance from the main part of the station, was destroyed that night. Apparently the fire started a little after midnight, and the prevailing westerly breeze served it well; by four, when the alarm was given, I doubt if anyone could have got it under hand even if the proper apparatus had been available. I myself was on the scene about twenty minutes after that, and the blaze was then so fierce that we could not go nearer than thirty paces. The discipline shown surprised me; for although the

whole station was awake (in the garish, scintillating light I could see the faces pressed at every window), not one man left his quarters excepting those detailed for fire duty. I hung about for half an hour or so on the chance of being useful, and then went back to bed. When I woke again a drizzle had set in which developed shortly into the sheeted rain to which we were so well accustomed, and I found on returning to the scene of the fire that nothing was left of it save fitful bursts of livid smoke from the grume of charred wood and ashes. Unconscious of the rain, a few men stood together at a little distance and stared at the débris in the vacant, curious fashion of their kind; at Mariki there was always a contented group to stare at a bird with a broken wing or an odd-shaped cloud that passed.

The ruined huts had contained some fodder, a small portion of the medical equipment which I had been at such pains to get from Petrograd, a few hundred blankets, some signalling flags and photographic apparatus: not much else. I thought it impossible that anyone could have been so senseless as to start the fire on purpose, and the general theory was that a corporal of the stores department had carelessly dropped a cigarette-end. At midday, however, a notice was discovered, nailed on the door of the officers' latrine: "If Karamachik is not released, more fires will follow." The spelling and script were good. The warning was signed laconically, "Soldiers' Council." Bestushev, contriving to read it with his head on one side and his glass held six inches from his eye, said, "It all sounds very childish to me."

§

Vestil came to inspect the impertinence himself, and almost immediately left for Paulskov, without sharing his thoughts. We waited patiently to see what action the potentates would take.

"The fire was arranged by one or two conspirators," Grassogi said, twisting his shapely body to get what comfort could be found in his hammock-chair; "one or two, or a dozen at most, I'm convinced of that. It's not a general movement—you can tell that much by the way the men are talking."

Virchov, flat on his back across the table, said sleepily: "I expect you're right, Grassogi. I always say to people, 'Always believe what Captain Grassogi says, Grassogi's always right.' Though I can't just see how you'd expect the bastards to talk if it *was* a general movement. . . ."

"I have a theory," Bestushev began. Having laboriously extracted a nail from one of the floorboards he sucked it, wiped it with his beard, punctured a pimple on his wrist and set to work to clean his

nails. "It is really rather interesting. (Perhaps Otraveskov will supply me with a cigarette? God bless you, honoured sir!) The first thing to decide is what route the miscreant took from the barrack line to the store-huts. Now look, take that part of the table as being the station, with the Paulskov road going off in that direction. (If you could move your backside just four inches, Virchov——) Now, that is the position of the stores-huts, just behind Virchov's epiphysis. . . ."

The rain still swept the station like a scourge of silver cords, striking a dreary rataplan on the iron roof of the Mess, and when I went outside I found the path a chain of puddles from which the overflow ran like a mountain stream towards the road. Hurrying towards Barrack F, where I had promised to massage a Cossack's thigh, I saw that two wagons were loading up with men to renew the hunt at Chotnje. The wagons had no covers; the men, forty or more to each, huddled together like sheep in a dipping-pen, were protecting themselves as best they could with sacks and blankets, while some, already soaked to the skin and completely ignoring the downpour, were rolling cigarettes with their wet hands and trying heroically to light them. But few were less than patient, and the greater part wore a sly cheerfulness, like schoolboys when their class is to be taken by a feckless teacher. The day was poor for a country excursion, but it was an outing all the same, with nothing to pay but the tedium of bearing a slung rifle for a few hours through the dripping woods. Before I had got to 'F' the first wagon overtook me, sprinkling my coat with liquid mud as it jerked and plunged through the flooded pot-holes, and across the spray I saw men waving their caps hilariously. A shout answered them from the door of one of the huts, and I caught the words *"Karamachik! Doloi Vestil!"* But when I went inside I found the men quiet, secretive, perhaps a little anxious. "There will be troops coming from Paulskov?" one man asked me in an undertone. He was a Finn, a modest, grey fellow of forty or so, recovering from dysentery and still in some pain. "We shall all get punished," he said knowingly, "whether we signed that paper or not. They'll never let us go home now, and I've a child in Savitaipale that I've never seen." He moved himself awkwardly and produced a crumpled envelope from underneath his tumbled bedclothes. "There!" he said, showing me the streaky photograph of a stodgy baby. "He weighed ten pounds at birth, it took my wife nine hours." At the farther end of the hut another man was equally unhappy; the rain coming through the boards had ruined his picture, an elaborate representation of The Marriage in Cana which he had done on the wall with coloured crayons. But in the next barrack they were quietly cheerful: something must happen now, and any happen-

ing was welcome if it broke the monotony. "I have been here nine months," a little fat southerner said, "waiting for this to grow again." He pointed to his right leg, which finished just below the knee. "Nine months, four of them with nothing but the snow to look at, and now this eternal rain. The same wall in front of me when I wake up, the same smell every day, the same bloody row of huts to look at. I'm a man of education, Vashe Blagorodie, in my ordinary life I sell the tramway tickets at Slavianoserbsk; that's a job you have to use your wits at. How can I keep my brain in health at a place like this? I tell you—though I'd have no hand in it—there'd be no tears in my eyes if the whole place was burnt out. They'll send us all to a prison in Petersburg, no doubt; but I don't mind, it'll be a change. . . ." I did not stay long in that barrack, for it sheltered men too lazy in wet weather to visit the latrines. But the literatus hobbled beside me as far as the door—he was always one of the friendliest—and we stood together for a few moments watching the bent figures which scuttled from hut to hut through the streaming rain. "It would serve them right!" he said in an angry undertone; and then addressing me, with a little smile: "At Paulskov they'll be talking about us people here. Avos! Something will happen soon."

§

Apparently the Paulskov genius for ignoring Mariki's internal affairs was not yet exhausted; or else, as Virchov suggested, Vestil had once again resorted to his favourite policy of *dolce far niente* and had kept his mouth shut. Certainly Vestil was more remote than ever; he would only see Grassogi, at whom he snapped routine orders; but the Paulskov mind, as we learnt by degrees, was not without other occupation. The unremitting rain which we believed to be our own peculiar affliction was in reality the northern wing-tip of a barrage spread from Polpetz to the plateau of Goldeslav; and the Oser, already charged from the January thaw, had stretched its waters over both its banks to make a lake of several thousand dissiatines. Whether three thousand men had drowned, as one report declared, or only a hundred or two, was not yet ascertained; but it was plain enough, even to our vague understanding of Sluchevskiev's plans, that the thrust on which he had lavished so much patient preparation was defunct at birth. That was unremarkable, for Russia's worst enemy was always the caprices of her weather; and the greater part of Sluchevskiev's rear division was now to be raced across to the punch-bowl at Jawzedoc, where Von Freyse, relieved of anxiety on his southwest flank, would inevitably concentrate and

try to thrust his northern line within striking distance of Ronsk-Velt. In theory the transfer was simple. But the railway bridge west of Propod-Czerveen had been mysteriously destroyed, the traffic moving north from Degrubir was in hopeless confusion, and the only feasible line of march for the transferred troops lay through Paulskov itself: Paulskov, where, after the Herculean task of receiving and passing on the whole of Bolgorouki's new divisions in the space of nineteen days, they had just begun to sit back and take their breath. Now the narrow streets were choked again, this time with men who moved in the opposite direction: men who looked as if they had just swum the Oser in their clothes, who were hungry and anything but docile, who, in their extreme of wretchedness, were as ready to force and rob a general's house as a dressmaker's. Their own supplies were spread along some twenty versts of the road from Ignateni, where one wagon lurched into the bed of slime from which its predecessor had been laboriously extracted; and they trusted, after the manner of soldiers, to find in Paulskov a land of plenty. But the milk and honey of Paulskov had, by gigantic labours, been squeezed away to slake the ravenous appetite of Bolgorouki's army, and its commisariat were now hard put to feed the standing troops and the civil population. They were specially short of fuel. And the men streaming into the town, finding no fires at which to dry themselves, made their own remedy by lighting a street of wooden houses which faced the canal. It was said that the men responsible for this had got hold of spirits; and that as the houses blazed a crowd of them stood screaming ribaldries at the agony of people trapped in the upper storeys; but that may not be true. "In this emergency," the official narrative records, "many units became disorganized, and some time elapsed before they were restored to proper order." For three days, in actual fact, the town was prey to troops who wandered about in bands of twenty or thirty, sometimes more, singing bawdy songs, dragging their rifles by the slings and using them when anyone was rash enough to lock his door against them; in that time most of the women kept to cellars or hiding-places in the attics; and one Narikentsi, who was there at the time with the Chenstokhovski Battalion, has told me that he saw an aged Jew being hanged from his own top window, with two young officers looking on, because he had concealed a few puds of potatoes. Lyublinov himself (of whose quality as a soldier I formed a high impression on the one occasion when I met him) was reported as saying: "It's no good, we can but let them drag their tethers for a day or two. After that, my dear Vroskov, we shall shoot one or two in the square here, and that'll knock sense into the bastards." Like most very simple plans

this one succeeded, helped by a supply-train which miraculously came through from Bruletzau; but success was slow; and while, to the east of Jawzedoc, Dersevil's army was holding on by the teeth against Von Freyse's growing force, one hopeful eye turned westward, the corporals of the Chenstokhovsi were still patrolling in the Paulskov alleys after men who had found a taste for independence and liked to sing their new, strange songs. With us, at Mariki, it seemed to be strange that our turbulence was so long disregarded. But I came to realize, as the news reached us in chips and patches, that Mariki was a little out of the Paulskov focus in those rainy days.

While in Petrograd, we understood, the public mind was so concerned with wheat and politics that the war was forgotten altogether.

19

After one of his talks with Vestil, Grassogi became aloof and mysterious; he was subject, poor fellow, to fits of self-importance; and a little afterwards a number of N.C.O.s was detached "for special duties," their place being taken by picked men, mostly of the Izmailovski, who were understood to have been drafted from the emergency establishment at Bruletzau. To me it seemed to argue some fundamental error in conception that soldiers of such quality should be detailed to guard a rubbish-dump, at a time when competent under-officers were so desperately needed in the line. But the feeling in the Mess was that Lyublinov had at last begun to take us seriously, and that was cause for thanksgiving. Also the rain had stopped.

In the barracks the development did not seem so popular. One of the new sergeants disappeared after only two days' duty, and was ultimately found in a bog some three versts away from the station. His head, as even Bestushev could see, had been hacked to shapelessness by many blows from the butt of a rifle; and no one could throw the smallest light on the matter.

§

A big car came out from Paulskov and an officer in the uniform of the Preobrazhenski went in to see Vestil. He was there for twenty minutes and then went back. Grassogi was interviewed that evening and subsequently had another attack of pompous secretiveness. No amount of chaffing would make him tell us anything.

Next day the car arrived again, important greatcoats were seen

hurrying across into Vestil's office. And a little later I, instead of Grassogi, was sent for. "I think you write shorthand, Captain?" Vestil said when he had introduced me. "I shall be obliged if you'll take minutes of this conversation—General Lyublinov will want six copies and I shall want three. Yes, if you'll sit at that table. . . ."

He himself sat at one end of the big desk with his hands folded on his chest; a little too polite, his smile a little too easy. Lyublinov, short and paunchy, had his shoulders against the back of his chair, which he had pushed to the window, and his fingers linked behind it; his fat thighs spread wide, his chin, the shape of a chestnut, implanted in a fold of his tunic. As if he intended to take no part in the discussion he stared gloomily at the floor in front of him, his eyes counting the lozenges on the worn oilcloth. His A.D.C. Odoevski, a large, intelligent creature whose grooming proclaimed the Nikolaievski Academy, was plainly in charge of the proceedings; he sat up to the desk with his elbows on the blotting paper and rolled a fountain-pen between his palms. He was saying, in the slightly precious voice of the Petersburg Quarter ". . . but I expect you get some shooting of a sort, Colonel, in the woods over there?"

"Not only shooting," Lyublinov said, without the smallest change of expression. "They also bang one another over the head with the butts of their guns.

Vestil laughed politely. Seated on Odoevski's left, Colonel Brugge, Director of Establishment at Paulskov, blew impatiently through his nostrils; neither his Alexander beard nor the meticulous correctness of his speech did anything to hide his none-too-distant origin, and I read in his eyes: "These Russians, they are always talking, they are always too mystical to get on with anything." He held himself erect with his hands beside him as if he were on parade; and whenever Odoevski glanced towards him, asking him to confirm a statement or opinion, he said "Quite! Exactly!" with the air of one enduring an awkward child.

Odoevski's voice went on with the fluent grace of a ballerina picking buttercups. "Yes, it has been a trying sort of winter, I myself find this rain so depressing. And don't you feel sorry for poor Sluchevskiev?—he had his dispositions worked out so very skilfully, I thought the Oser movement looked most promising. It's fourteen years, they say, since the river was really in spate."

Vestil, fiddling with a sheaf of papers, said "Indeed? I hadn't realized that." And then, abruptly: "I'm afraid I have no new information for you, gentlemen. I have Captain Grassogi's report here, if you care to see it, but it adds nothing to what I've told Colonel Brugge already. As you know, the sergeant was last seen by another

N.C.O. as he was going into Barrack H, on the north side of the road, where the men are Orenburg Cossacks. The men admit that he came in there, but they say that he went out again five minutes afterwards. The barrack has been inspected again this morning. . . ."

Odoevski, whose eyes had been shut, suddenly opened them. "One moment, Colonel, if I may interrupt! I think that perhaps our most useful line of procedure would be to consider whether the sergeant's murder was an isolated act of personal hatred, or whether it was symptomatic of a general feeling against the new N.C.O.s." He looked both ways for support, and Lyublinov grunted assent. "I mean, the murder itself was—comparatively—unimportant. Of course, good sergeants are scarce, I realize that—I wouldn't for all the world offend Colonel Brugge here (ha! ha!) by saying that a picked sergeant of the Izmailovski counts for nothing (ha! ha!). But you'll understand me, Colonel Vestil, when I say that if the man was murdered as the result of a general impatience of authority (I wouldn't go so far as to say 'a spirit of mutiny'), that would be much more serious than if it was only the consequence of a private animosity. Would you agree with me there?"

Vestil nodded gloomily. I could see already that he detested Odoevski, who, on top of being unduly handsome, was an infantryman. He said:

"Still, I should rather like to know who did it."

Odoevski smiled. "But of course, Colonel! I think we should all like to. My idea is that if we can once dispose of the possibility that the crime was committed as part of a general policy of—what shall I say?—intransigeance, then we can proceed towards discovering some cause of private malice which must lie behind it. Would you think that logical, Brugge?"

"Exactly! Precisely!"

"Of course"—he had turned to Vestil again—"I have no reason whatever for thinking that there is any such troublesome spirit at Mariki-Matesk. I simply make the suggestion because we have heard so much lately of what may be called 'seasonal melancholia' in several divisions. In fact, we've been rather conscious of it in handling the transfer of General Sluchevskiev's troops—in my opinion it's just a reflection of the high political temperature which you always find inside any country in wartime. Have you been aware of anything—that one might describe——?"

Vestil still hesitated, sponging each lip with the other. Then he said abruptly: "I'm not sure if we really need take up Captain Otraveskov's time. I myself shall be able——"

Lyublinov looked up for the first time. "Let the boy stay!" he said; and to me: "Only for God's sake don't fidget."

Rather to my surprise Vestil suddenly turned to me. "Would you say, Otraveskov, that there's been any general restlessness in the station?"

That was a risky question, but I gave him the answer he had gambled for:

"It's hard to say, sir. Of course, morale must suffer to some extent from a long period of idleness——"

"Must it?" said Lyublinov. "A long period of idleness would improve my 'morale'—if you must use such expressions—like a bucket of brandy."

"But I see what Captain Otraveskov means," Odoevski said, as soon as the regulation chuckle was over. "I've always maintained that long periods away from the line do more harm to discipline than anything."

As if taking a pre-arranged cue, Brugge pulled a slip of paper out of his pocket, glanced at it, and said: "I have a note that a third draft of approximately four hundred men was to be sent from here to Propod-Czerveen on the fifteenth instant. I have no record that that was carried out. . . ."

Odoevski smiled. "When Colonel Brugge gets to Heaven," he said, "the Recording Angel will retire in his favour. You have no idea, Colonel Vestil, what marvellous records he keeps. . . ."

Without showing any gratitude for the moment's respite, Vestil said coldly, addressing Lyublinov: "No doubt you remember, sir, that I sent you a memorandum on that matter?"

Lyublinov shook his head. "No," he said affably, "no, I don't remember. What was in the memorandum?"

Vestil stretched to one of his drawers. "I have a copy here. . . ." But apparently the paper had got out of place. "I'm sorry . . ." he began.

"At any rate you can give us the gist of it," Lyublinov said.

For just a second Vestil closed his eyes. Then: "I would rather you saw the original memorandum, sir—I will have a new copy sent you. . . . My own estimate of the situation" (his eyes had shifted towards Odoevski) "is that the spirit in the station remains good enough on the whole—naturally. I am always preoccupied with that question. On the other hand, it's plain enough that there are dangerous elements here; I think you know already that two men have deserted——"

"I don't think we need trouble too much over two deserters."

Odoevski interposed, with the dawn of a smile. "If it were two hundred——"

"As long as the matter is properly recorded——" Brugge said anxiously.

"And there is the firing of the stores-huts," Vestil continued. "That notice which I showed you may have been just a joke, a very silly joke——"

Lyublinov pushed himself up a little in his chair and noisily bored an airhole through the phlegm in his windpipe. "So your idea," he said heavily, "is that the same man, or small group of men, is responsible for all these little troubles?"

"Exactly, sir!"

Lyublinov yawned. "They must have been pretty busy," he said. "One day they desert, the next day they set fire to your huts, the next they collect a sergeant of the Izmailovsk and bang his head into a pudding."

"Oh, I'm not suggesting, sir, that the deserters were responsible for the other two outrages."

"Neither am I, neither am I!" Lyublinov said agreeably. "I may be just as big a fool as Odoevski thinks I am, but I don't believe in soldiers turning into poltergeists."

Seizing his opportunity, Odoevski daintily picked up the reins. "I take it, Colonel Vestil, that you haven't been able to fasten on any particular man or men? If you had, of course——"

"Unfortunately, no. A man called Karamachik gave me some trouble, but he's been under confinement during the period of the outrages."

Odoevski nodded. "Karamachik, yes—that's the man referred to on that paper you showed us, is it not?"

"Er—yes."

"Then supposing that, as you suggest, the various misdemeanours have all been the work of the same man, or group, I suppose our first business is to find out who were Karamachik's chief associates——?"

Brugge, glancing at his wrist-watch, said shortly, "That would be my plan."

"I have already——" Vestil began.

"Why has that fellow been locked up?" Lyublinov suddenly demanded.

Vestil hesitated, and a nervous movement of his fingers would alone have told me that the discussion was not going at all as he wanted. He said almost brusquely: "It was a case of insubordination, sir. Knowing the man's character——"

"But you don't keep a man locked up indefinitely for insubordination!"

Vestil stiffened. With a rather tart dignity, which I felt to be justified, he said: "I should be sorry, sir, to be accused of undue severity. The command of this kind of establishment, with all its heterogeneous elements, is not a very easy job. No doubt you realize that sick men get out of hand much more quickly than those who are fit, and if I——"

Seeing that Lyublinov had shut his eyes again, Odoevski said quickly: "I'm sure we all realize that, Colonel. Our only wish——"

"But that isn't what Colonel Vestil told us a few minutes ago." Lyublinov spoke without opening his eyes. He had pulled a pinch of tobacco out of his breeches pocket, and I watched with some admiration the neatness of his short, blunt fingers as he tore off a piece of paper and rolled himself a cigarette. "You were telling us, Vestil, that 'the spirit of the station is good enough on the whole.' I took that to mean that you hadn't anything to bother you except these particular troubles. Now you're saying it's a damned difficult station."

"That wasn't exactly my meaning, sir?"

"What precisely was the nature of Karamachik's insubordination?" Odoevski delicately inquired.

Vestil swallowed a spoonful of saliva.

"I think General Lyublinov already knows about that. In my memorandum——"

"No harm in hearing again!" Lyublinov said pleasantly.

Stroking his lower lip, Vestil said slowly: "We have had some difficulty over the four hundred men which I was originally required to send to Propod-Czerveen on the fifteenth——"

"Transport difficulty?" Brugge asked.

"No. No, it was a question of making up the number required."

"You mean," Odoevski asked, "that you had not sufficient men in proper condition?"

I saw Vestil's mouth shaping the word "Yes," but before it was spoken he changed his mind. "We selected approximately three hundred," he said. "That appeared to be the maximum available at the moment, and——"

"And Karamachik was among them?"

"Yes."

"And he refused to go?"

"Yes."

"But on what grounds?"

Again Vestil hesitated, and, forgetting all his laziness and

stupidity, I was momentarily sorry for him. Obviously he had sent for me in the hope that a junior officer's attendance would save him from being pressed too hard; and now, when he was struggling to evade reflection on his competence, my presence was a mere embarrassment. He said cautiously. "Karamachik's attitude, as far as I could understand it——"

Both Odoevski and Brugge raised their eyebrows. "Attitude?"

Lyublinov said carelessly: "Perhaps Captain Otreveskov can help us, if his recollection——"

"Captain Otraveskov was on leave at the time, sir."

"The man's attitude was . . .?" Odoevski pursued.

"As I understand it, he believed that many of the men selected were not medically fit for return to active service, and——"

"But they'd been examined?"

"Of course, yes."

"And the medical report was quite satisfactory?"

"Entirely."

"In other words," Lyublinov broke in impatiently, "the man Karamachik is a common agitator. God knows, and so do you, Odoevski, they're as common these days as bugs in a posting-house. And Colonel Vestil—if I may express my very humble opinion—was quite right to clap the bastard into guard-room."

"I'm glad you take that view, sir."

"And that was the end of the trouble?" Odoevski asked imperturbably.

"No. No, it was not. I asked leave to postpone the despatch of the draft, hoping that the effects of Karamachik's agitation would wear off——"

"And they haven't?" Odoevski asked sympathetically.

"I cannot remember seeing any report of the situation," Brugge said.

Ignoring Brugge rather pointedly, Vestil turned to Lyublinov. "I want you to understand, sir, what my position has been. I was asked originally to supply a thousand men. They were very urgently required. I was able to get off some six hundred in the course of a few days—which I felt to be a fairly creditable performance on the part of everyone concerned, considering the conditions under which we work here—and I was exceedingly anxious to fulfil the balance of the requisition as soon as I could. Then this trouble cropped up, but I still hoped that by making Karamachik sorry for himself I should get things put right very shortly. (Captain Otraveskov will tell you that I talked the matter over with him on several occasions.) And knowing the pressure under which you work at Paulskov, I

wanted to avoid troubling you as long as I could; I've always been accustomed to surmounting my own difficulties, and I saw no reason why I shouldn't get this matter under proper control by firmness and perseverance. As you know, I got rid of certain N.C.O.s whom I distrusted and Colonel Brugge supplied me with men to replace them. It was only when one of these was brutally murdered that I felt justified in asking you for special assistance."

That statement, disingenuous as it was, sounded so manly and straightforward that I could not think why he hadn't made it in the first place. But Odoevski, with no sign of being impressed, asked with bleak politeness:

"And—what form of special assistance do you think we can give you now, Colonel?"

Retaliating, Vestil said cautiously: "I was hoping that you—perhaps—might have some suggestion."

There was a pause which lasted for at least three seconds. Then it was Brugge who said, with the air of a Jew quoting his lowest price:

"I can't supply any more sergeants."

Lyublinov shifted in his chair, yawned, stretched, and turned his knuckles in his eye-pits.

"This man Karamachik," he said, "I should like to see him."

I saw at once that Vestil was dead against this proposal. "I rather think, sir," he said, "that if you bring Karamachik in here he may get an exaggerated idea of his own importance."

"I doubt it, Colonel, I doubt it!" Lyublinov said amiably. "It seems to me his importance would be rather hard to exaggerate."

§

I had not seen Karamachik before, and my rough mental picture had been quite different from the man as he really was. You could see at a glance that he was a townsman (actually he came from Kazan) and I should have put him down as a skilled labourer, perhaps a foreman in a factory. He was fifty or so, on the short side, and the poorness of his physique was such that the Mariki diet would not alone account for it: the chest wretchedly small and hollow, the legs slightly bowed, the arms hung loosely from drooping shoulders. But his small hands looked as strong and subtle as a weaver's, and his head, North-European, spare in flesh, large-browed, had something of a scholar's dignity. He wore the dirt which you almost always find on solitary prisoners; his face had been wiped over, but it carried not less than a full day's growth of dark brown beard, his

neck was filthy and splashed with bugsores, his hair long at the back; yet he looked neither cowed nor excited, his brown eyes were steady and slightly scornful, his lips kept fast together like a livery-servant's even when he smiled. When Mariosik, who had brought him in, pushed him roughly against the wall, Karamachik glanced at him sharply; and the look, I thought, was contemptuous, not angry.

Odoevski began at once to ask him questions. "Your name is Karamachik? . . . You have served how long? . . . You were wounded where? . . . In the groin, yes, but I mean—at what part of the front? . . . You have been at Mariki-Matesk how long?" But in half a minute Lyublinov interrupted:

"We know you took part in the nineteen-five disorders. You were at Skargizka, I think."

That was to rash a guess, I thought; and I waited for a blank denial. Karamachik, however, answered quite calmly:

"No, Vashe Prevoskhoditelstvo, it was at Kishineff. I helped to fire a granary there."

Lyublinov nodded as if that were exactly the answer he expected.

"Was that known when you joined the army?" he asked, as one gentleman chatting to another.

"No, sir."

"You were enlisted when?"

"In nineteen-thirteen. The Keksgolinski."

"Voluntarily?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

Karamachik smiled.

"I found it convenient."

("Answer the General properly!" Mariosik grunted.)

"For yourself or your political aspirations?"

"For myself."

"You've been in prison?"

"Three years at Kieff, four at Petrograd."

"And also in Germany?"

"That was not the same thing, sir. I was well treated there."

"You like the Germans?"

"On the whole, yes."

"They liked you?"

"On the whole, no."

"But they gave you some work to do?"

"Work?"

"I mean in Russia. They said: 'All right, Brother Karamachik, you can go back to Russia now, but we'd like you to do a little job

for us, some quiet propaganda.' It was arranged like that, wasn't it? You were to receive a series of credit notes which could be cashed in roubles through an agent in Rega—that's how the scheme works, isn't it?"

Karamachik looked at the General as a schoolmaster at an abnormally stupid child.

"Do you really think," he said, "that if I was in German pay I should be such a bloody fool as to make my intentions so clear that even the Colonel there could understand them?"

Mariosik struck him under the ribs with his elbow. "Here, you, who d'you think you're talking to? Put your feet together!"

"All right, Sergeant, all right!" Lyublinov said pacifically. "Our prisoner is really very logical. . . . But"—addressing Karamachik—"if you aren't getting paid to be an infernal nuisance in this station, why, man, in the name of heaven, do you do it?"

Karamachik smiled again. "I'm afraid I should only be wasting your time, and that of these gentlemen. I don't expect people of your upbringing to understand such things as humanity, justice. . . ."

(Mariosik: "Careful now, you!")

Still unprovoked, Lyublinov said: "No, well, perhaps not. No, people like myself, whose only business in life is to get the finest there is out of human beings and use it to the highest common advantage, we, no doubt, know nothing about humanity at all. Or justice either, since that is what we're all fighting for. (Captain Otraveskov, will you please for God's sake stop writing down every word I say! I'm not addressing the Duma.) However, you do admit, then, that you've been making all the trouble you can in this station?"

"No, sir. The trouble was ready-made."

"Stop quibbling!" Vestil said.

"At any rate," Lyublinov continued, "you admit that you refused an order to go to Propod-Czerveen, and persuaded others to refuse as well?"

"No, sir."

"What?"

"We were willing to go under certain conditions."

"What conditions?"

"We wanted to go under the charge of a particular officer."

"What officer?"

"Lieutenant Scheffler."

Lyublinov glanced questioningly toward Vestil.

"I can produce three hundred witnesses," Karamachik said quietly.

"That was an expedient," Vestil said briefly. From the rigidity of his body I could see that he was intensely nervous.

Lyublinov nodded, and at once turned back to Karamachik.

"Why Lieutenant Scheffler?"

Karamachik closed his eyes for a moment.

"We trusted him," he said simply.

"All right," Lyublinov said. "Sergeant, you can take this man away now; but I may want him back again."

"Very good, sir. Prisoner, right turn!"

"Oh—Sergeant! When was he last fed?"

"Last night, I believe, sir."

"Well, give him something now. Coffee—and some meat if you can get hold of it."

"Very good, sir. Prisoner, quick march!"

The door closed. Lyublinov turned to Vestil.

"This Lieutenant Scheffler . . .?"

Vestil scraped his lower lip with his teeth. "A difficult officer!" he said thoughtfully. "He is—well, the last man I should have chosen if I could have picked my own staff for running this station. But of course I had to take everything as I found it; Scheffler was one of the hundred problems that have come to me, and I've been hoping—well, to make a soldier of him. Frankly, I can't say I've got very far."

Brugge was running his middle finger down one of the foolscap sheets which he seemed to carry in every pocket of his uniform.

"Lieutenant Scheffler . . ." he said. "That is Count Anton Antonovitch Scheffler? Age, forty-three. Formerly barrister, St. Petersburg."

Odoevski shut his eyes for a moment and then turned to Lyublinov.

"Do you remember, sir, the trial of a man called Zvetzkov? Nineteen-ten, I think."

"No, I don't."

"Count Scheffler, if I remember rightly, was the defending counsel."

"Oh, a radical?"

"Probably."

Lyublinov rubbed the balls of his thumbs together. "Well well, radicalism is like adultery, it has become so commonplace that it's quite ostentatious not to go in for it."

Odoevski nodded; he really could not laugh once more at that aphorism. "But I think," he said, "that it's best left at home with one's civilian clothes."

"That is my own opinion," Vestil said crisply.

"You don't mean by that," Lyublinov asked, "that this fellow Scheffler is talking politics among the men?"

"Well—I wouldn't say that."

"Why didn't you put him in charge of the draft, if the men wanted it? He'd only got to get them as far as Propod-Czerveen."

"You mean, sir, you think I should have given way to their demands? As a matter of principle, I thought——"

"Scheffler was willing to go?"

"Well—he made a great deal of difficulty."

"Oh?"

"He was over-ready to listen to the men's grievances. He——"

"Grievances? What grievances?"

Picking his words, Vestil said: "This Karamachik that you've just seen had persuaded some of the men selected for the draft that they were not physically fit for service; and on top of that, the idea had got about that some of them were to have a spell of leave before beginning further duties. The men in question, of course, were very ready to believe anyone who——"

"And Scheffler supported that view?"

"As far as I could gather from what he said to me, he did."

"Perhaps we'd better see Lieutenant Scheffler?" Odoevski suggested.

"One minute!" Lyublinov was regarding Vestil's face rather as if it were an interesting stretch of scenery. "You haven't made any report on this matter to me, Colonel Vestil?"

"I considered it a purely domestic matter, sir."

I saw (but I don't think Vestil did) that Lyublinov's eyes opened a little wider.

"But you wouldn't object to Scheffler being brought in here?" he asked.

For a moment Vestil held his lips together. Then: "I don't think you'd learn anything from him that I haven't told you, sir."

As he said that I looked hard towards him, hoping that he would catch my eye; but he was far too alert to let that happen. Lyublinov pulled a long thread from the frayed sleeve of his tunic and wound it round his little finger; for the first time, as I judged, he did not see his way ahead quite clearly.

"Suppose," he said slowly, "suppose I were to relieve you of Lieutenant Scheffler's services?—Brugge, I'm quite sure, could find a job for him, something that would enable him to concentrate on his own grievances."

Brugge performed the seemingly impossible feat of smiling.

"I confess," said Vestil, "I should be relieved and grateful."

"And Karamachik," Lyublinov said, "you could find a job for him, no doubt, Brugge?"

"There is always the Romanov railway," Brugge said sedately.

"And with those two gentlemen off your hands, Vestil, everything would proceed quite smoothly?"

"I shouldn't care to be too positive, sir."

Lyublinov switched his eyes across to me.

"What do you think, Captain?"

Obeying the rule that you should speak the truth when you have no time to think of anything better, I said: "I am quite certain that things wouldn't improve. Certainly we shouldn't get that contingent off to Propod-Czerveen."

He turned to Brugge. "Is it of vital importance to get this pocketful of men off to Propod?"

Odoevski, perhaps a little vexed at being shouldered out of the discussion, said shortly: "As a matter of principle, surely! Since the order's been given. . . ."

"One can countermand orders," Lyublinov said reflectively.

"And leave the agitators with a clear victory? What happens when the time does come for using these men? I mean, sir, they can't stay here enjoying a rest-cure indefinitely. . . . Of course I'm only saying how it appears to me. . . ."

"I don't remember asking how it appeared to you," Lyublinov said lazily. ". . . But since you're so bright today, Odoevski—how would you tackle it? I mean, without having one flaming hell of a mutiny in this rag-shop, which at the present moment would be highly inconvenient?"

Odoevski smiled thinly, his eyes drifting away towards a corner of the ceiling. He said, with that humility of tone which comes from complete self-confidence: "I should have thought, sir, that we might regard this Lieutenant Scheffler as the key-man to the whole situation. Karamachik, as I understand the fellow, is relying on Scheffler as his main support. If Scheffler throws him over, and we act quickly, Karamachik will be left to bellow against the north wind. . . . My own feeling is that if Scheffler had been handled rather more—shall I say?—arbitrarily in the first place, the present situation might have been avoided."

I saw Brugge glance at Vestil and cough. Vestil said in a low voice:

"Yes, in theory it was all perfectly easy. I've no doubt that any other officer would have managed things much more ably. Unfortunately I was trained as a cavalry commander, not as the matron of a hospital."

Lyublinov struck his hands together sharply. *"Pzzt! Attendez mes enfants, taisez-vous, taisez-vous!* Odoevski, my dear Vestil, is a

very irritating fellow. Often I could spank him. . . . But he has quite sensible ideas, quite sensible. And I think—yes, I think he's right in saying that this Scheffler of yours seems to be our main stumbling-block. Yes, I think so. I think we shall have to put our heads together and see if we can't persuade Lieutenant Scheffler that being a soldier at Mariki-Matesk is not quite the same thing as being a lawyer in Petrograd. Don't you think that's a good idea?"

For the first time in several minutes, Vestil glanced at me; and I saw that he was asking for my help. "We are allies in this"—that is how I read his glance—"You don't want Scheffler brought in because he's your friend; and I don't, for my own reasons." But he had guessed my thoughts wrongly; for Anton was already far out in a dangerous tide, and to stay unheard would not advantage him. I looked away, and I heard Vestil saying awkardly:

"Scheffler is not—very well at present."

"How much less well he will be," Lyublinov said cheerfully, "by the time we've done with him!"

§

Mariosik was sent to ask for Lieutenant Scheffler's attendance—that was how they put it—and I think we must have waited ten or twelve minutes before he came. Those few minutes have remained more lively in my recollection than any other of that long morning, chiefly for their silence, in which sensation always graves your mind most deeply; and I associate that interval with one in my student days, when a group of us waited at a corner of the Lubomirski gardens, in a misty daybreak, for two of our friends who had fallen out at card-play and must needs establish their integrity with swords. In this small, shabby room, where riding-boots and box-files stood together along the wall, there was the same quietness, the same sensible impatience. None of us looked at another openly. Lyublinov, who had slid a long way forward in his chair and undone the two top buttons of his breeches, had his eyes almost closed; but as he opened his mouth in a prodigious yawn I saw him glance with interest at Vestil, who, with his head bent forward, was rubbing a finger-nail with the concentration of a chaser. Odoevski, with his fingers placed episcopally together, was faintly smiling, as if he recalled a successful stroke of wit; while Brugge, restless at losing so much time, had spread a staff-list on the desk in front of him and was making little angry ticks with his fountain-pen. Somewhere in the room there was a constant tapping, like that of a telegraph-transmitter, and I noticed after a time that it came from Vestil's

heel. In myself I was conscious of no nervousness at all; and it surprised me when I saw that my pencil-point had sketched a shaggy mane across the note-pad on my knees. Of the few words spoken I only remember that Lyublinov asked me if Scheffler was a friend of mine. I answered, "Yes." But he did not send me away.

When I heard Anton's step outside I turned my head, and as he opened the door he saw me. He smiled, and in that brief look I saw that nothing which happened here could hurt our friendship. Then, more soldierly than I had seen him heretofore, he came into the room as if coming on parade, and saluted, and stood at attention. From that point on I saw his face only in profile; he looked tired, but no more ill than usual—he had never a robust appearance. He was decently groomed, and serious, and wholly at his ease.

"You will please sit down, Lieutenant Scheffler," Lyublinov said, examining him as he had examined Vestil, through the slit beneath his lowered eyelids. "This, I may say, is a conversation—it is not a court of any kind." His voice was far more dry than when he had spoken to Karamachik. "You will appreciate that distinction?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right. . . . I believe that in civil life you were a lawyer of some kind? . . . But perhaps your studies have not included that of military law?"

"I am tolerably conversant with military law."

"Oh? You realize, then, the penalties attached to direct disobedience to an order?"

"Perfectly, sir."

I glanced at Vestil and saw that he was relaxing. Lyublinov knew how to handle this man, and would give him no chance to vent his general grievances; while, on the other hand, the cocksure Odoevski might realize within five minutes the kind of problem Vestil had had to deal with. Yes, this interview might shape to great advantage after all. . . .

Lyublinov pulled his chair forward and leant his chest against the table.

"On the other hand," he said deliberately, "you probably do not realize the cardinal distinction between civil and military modes of conduct. You, I understand, are a man of individual views—very interesting views, I expect, perhaps very sound views; and if I, and the rest of us here, were all members of the same club in Petrograd —shall we say—I've no doubt that we should listen to those views of yours with great interest, possibly with benefit to ourselves. Now in the Russian army, which is an old and rather valorous organization—a society, I may say, which cherishes its traditions no less de-

voutly than any legal society—in the army we allow our members to hold what views they like and we respect the holding of them. But we have one simple rule: that personal ideas and philosophies must never interfere with the plain duties of loyalty and obedience. That rule applies to all of us, and it has to be enforced on those who do not understand it as much as on those who do. It's a rule without which this or any other army could not exist; and it has, if possible, an even greater importance at a time when we are struggling for our nation's very life against the most resolute and brilliant fighting force which has ever been brought into operation in the course of the world's history." He was looking, as he spoke, not toward Anton but at some point on the wall behind my head. He spoke slowly, with a marked drawl, not the conventional drawl of a Dragoon, but the natural, lazy slurring of the Georgia landed farmers; and to me that homeliness of accent made what he said far more impressive. "Let me give you an example of how that principle works out. Not long ago you were given a certain order which you disobeyed, because it ran counter to your private theories of conduct; you disobeyed it without knowing anything of the genesis, the necessity of that order; and your disobedience was known throughout this nation. What is the result? They have come to think—the many ignorant soldiers quartered here—that the rule of obedience has been abrogated, or at least devalued; if an officer treats orders lightly, they can do the same. With that, discipline goes to the winds. Men run off into the forest, where in all probability they have lost themselves and starved. Valuable stores are senselessly destroyed. And finally a man of great intelligence and fine character is brutally, hideously murdered. That is the kind of thing that happens when you weaken the law on which the structure of an army is propped; and we professional soldiers, who have devoted our lives to the understanding of these things, know that it will happen. You, belonging to a different kind of society, a different mode of life, did not know it. The demonstration has come too late. But perhaps you will realize, when next you are considering your position in this unfamiliar brotherhood, that it's wiser to regard the experience of others when you have none of your own. . . . Have you followed me?"

"Closely, sir."

Lyublinov filled his mouth with saliva and wetted his lips.

"Now," he said, "coming to the practical point: I take it that you would be willing—supposing that I decided to treat this matter in an irregular and lenient way—to sign a paper admitting in unqualified terms that you refused to obey Colonel Vestil's order?"

Without hesitation, and with a certain emphasis, Anton said:

"Quite willing, sir."

"And further," Lyublinov pursued, "to declare frankly that your action was entirely irresponsible and in the highest degree culpable?"

"No, sir."

Lyublinov opened his eyes.

"What did you say?"

"I said 'No,' sir." He spoke in a voice that was quite expressionless, like that of a sergeant reading the day's orders from typescript. "You have told me," he continued, "that a soldier is allowed to have his own opinions, and that those opinions are respected. My opinion is that my action was neither cupable nor irresponsible. It is impossible for me to sign a statement to the opposite effect. I am, on the other hand, ready to state why I disobeyed the order."

I do not think that the way he said that could have been called insubordinate. It was simply a way quite foreign to these surroundings, the way of a man who recognized nothing as more important than cold exactitude. Lyublinov, I think, was aware of that. Certainly he showed no sign of anger. It was Vestil who angrily shifted his chair, and made, as I think, his one serious blunder.

"You have not been asked," Vestil said tersely, "why you disobeyed the order."

Lyublinov slowly turned his head, as if to rub a neck-itch with his collar. "I think, Colonel Vestil," he said mellifluously, "that I am conducting this interview.—I have already explained to you, Lieutenant Scheffler, or tried to explain, that I am not interested in why you disobeyed the order. The only fact which has the smallest practical importance is that you did disobey it. However, if you feel that you're being treated unfairly (which you are certainly not) I'm ready to hear what your reason was, if you can put it briefly. But I haven't time to hear the whole of your philosophic attitude to life. . . . Well?"

As if he had been given a precise maximum allowance of words, and was counting them out, Anton said slowly:

"The men selected were not fit for active service."

With the air of a patient man hard-tried, Lyublinov said simply:

"They were not required for active service. They were required for service in support."

For a second Anton did not reply; and then, with a fierceness as startling as if he had slammed a book on the desk, he said:

"Nominally!"

"I beg your pardon?" Lyublinov said mildly.

Precisely now, but with that edged precision which comes of guarded fury, Anton said: "The first two contingents despatched

from here were nominally for service in support. Of those men, the great majority were immediately drafted into fighting units."

Lyublinov turned to Brugge.

"No doubt you can contradict that, Colonel?"

Squeezing his beard as if he were trying to wring out a spoonful of water, Brugge said cautiously: "According to my information a certain proportion of those men, on re-examination by the medical staff at Propod, proved fit for service in the line, and these accordingly. . . ."

Lyublinov nodded. "A certain proportion, naturally——"

Anton said quietly: "Approximately seventy-eight per cent."

Ignoring him, Lyublinov asked: "And you say, Colonel, that those men were re-examined?"

"Oh yes, I think so."

"On the station platform?" Anton asked sharply. "All in the space of three hours?"

Lyublinov rapped the table. "Lieutenant Scheffler! Everything you say goes to show me that you still have a completely wrong conception of military duty. What happened to those men at Propod-Czerveen is nothing to do with you or anyone else at Mariki. It was the concern of no one but the officer under whose command they were placed, and he was fully entitled to use his discretion."

"Without reference to the international law regarding the employment of repatriated prisoners?"

Taken unawares, Lyublinov glanced toward Odoevski for enlightenment.

"Very vague!" Odoevski said judicially. "The international convention is extremely vague."

I saw Anton smiling, as Solovyov might have smiled at a school boy explaining for his benefit the art of prosody. And Lyublinov saw him smiling too.

"However," he said quickly, "we are not talking about anything which may have happened to two previous consignments at Propod-Czerveen. We are talking about the despatch of the third consignment. You have told me, Lieutenant, that you considered the men unfit for service. And I tell you that your private opinion on the subject was—not—of—any—importance—whatever. Do you understand? The responsibility was that of Colonel Vestil, a distinguished and experienced commander who has already satisfied himself that the men were quite equal to the journey. That being so——"

With deadly politeness, Anton stopped him. "I take the liberty of contradicting. Colonel Vestil had done nothing whatever to satisfy

himself as to the men's condition. He would not even give them a cursory inspection."

With one eye still on Anton, Lyublinov looked sidelong at Vestil, as if to say: "Do you want to answer that?" And Vestil, after a moment's hesitation, said in a voice that was thinly supercilious: "I had an entirely satisfactory report from my senior medical man. I have never heard that it's my business to conduct medical examinations. . . . My business, as I understand it, is to get orders carried out quickly, and——"

"Exactly!" Lyublinov said, a little absently. Then, with faint sarcasm, "Perhaps, Lieutenant, you did not realize that another authority had examined the men?"

"The position," said Anton, his eyes holding Lyublinov's, his voice quite free of stammer, "was that two junior medical officers had emphatically refused to pass some sixty per cent of the men selected. The senior medical officer, Captain Bestushev, then overrode their opinion and passed the whole consignment himself."

"As he had every right to do!" Lyublinov said with finality.

I looked at Vestil, and although he kept quite still his relief was manifest; I could almost hear the guarded breath escaping from his nose. I saw him glance at Anton and then at Lyublinov. not so much with gratitude as with admiration: if only he, Vestil, had treated this Scheffler with equal firmness!

"Have you anything else to say?" Lyublinov asked briskly.

"No, sir, I have stated the whole of my case."

"That being so——" Lyublinov began, and paused. "That being so, I must—— You're certain there's no other excuse you can think of?"

He had broken his opponent's guard, it seemed, too quickly; and now he was playing his foil, uncertain how best to strike. I noticed Odoevski making impatient movements with his hands and feet.

Anton said, with the air of one who cramps his papers into a briefcase, and snaps the clasp: "Nothing within my terms of reference, nothing at all."

"May I suggest, sir——?" Odoevski began.

"No you may not!" Lyublinov answered. ". . . Lieutenant Scheffler, you realize, I suppose, that the contingent will be sent—is being sent off tomorrow—under another officer?"

"I had not realized——"

"Well, that is the case. And consequently the only thing achieved by your gesture is a certain amount of delay—a very costly delay—and the waste of several hours of my time. And if you are under the impression that at Paulskov we've nothing to do but kick our

heels, I can only inform you that you're mistaken. . . . It appears now that there is no alternative to bringing you before a court-martial, and it seems to me unlikely that the court will find any reason to mitigate sentence. Do you realize what that means?"

He could not have said that with more terrifying gravity. Instinctively we all turned our eyes to Anton.

"Yes," he said.

Lyublinov nodded. "I am sorry, but I rate your intelligence extremely low. You can go now."

He waited till Anton had reached the door before he called him back.

"Lieutenant Scheffler," he said quietly, "I believe that when you have thought this matter over, in the light of what I've said, you'll realize that your attitude has been childish. Unfortunately I can't give you the time to think it over, I can only give you a last chance now. Listen! I now repeat the order that you are to conduct a contingent to Propod-Czerveen. That will be tomorrow morning. I shall regard your obedience to that order as an admission of your gross misconduct, and I shall then be ready to re-consider my decision. Do you understand?"

Anton hesitated, his mouth moving as if he were trying to feel of alternative sentences. Then he said, quite courteously:

"I understand, sir. But I prefer to let the present plan go through."

At that, for the first time, Lyublinov showed himself really angry.

"What plan?" he snapped.

"That the contingent goes to Propod under another officer."

I looked at Anton's face closely, and I thought I saw a twitch of the eye which was towards me. But that may have been imagination, for his mouth was quite serious, his expression almost sedate.

"You can go now!" Lyublinov said curtly.

At a sign from Odoevski, I followed Anton out into the passage, pulling-to the door behind me. But the catch was weak, like all of them in that ramshackle building, and the door gently swung open again. I heard Lyublinov say, in his thick, dusty voice, "I'm afraid, Colonel Vestil, I really cannot congratulate you. . . ."

20

I heard that afternoon that Karamachik had been released. No one knew why. The General and his satellites had gone back to Paulskov, leaving nothing behind him but the end of a cigarette, which a soldier on fatigue picked up and declared to be fragrant

beyond belief. Anton was still confined to his quarters. Vestil was hardly seen at all; it was understood that Grassogi was in close touch with him, but Grassogi's reticence had become chronic and he seldom came into the Mess. It was felt, with disappointment, that the excitement was over.

"You see," Virchov said, with superficial melancholy, "the powers-that-be have surrendered. They've let that razboinik go scot-free, and they think the other blackguards will be so grateful they'll behave like good children till the end of the war. Well, it's not what they used to teach me about discipline, but who am I to argue with the wisdom that cometh from Paulskov?"

It was not my idea of discipline either, but the method seemed to answer. On the night of Karamachik's release there were rowdy celebrations among the Orenburgs, but no serious damage was done; and for three days following there was no disturbance of any kind. Once I saw Karamachik himself wandering between the huts; he looked forlorn and a little puzzled. Yes, it was working as well as ever, that system of *dolce far niente* which Vestil—praise his name! —had so steadfastly pursued, and which seemed so natural among our soldiers. We heard, in shreds from the drivers of store wagons, that despite Lyublinov's exertions in hurrying new battalions across to Jawzedoc, Von Freyse had cut himself a useful gap and penetrated seven versts or so on a ten-verst front; Von Freyse himself, with men of the "yellow-and-white" division which was supposed to have been cut to bits and trodden a foot below the ground in the hideous massacre of Stepenpolsk a year before. That, no doubt, was enough to occupy the Paulskov mind.

Next afternoon—the fourth, that is, after Karamachik's release— Vestil sent for me. He was friendlier than he had ever been; a little, perhaps, from gratitude, for I had had the chance to injure him severely; and in his tired, gentle manner, his shy embarrassment, I saw now something of a kindliness which in another course of life might have made him the best of men. I did not like him then, I never liked him; but in those few moments the weakness for which I despised him showed almost as a virtue. He should have been a farmer, or the president of a provincial zemstvo, petted and managed by energetic daughters. . . . All he had to ask me now was whether there had been disturbances of any kind in the last few days, whether I had noticed any restlessness. And when I told him that things seemed quieter than before, the men more docile, he said repeatedly, "Are you perfectly sure, Otraveskov, are you quite certain there's been no outbreak of any kind?" Curiously, his tone was almost that of disappointment; and had I used more intelligence

I might have guessed from this that Lyublinov's instructions had been less simple than we supposed. "I don't want to get mixed up in anything that happens," he said at length, "I see no reason why you should be involved." And with that he dismissed me.

The shock came that same evening. In the orders for next day it was stated that the departure for Popod-Czerveen of the contingent selected for auxiliary service, postponed from the 15th instant, would take place tomorrow, the march to begin at eleven o'clock. The following (the list was identical with the original one, with Karamachik's name near the top) would parade with specified equipment at nine o'clock, for inspection by the Station Commandant. The officer to command the contingent would be announced later.

I did not expect that order to be popular; but I was unprepared for its extraordinary effect on the moral temperature of the station. It was read and posted in every barrack between seven and eight o'clock. At half-past eight, when I went to Q barrack to inspect a flooring job I had set them in the morning, I found the door bolted against me. To my thump on the door there was no answer, but I was certain there were men inside; I learnt later on that all the huts were bolted, and that many N.C.O.s, locked out, had to sleep in the stores-huts. Two out of the three Mess servants disappeared, and the meal splendidly described as "dinner" reached us an hour late, brought over from the kitchens by the Kalmuks, who like Gallio cared for none of these things. From nine o'clock onwards there was hardly a man to be seen about the station. On the south side of the road the huts were ominously quiet; from those on the other side we heard fitful singing. Without consulting Grassogi, who had disappeared again, I posted a picket of Ural Cossacks (the only men of whose loyalty I felt quite certain) at each of several strategic points about the station, with a strong guard in the Stores and Armoury area. That may have been unwise, for the men in the huts could hardly fail to observe such precautions, which might have increased their resolution; but in a station where the chief authorities were wrapped about with private zeal it was time, I thought, that someone made a gesture of responsibility. My colleagues were not much disposed to help me; at one o'clock in the morning, I found them discussing with unabated interest the chances that the men would come to heel, the possibilities which might follow their refusal; but with detachment, as men discuss the outcome of a steeplechase. It was Vestil, after all, with Lyublinov behind him, who had provoked the issue; and he would have to deal with it. While the talk was in full spate someone came into the entrance lobby of the Mess, where we hung our belts and where copies of notices were

posted. And a little afterwards a paper was discovered pinned to the board below the orders for the day: *"The soldiers' council says that this will be carried out with the condition said before—Lieutenant Scheffler to command, not unless."* It chanced to be Grassogi who found it, and he took it at once to Vestil's quarters.

Half an hour later one of my Cossacks came to report. He had noticed a man moving suspiciously near the Officers' Mess and had put a flashlight on him. The man had turned and made off, but the Cossack was ready to swear it was a soldier whose appearance he knew well—Karamachik.

§

I lay down in my quarters, half-clothed, at about three o'clock; not expecting to get much sleep, for it seemed likely that a hut or two would be fired before morning. But in fact I slept quite well till—I think—about seven, when my servant pulled back the makeshift curtain and let in the light of a watery rising sun; a man, he said, was asking if he could see me—a Turkestan Cossack. I said I would see him presently.

It proved to be the boy who had driven me out from Paulskov on my return from leave; and he came to ask if I could use my influence to get him off the Propod list. His wound had become bad again, but as there would not be a fresh examination (so he had heard) he would be included all the same, and he doubted if he could endure the march. "It's not that I'm lazy, Vashe Blagorodie," he repeated, "I wouldn't have come and troubled your honour, only you can't go marching and fighting with a wound like this—I fall down sometimes when I'm only going between the huts. . . . They promised we should go home for a time and see our women, they promised that. . . ." I said, "Yes, but do you think you're the only one who wants to get out of it?" "No," he answered simply, "the others are just as sick as I am, we are all the same."

Without making a promise I said I would put in a word for him if the chance occurred. He looked so much in pain, so honest and so young.

When I had had my coffee I strolled some way along the road to make an unobtrusive survey of the station, and I saw near the quartermaster-sergeant's office a party of Letts putting soldiers' bedding and other baggage on to wagons; but that was the only sign of activity. Many of the huts looked as if they were still bolted, and the few men I saw were standing by twos and threes in that posture of chronic idleness which was Mariki's fashion: the feet crossed over, shoulders slumped, head lolling sideways. Between the

huts where the Orenburgs were quartered a dozen or more were grouped about a lanky veteran who harangued them with those wide, horizontal gestures which pedlars use at country fairs. I could not hear what he was saying, and as soon as one of the men caught sight of me the group dispersed. I went back to the Mess, where I found a message that Colonel Vestil wanted to see me at once.

§

In Vestil's office I found Grassogi, Betushev, Virchov, and one or two others. Vestil himself was at the telephone. He motioned me to sit down and I took the vacant chair on Grassogi's right. We were all in a row, on our best behaviour and extremely solemn.

". . . Well, yes," Vestil was saying in a rather unctuous voice, "things have worked out very much as we expected—no, no fires, nothing of that sort. . . . No, I have not interviewed Scheffler yet, but I—don't think I shall have to trouble you. . . . Oh yes, I agree, it would have to be put through as quickly as possible. Yes, I'll speak to you again a little later."

He put down the receiver and turned round. He was nervous and excited, he would not look directly at any of us, but rather let his glance pass quickly across our faces as if he were an artist trying to entertain us by a feat of legerdemain. "Oh, Otraveskov," he said with an imitation of his easier manner, "you've seen, I suppose, that little message we've had from our friend Karamachik? There's no doubt in your mind that it was Karamachik's work? . . . Quite, I think myself that the evidence would be sufficient for anybody. We are agreed on that, gentlemen?"

We nodded in unison.

"I should go so far as to suggest that it's Karamachik's idea and no one else's," Grassogi said prosily. "As I see it, the order last night made it clear enough that no sort of nonsense would be tolerated this time. Karamachik realized that, but he thought he'd try us again with his old gag. He can't have had time to consult anyone else."

"You mean," said Vestil, struggling not to be annoyed by Grassogi's implication, "that on this occasion the men are likely to think my order's more important than Karamachik's?"

Deaf to the note of sarcasm, Grassogi said cheerfully, "Exactly, sir!"

Vestil turned to me.

"Do you think that, Otraveskov?"

I shook my head.

"Why?" he asked.

"If the men had no grievance," I said, "it would be simple enough to call Karamachik's bluff. But in my opinion they have a grievance, and after meditating on it for three weeks they're more likely to stand behind Karamachik than they ever were before."

"That's interesting," Vestil said, without conscious patronage, "that's a very interesting point of view, Captain." He leant back and linked his hands behind his head, drawing up funds of inspiration from his stomach. "Grievances?" he said thoughtfully, "well, perhaps so! At least we needn't argue about that—you and I, Otraveskov, we know each other too well to argue. But if you said they have 'a sense of grievance' then I quite agree with you. I'm not blind to that, I assure you. The reason—well, we needn't bother about the reasons. My point is this: I think we should all agree that the discipline of the station has become lax, and that it can't be re-established without the punctual enforcement of the Propod order. (I regret, frankly, that I allowed some sentimentality to influence in postponing its execution earlier on.) And to that end I believe I shall be acting wisely if I undertake to remove what Otraveskov calls the men's 'grievances.' " He switched his eyes across our faces, not so much asking for our support as challenging us to contradict him; but most paternally. Then, stretching his body again as wisdom entered into him, he went on: "I can't profess to understand the exact nature of these 'grievances'—we cannot all have Otraveskov's philosophical intuition, can we, gentlemen?—but it seems that they will feel themselves fairly treated if I inspect them myself, as I've already agreed to do, and if Lieutenant Scheffler will command them. Scheffler has had some time now to consider the question of impulsive attitudes, and I do not think he will refuse to take command when I tell him that I have personally inspected the contingent—that was his original stipulation—and when I have placed all the other facts before him. I think we may all agree to make that concession to our colleague's notions without loss of dignity, bearing in mind that he is anything but a man intended by nature for military life. As soon as Scheffler has agreed, I propose to circulate a notice to that effect."

That speech, I thought, deserved a good reception. By no means a clever man, he had obviously rehearsed the greater part with anxious pains, and the way he delivered it had just that combination of assurance and informality which carries an audience or a jury. But his eyes rested on my face a moment too long, and the inquiring glance which he steered across the others was not quite bold enough. Betushev, seizing upon the obvious with all the relish of the

true Pskovian, put back the eyeglass which he had been laboriously polishing and said with heavy diffidence:

"Don't you think, Colonel, that you will look rather like—capitulation? You're giving our friend Scheffler what he wants, and you're letting Karamachik accomplish a successful piece of blackmail. Of course, I'm only a scientist, I don't profess to understand military policy——"

Vestil smiled bleakly. "Well, yes, Bestushev, perhaps you're right, perhaps I am more a specialist in these matters than you are. You see" (he spoke very patiently, as to a backward child), "it appears to my simple intelligence that to accept Karamachik's condition is just what he does not want. The condition—if you follow me—is only a device. What Karamachik wants to do is to make trouble, at a time when we are very ill-equipped to deal with it. And I propose, at the price of nominal surrender, to stop him making it. No, gentlemen, I don't think we shall really give Karamachik much cause for rejoicing."

He looked hard at Grassogi, who, suddenly inspired, said deeply: *"Reculer pour mieux sauter!"*

"Exactly!" Vestil said.

I glanced along the line to see if the rest accepted this change of front as equably as the good-natured numskull on my left. Apparently they did, except for Virchov who, as he caught my eye, came as near to winking as he dared; he, I reflected, had enjoyed a spell of education in Lausanne, and his brain had never quite gone back into the Russian shape. With obvious reluctance, Vestil turned to me again.

"Well, Otraveskov, you're very quiet as usual!"

I asked: "Do you propose, sir, to announce straight away that Scheffler will take command, or will you see him first?"

That seemed to me the obvious question, but Vestil looked annoyed; and I understood why. Even on the smallest questions he hated making up his mind.

"What do you think, Grassogi?" he asked.

Grassogi pulled out his under-lip as far as it would go. "I think," he said slowly, "in order to be quite sure where we are, the wisest thing would be to deal with Scheffler first. We might, otherwise——"

"No," Vestil said, disagreeing automatically with anything Grassogi suggested, "the sound course is for me to make the announcement at once, parade the men, inspect them, and then give Scheffler his orders. Surely that is the logical procedure?"

We mumbled assent.

"Very well! Will you, Captain Grassogi, please get the announcement posted at once—yes, your own signature will do. And at half-past ten I shall want you all to be in this office again, when Lieutenant Scheffler will join us. . . . I am much obliged to you, gentlemen, for giving me the benefit of your views. It is most desirable, I think, that my staff and I should be in the closest accord when problems of this kind have to be dealt with. . . ."

Virchov said to me, in the passage outside: "Do you know, he asked me twice what my name was. . . . I kept thinking the poor old thing was going to burst into tears."

"Even now," Grassogi whispered to me twenty minutes later, when the notice had gone up, "I don't believe those men will parade.

§

He was wrong there: poor Grassogi, he was always wrong. At ten-past nine, looking from the window of the surgery hut across the mud-patch which served as parade-ground, I saw them there, standing at the easy in Company formation: as motley a gathering of soldiers as the war had shown me, men of half a dozen nationalities in the shabby remains of every uniform known to the Emperor's army, men without rifles and men with no boots, with one here and there who lacked the use of a hand or arm. The sun of late February, half-veiled till now in a vest of morning fog, slipped clear to throw a chilly radiance on the ugly huts and grassless, paper-sprinkled turf. And my mind, slipping away from that still, drab view, moved back to the shadowed wards at Krozkohl and the train crawling through Austria in darkness. A few of these fellows had been with me there. . . . Grassogi was on the ground now, and Mariosik, who had called the parade to attention, was reading the roll. I watched him fold up the sheet, march to Grassogi, and salute. All present, apparently.

As I left the hut, intending to go back to the Mess, I saw Vestil coming along the road and I stopped him. There was a youngster in the contingent, I told him, a Turkestan Cossack, whose groin wound had become much worse since Bestushev had passed him. Might he be specially released from this draft? "I don't know," Vestil said vaguely. "It's a bad principle, they'll all be discovering wounds. . . . Still, I'll look at him. You'd better come along with me and point him out."

With that quiet curiosity which attends the sick-room or a funeral, a crowd was gathering on the edges of the ground as if to witness a display of horsemanship by the Chevaliers-Gardes. Vestil did not

appear to notice them. With Grassogi and me trailing behind him he walked at a mule's pace along the ranks, paused before each man and scrutinized him carefully: head, body, legs. It was a conscientious performance, his eyes travelling so slowly that they could have missed no outward feature; but his face was without expression, he said nothing, his movements were more mechanical than those of an Archduke formally inspecting a guard of honour. I had the queer impression, as once before when he had interviewed me, that he was drugged and unconscious of his actions. When I caught sight of the Cossack boy I moved forward and touched Vestil's shoulder. He seemed to wake up then, he nodded to me, and asked the boy: "You have a groin wound? . . . It's bad? . . . You vomit sometimes? . . . What, always when you walk to the surgery?" Then, after a moment's reflection, he called Mariosik to him and said quietly: "Cross that man's name off the list." After that he became more lively, and was speaking to Mariosik at every second pace. "That man must have new boots. . . . Why has this man got his hair in such a state? . . . Is it essential for this fellow to have a dirty bandage round his neck?" More to my surprise, he began to pick on men who were palpably ill or disabled and curtly order their names to be crossed off. I think he dismissed between twenty-five and thirty. Those orders he gave laconically as he passed to the next in line, without looking back either at the man dismissed or at us who followed him. He came to Karamachik, who was decently turned-out and stood very soldierly, and examined him with a special, frigid attention; but said nothing. Grassogi, keeping his regulation one-pace-and-a-half to rear, hardly looked at the ranks at all. It was left to me, limping behind him, to look at the men's faces, the elderly, tired faces; the young, suffering faces; the dark, dull faces of the Tartars; and I wondered if Vestil felt as I did the heat of reproach from eyes which, as discipline dictates, were set right forward to catch you passing like the teeth of a comb. It took, I suppose, some twenty minutes altogether. Then we, the officers, went off, leaving the men at-ease, the attendant crowd still gaping, the sun shining bleakly on the hirsute faces and the shabby uniforms. Well, thirty were saved.

§

My head and eyes were unsteady after the short night. It was not quite ten, and I meant to lie down for a few minutes before reporting at Vestil's office again. But when I got back to my quarters I found a visitor waiting to see me, a creature who looked as con-

gruous in Mariki as a naked Amazonian in the palace of Tsarskoe Selo: an elderly Jew whose forehead came level with my chest but whose breadth of shoulders made him look like a giant with his legs chopped off below the knees; beautifully dressed, with an overcoat which shouted "Mandl," and well-creased trousers falling over patent-leather boots; carrying in his hand a black soft hat. Somewhere and somehow he had got himself shaved as the Kuznetski barbers do it, his finger-nails were nicely cut and polished, even his boots were clean. When he saw me he bowed obsequiously as the Polish Jews do, and his face, which at rest had the tight severity of Diocletian's, slipped momentarily into a charming smile. "Captain Otraveskov? I am Strubensohn," he said, in a soft voice which reminded me a little of Sopojnikin's, "Kahn Abramovitch Strubensorn." And having delivered that hideous dissonance he nodded slowly, either to emphasize the truth of it or to convey its importance. But in fact, I knew the name. Then, with a conjuror's briskness, he produced a letter on which I recognized the loose and rather childish hand of Yelisaveta. "From the Countess Scheffler!" he said solemnly, and stood back a little way while I read it.

The letter covered many flimsy sheets.

"MY DEAR ALEXEI ALEX'ITCH": it began. "The creature who brings you this letter is called Strubensohn. Julia Petrovna says he is the best lawyer in Russia and she knows about these things, and he says he is a friend of Anton's, which I can well believe. I have paid him a lot of money, and since you don't seem able to do anything he is to try and get Anton out of this mess. I doubt if he can, since Anton seems to want nothing else but to get himself and keep himself in trouble, and I expect he will get in the way of everything the little Jew wants to do, but you must make the Jew do his best and give me something for what I've paid him. You will, Alexai, won't you, help him as much as you can!

"And now about Vava: . . ."

The rest would have to wait till I was alone. I helped M. Strubensohn out of his coat and made him sit on my bed—the only chair was occupied by my equipment and a pair of field-boots. On that inconvenient perch, with his buttocks sunk deep among the broken springs and his little feet hung clear of the ground, he did not seem to be aware of indignity or discomfort. He put his fingers together and began at once to ask me questions.

"I have come with very little information," he said, as one read-

ing from notes, "and I want you tell me everything you can. First, has Count Scheffler already been before a court-martial?"

"No, not a court-martial, but——"

"Excellent!" he said, as if I were a promising candidate in viva-voce. "That being so, I can conduct the case from the beginning. . . . I imagine, from what Mme Scheffler told me, that a court-martial is inevitable?"

My clouded mind strained forward to the next meeting in Vestil's room, and I found it difficult to keep attention steady on these questions. I longed to tell the man to go away and come again when I was feeling better.

"It depends," I said confusedly, "it depends on what happens this morning. Scheffler is to be interviewed by the commanding officer at half-past ten——"

Strubensohn tugged up a gold watch. "Half-past ten? Then I've time to see him now! If we can run over what he's to say to this man——"

"I'm afraid not," I said. "Scheffler's being kept under close guard——"

"Guard?" he said. "Ch-ch-ch! If I send my card to the leading officer——"

"You must understand," I told him politely, "that in an establishment like this no civilian, whatever his rank, has any weight at all. So long as you are here, you yourself are under military jurisdiction."

He smiled.

"Yes, quite, exactly! My dear Captain, I shan't think of doing anything irregular—until I see just how much irregularity is necessary. . . . So kind of you, so kind, to give me all this help! . . . Well now, the first question is this: is Count Scheffler accused of actual disobedience to orders or only of what might be called 'insubordinate behaviour'?"

"Actual disobedience," I said.

"Ah! To this—chief officer, that is?"

"To the officer commanding this station, Colonel Vestil."

He took out a tiny pocket-book and wrote down the name. "Vestil, yes. . . . This Colonel Vestil, is he the kind of man, can you tell me, who is likely to accept an apology for a personal offence? I mean, supposing that Count Scheffler were to sign an apology which I drafted——"

"He would probably accept an apology, but Scheffler is not likely to offer him one."

Strubensohn shrugged his shoulders. "Ah, well, it's extraordinary

what people will do when asked at the right moment. . . . He is a cavalry officer, Colonel Vestil?"

"Yes."

"A keen horseman?"

"I believe so."

"And wealthy?"

"I rather imagine not."

"I wonder," Strubensohn said thoughtfully, "if he goes in for steeplechasing. When he's next on leave he might be looking round for a mare or a gelding or whatever it is they use. . . ."

I told him that if I judged Colonel Vestil rightly he would be a very upright man in financial matters. "And incidentally," I added, "there are higher authorities concerned. General Lyublinov——"

"Ah!" he said, with a note of vexation, "Generals are much more difficult to deal with—difficult, though not impossible. The dignity has to be—as it were—massaged. Lyublinov, you said?" He wrote it down. "Now let us—if you will be so kind—run through the actual events one by one, as accurately as you can remember them."

At that moment Virchov's head came round the door.

"Sorry to interrupt! Vestil wants us straight away."

Strubensohn rose politely, bowed to Virchov, and gave me one of his cards.

"Perhaps you would be so very kind as to present this to Colonel Vestil," he said, "and to tell him that I should like to wait on him at his convenience. You might say, perhaps, that we have a mutual friend in—let me see!—ah yes, in General Lyublinov."

§

Anton was there already when we collected again in Vestil's office. He sat alone against the wall to the right of the door, upright, but with his legs crossed, his eyes directed at the window. He looked sleepy, and a little bored, as if he had to attend some routine ceremony which was really a waste of time. While Vestil, in his usual place, was writing industriously on a block of establishment-forms with a fountain-pen which, as I chanced to notice, had no ink in it. For about five minutes nothing happened. Bestushev, suffering from his usual indigestion, was uttering a procession of hiccups, which the incorrigible Virchov counted on his fingers. No one spoke. At last, with the air of one whose time was measured by the quarter-minute, Vestil blotted the pad and pushed back his chair.

"Lieutenant Scheffler," he said with a quiet formality, "I have asked these gentlemen to meet us here in order to assure you that

I am acting quite candidly. I know very well—we needn't mince matters now—I know quite well that I have never had your confidence; but I hope and believe that you trust the honesty of some, if not all, of these fellow-officers of yours. . . . As you probably realize, General Lyublinov intended to take disciplinary action after he had seen you on Monday. I succeeded in dissuading him, because I still hold to my view that the way of reason is better than the way of force, more dignified and productive of happier results." He paused. "I hope, I hope very much, that my belief will not be betrayed. . . . Now as I recollect the first conversation we had on this question, you agreed to command the third contingent proceeding to Propod-Czerveen on two conditions: that the men were themselves willing to go, and that I should personally inspect them before they started. You had, of course, no possible right to make such conditions—to make any conditions at all about obeying an order. You have no right now. And if I were dealing with a professional soldier—one trained, that is, to understand the sanctity of military orders—I should adamantly refuse to offer you any such concessions. But as I tried to explain to General Lyublinov, I recognize in you a man of—of special education and peculiar sensibilities; and I have always believed that however much you may resent my authority I can count on you to act honourably in response to honourable treatment." His voice had become very gentle, almost paternal. "In the last few days I have been inquiring most carefully into the general feeling of the men in the station, and I have satisfied myself that the opposition to the sending of a further draft has disappeared —except in the case of one or two hot-heads who would still like to make trouble out of it. General Lyublinov holds the opinion— I tell you this in confidence—that I was wrong to postpone the sending of the draft in deference to the men's original objections; but it seems to me that their present attitude has gone some way to justify my decision. Last night I re-issued the original order, and the men have paraded without any show of reluctance. And now, to satisfy the second of your—stipulations, I have inspected the men myself with Captain Grassogi and Captain Otraveskov in attendance. I think you will agree—I am certain the others will agree—that I could hardly have acted with greater consideration for the feelings of one of my officers. I now ask you—for the moment I do not order, I only ask you—to repay my consideration by taking command of the contingent."

He had made his peroration so slowly—so impressively, that even Virchov looked solemn at the end of it. In Grassogi's serious face

I read an almost idolatrous approval; and I was sure that Vestil, waiting for Anton's answer with his hands folded on the desk, believed he had achieved a masterpiece of tactful, dignified persuasion. Cautiously, for I was frightened of catching his eye just then, I looked to see how Anton had taken it. He was still in exactly the same position, and though his eyes had moved to Vestil's desk his detached expression had not altered. We waited for perhaps ten seconds before he made any reply. And then, speaking conversationally in a rather low voice, he said:

"M-may I just ask this: is there any special reason why you still want me, particularly, to command the contingent?"

Vestil said quickly: "I do not feel obliged to answer that. But I will," he added. "It was explained to you by General Lyublinov that the discipline of the station has suffered through the common knowledge of your disobedience. There are only two ways to correct that: either to punish you—and make the fact public—or to demonstrate that you are no longer disobedient."

Anton nodded. "I see. So the contingent is being sent, and I am being sent with it, as a disciplinary measure?"

Vestil scraped the legs of his chair on the floor. "You know," he said, "there are limits to my patience! I've been willing to treat you with the most unusual consideration, but I am still your commanding officer. It is not my business to discuss with you the reasons for my orders. . . . Do you, or do you not accept my statement that I have personally inspected those men?"

"Naturally I accept. But——"

"Then——"

"—But you will recognize, I think, the distinction I make between a formal and genuine inspection. Frankly, sir, I find it difficult to believe, since you are satisfied with the men's condition, that your inspection was anything more than formal."

Vestil smiled. "Yes," he said, in a voice thin with excitement, "yes, you form your conclusions very rapidly! It may interest you to know that in the course of this superficial inspection of mine I discovered no fewer than twenty-eight men that I considered unfit for service and that I immediately dismissed them. Now, perhaps, you may feel that you owe me an apology?"

Anton nodded. "I apologize!" he said. "And now, sir, since you yourself found twenty-eight men in the consignment who were obviously unfitted for service, you will perhaps admit that I was right in the first place in refusing to take them without your inspection? I think, if I may say so, that an apology is due to me."

At a loss for the moment, Vestil said awkwardly: "We are not discussing that. . . . The only fact of importance is that the men have now been inspected and weeded-out——"

"By you, sir. But not yet by a competent doctor."

Vestil glanced at Bestushev, who was wriggling as if all his clothes had become too small.

"Perhaps Lieutenant Scheffler would like to examine my diplomas," Bestushev said rather shrilly.

Anton smiled. "I should be quite content to examine the dates on them."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean," Anton said, coolly ignoring Vestil's efforts to interrupt him, "that you have passed for service no fewer than twenty-eight men whose condition is so shocking that Colonel Vestil himself, against his most cherished principles, felt obliged to rule them out. And in the face of that evidence no diploma ever penned will convince me that you have the smallest ability or integrity as a doctor. If you——"

Vestil struck his fist on the table.

"That's enough, Scheffler! This is not the place for you to pile vulgar abuse on a fellow-officer. When I——"

"Oh," Anton said with an air of surprise, "you s-still think he's a good doctor?"

"*Will you hold your tongue!* What I think of Captain Bestushev's ability as a doctor has nothing to do with the matter. Listen to me, will you! You wanted me to inspect those men and I did so. You've accused me of scamping the inspection and I've proved to you that I did it with the greatest solicitude. Is there any other excuse you can possibly make for not obeying my order?" He turned to us. "Do you, gentlemen, see any sound reason whatever for Lieutenant Scheffler's obstinacy?"

There was an awkward silence; every one of us, I think, wanted to be done with the whole undignified business. Then Grassogi, who looked wretchedly uncomfortable, murmured: "I don't think so." Had he kept quiet I should probably have done so too. But the sophistry of Vestil's speech was still fresh in my mind, and Grassogi's sanctimonious face had provoked me beyond endurance. I began:

"Having been present at your inspection, sir——"

"Yes?" Vestil said, with hesitant optimism.

"I feel bound to say——"

It was Anton who stopped me. "Better keep quiet, Alexei!" he said simply.

Ignoring him, Vestil said boldly: "If you've anything you want to tell us, Otraveskov——?"

"I prefer not."

"Very well.—Have you, Scheffler?"

Anton said slowly: "I think I have already made myself quite plain. Four days ago I was offered the choice of obedience or a court-martial. I accepted the second alternative, and my decision has not altered."

"Then all my efforts——"

"I'm afraid that I can't take your efforts very seriously. It's quite obvious——"

He broke off and held his mouth tight shut; realizing, I supposed, that nothing more was called-for. But Vestil said sharply: "Well? You may as well say what you've got to. . . ."

Anton hesitated. Then, soberly but with increasing warmth, he went on: "I was going to say that you have been anything but candid with me. You've told me that the men are perfectly willing to go, and I know as well as you do that that can't be true. If it were true, why should you take so much trouble and sacrifice so much dignity in trying to persuade me to command them? The fact, as you and everyone in this room knows, is that the men won't go unless I do command them. In order to patch things up you've tried to extract a promise from me by pretending that they've been properly examined. If you'd meant to make a conscientious inspection you'd have let me accompany you. Instead of that you keep me locked up until it's over. In the course of a few minutes you find that Bestushev has grossly misjudged some thirty cases, and yet it never occurs to you to have the rest of his findings checked by one of your other medical officers. The reason is, Colonel Vestil, you know very well that no competent doctor would pass twenty per cent. of those men for any kind of service, let alone fighting, and yet you're determined to send them. I doubt, I doubt very much whether you're even justified by military expediency—it appears to me quite incredible that two hundred and seventy floundering invalids are going to make the smallest appreciable difference to the progress of the war. But the wretches have got to go, because a fat little general in Paulskov said they must and because you're still trying to disguise your own manifest ineptitude as commander of the station. Two hundred and seventy human beings have to be sacrificed to your amour-propre, and you've tried by a remarkably naïve stratagem to make me the instrument of their martyrdom." He stopped and suddenly smiled. "Well," he concluded serenely, "perhaps I've

said enough now to convince you that I don't mind very much about breaking my neck."

I must record that Vestil listened to that philippic with surprising patience. Twice he looked up from the desk and seemed about to speak, but each time his mouth shut before the words had formed, and his eyes went back to the little wine-glass he was twisting from a piece of paper. In the few moments of silence that followed he put his hand across his mouth, the thumb forked back against his jaw, and gazed with calculated indolence at a fly crawling up the wall above Anton's head. Presently he said, at first in the tone of thoughtfulness:

"It is not your neck, in particular, that we're concerned with. It's the neck of a man called Karamachik. You know him, I think?"

"Yes."

"Karamachik," he went on drily, "is a professional agitator, probably in German pay, who has succeeded in making a great deal of trouble ever since he came to this station, and he has now overstepped the bounds of prudence. We have evidence, almost conclusive evidence, that he has tried—unsuccessfully—to interfere with my plans for today." He hesitated. "It appears to me likely, it appears almost inevitable, that when he hears of your recalcitrance he will be encouraged to try again. When that happens I am all ready to deal with him. Do you understand me?"

Anton closed his eyes. "As I understand you," he said carefully, "the men have refused to go unless I command them—as I conjectured a few moments ago—and you now threaten that if they don't go you will make Karamachik answer for it as well as me."

"No," Vestil said, with recovered confidence, "that is not the correct way of putting it. What I say is that your disobedience will in all probability lead to disobedience on the part of Karamachik, and possibly others, who will very naturally assume if an officer defies authority they can do so with impunity. I shall then have no option. Karamachik will be dealt with as no doubt he should have been dealt with three weeks ago. And the responsibility, as far as I can see, will be entirely yours. Is that clear?"

"Yes."

"And possibly, since you claim to be the only one who values the lives of the men beneath us, you will now think over the question rather less casually. Very well, I shall see you again in a quarter of an hour." He turned to us. "I shall not have to trouble you gentlemen any further."

§

Anton went back to the cottage; and I found, when I went there a few minutes later, that his guard had, characteristically, gone off duty. Only Vetushka was in the lower room. She smiled to me through the steam of a saucepan and I went boldly upstairs.

He was standing by the window, and he turned round as I came in. All his confidence had gone, he looked wan and wretched. He said nervously: "Sit down, Alexei, sit on the bed, I'm glad you've come. . . ." But he wouldn't sit down himself, he walked backwards and forwards pulling at his thumbs, he kept looking at his watch and holding it up to make sure it was going.

"Tell me this," he said, "—I can't be quite sure, I can't get outside myself enough—tell me, do you think I'm just being childishly obstinate? Do you think it's just because Vestil's such a fool, such a hectoring, drivelling pedagogue, that I won't give in to him? Tell me, I want to know what you really think."

"No," I answered, "I don't think that."

"But you think I ought to throw my hand in now? You think I've held out long enough?"

"Of course I'd like you to——"

"But do you think I ought to? Tell me, I want to know!"

I said: "It depends, as far as I can see, on how you feel about Karamachik."

"Yes," he said. "Yes, you're right, it depends on that. That was a very neat stroke of Vestil's—though anyone in his position with the smallest intelligence would have thought of it a fortnight ago . . . Karamachik? Well I hardly know him. But he's not what Vestil says, he's not a German agent, he's not getting any sort of pay from anyone, I'm certain of that. (There are others who are, I know of at least one, though I couldn't prove it.) No, Karamachik's quite sincere, he's simply a man who won't stand for the oppression of his own kind, that's all there is to it."

I said: "I believe he's the father of a family."

"Yes, yes, I believe so. I don't want to think about that. There are lots of fathers of families in that two hundred and seventy. . . . Would you hold me morally responsible if Karamachik got shot for disobedience?"

I had no ready answer for that; but I said: "No. No, I don't see how——"

"No," he said swiftly, "I shouldn't be. Karamachik knows what he's doing, he won't imagine that anything can get him off if he twitches Vestil's beard again. No, he's got to look after himself, he must make his own decision."

"The only thing is," I objected, "he may feel that if you keep up your resistance he's bound to support you."

He had reached the window again and this time he turned round sharply, as if I had angered him and he was going to pounce on me. But he only said, reflectively: "You're right, you're quite right about that!" and then: "It's devilish, Alexei, they've got me in a devilish position. I almost begin to think that Vestil isn't such a fool—but no, of course it was Lyublinov, Lyublinov's planned the whole thing—letting Karamachik out, everything. Not a quick thinker, but a very shrewd one, I formed a very high opinion of his intelligence. And very amusing, very amusing, I wanted to laugh all the time, I could hardly take my eyes off that round, rubber face of his. . . ."

For some time he went on talking about Lyublinov, and walking aimlessly around the bare little room, and looking again and again at his watch. I knew from my experience of his ways that his thoughts were different; for he could always talk with fair coherence upon one subject while his best mind fingered another. And my own thoughts, as his voice flowed bickering through my ears, moved fast and wide; to the prisoner-train and the Krozkohl laundry, to Yelisaveta's face, to the night which seemed so far away now when we had sat together on this bed in the heavy darkness. I tried to collect myself, feeling the urgency of this occasion, knowing quite well what I ought to say: "You've done enough, Anton, you ought to surrender now. Whatever happens, no one can blame you, you've made the strongest protest that you can." But the man striding up and down the room, silent now, his eyes dull like the upmost layer of coke on a furnace, would not have heard what I said; no, I am certain of that, he would never have listened. And presently, looking quite away from me, he said in a jet of passion:

"Why does it happen to me, to me? Why have I got to say 'My fault! my responsibility!' when they've got a man by the throat and push his head under water? Why am I cursed with such a monstrous impotence when all my heart and mind are matched against barbarity? They've got me, Alexei, they've got me all right: someone's going on the rack now, and they'll use my hand, my hand, to brace the pulleys!" Then, more quietly: "Someone'll have to pay for this, you know. There's a bill mounting up against the people we belong to, someone'll have to pay it. . . . What time was it, what time did the old devil tell me to see him again?"

"You're supposed to be with him," I said, looking at my own watch, "about thirty seconds from now."

He laughed then. "Jupiter!" he said. "The poor misguided crea-

ture'll think I'm just insulting him again. I shall get a long lecture on punctuality." He began to dart about in search of his cap, which we found at last on the floor behind the bed. "Well," he said jauntily, clapping it on the back of his head, "now for another talking-bout with the prince and father of all pedagogues, the last I hope! *'Let me remind you, Lieutenant . . .'* I shall be rude to him this time, 'Lexei, I shall mock the old bastard." With these words thrown over his shoulder he was already plunging down the stairs, leaving me alone at the top. But before he had got outside the cottage he stopped and came stumbling up again. "I forgot," he said rapidly, "there's something you can do for me. Vetushka, she's been very kind, she's often sat with me when I felt lonely. I want her to have my watch when I've gone, it's not worth an awful lot but I think she'd like it. The rest of my stuff must go to Yelisaveta. Give her a message, will you, say—well, you'll think out a kind message for her, won't you?" Having said that he kissed me, holding me for just a moment in a rough and passionate embrace; and murmured a blessing and went off again.

§

Eleven o'clock passed; twelve; one; two; and the contingent was still on parade. Not in the formal sense: they sat down in the mud, they moved a little to form groups for card-playing, food was sent out to them in mess-tins, they smoked and chewed. The clouds joined, and it rained once, a sharp, cold shower; but they did not seem to notice that, you had said from a casual glance they were a contented party, picnicking there in a mud-patch on a chilly late-winter day. The crowd which had gathered to watch them had long since dispersed; but they still came back by twos and threes to stare for a while, as the Krozkohl children had often clustered in the doorway of the hospital tents to peer in wonder at the dim line of trestle-beds where the terrible Russians were lying. Walking along the road I heard a man ask his companion, "Are you going to the barrack now?" and the other replied, "No, I think I shall watch the parade for a while." Throughout the morning it remained a popular diversion, homely and free of charge.

Periodically I went to the Mess to see if there were any news; and there was always news, fresh each time, and mostly (I think) of Virchov's manufacture: Vestil had given in and the draft was cancelled: Scheffler had broken down, made humble apology, and begged Vestil to forgive him: Vestil and Scheffler were going to fight a duel with colt revolvers, the winner to have his way: ten sotnias of Kuban Cossacks were coming out from Paulskov to hold

the station at bayonet-point. The last of these absurdities seemed least remote from truth, for in the early afternoon a fleet of motor-wagons came along the Paulskov road, and stopped at the place nearest the parade ground; but of the six, five were empty. A score of men, said to be of the Tekinski, with four N.C.O.s, climbed down with baggage from the leading one and were marched to special quarters at the end of the "C" line. A little later a car arrived from the same direction and two officers were seen walking across to Vestil's office; one of them was recognized as Odoevski.

For most of that time I was in my quarters, unable either to work or to amuse myself, constantly plagued with food and physics by my servant; he thought I had typhoid and was chittering with solicitude. M. Strubensohn, I thanked God, had gone away, leaving a message that he had to seek "material" at Paulskov. I lay down, I walked to and fro, I stared out of the window. Yelisaveta's letter was in my pocket, still largely unread; "Vava is altogether content" —I had got as far as that and my mind would not settle to follow her tricky hand through the rest of it. I said to myself again and again, in the foolish way that children will repeat a phrase, "I have to lose Anton too, God's grudge against me isn't satisfied." When Techesig finally left me the building was free of footsteps, and except for the occasional noise of wheels on the roadway the station seemed unusually quiet. I smoked a great deal, and tried for occupation to sort the confusion in my baggage-cases. The time passed very slowly.

At three o'clock, or about that hour, Grassogi came with a message from Vestil. The contingent was to leave for Propod at half-past three, travelling by lorry. And I was to deliver it there.

§

I did not hesitate about obeying that order. The larger issues had become remote, and I could think of nothing now but Anton himself; if the contingent could be got on its way without more trouble there was a slender chance, I thought, that Anton might be spared the farthest consequence of his contumacy; Vestil would owe me something, and that might help. For a moment, as I was lacing up my boots, I imagined pitifully the human wreckage I had seen spread out across the field this morning, and the indignation I had experienced then came faintly back like the hurt of a mended wound; but in the end, I thought, they would have to go, that was the shape of war as Russia knew it, no gallant gesture of mine could prevent that happening. I took my greatcoat off the hook;

a button was missing, Techesig was nowhere within call, I had to set to work and sew it on.

It was routine, I said, it was nothing but routine, the job was in no way different from anything else I had done in the last three years. When I reached the parade ground Mariosik had called the men to attention and was making his own final inspection; I saw, in a brief glance, that they were now reasonably well equipped. In the road the lorries had been turned round, the personal baggage was already stowed, the drivers were cranking their engines. A fine sleet was falling, almost hiding the huts that flanked the ground. Mariosik came to me and saluted and said that all was in order. It was a very ordinary scene.

Yes, and I believe it might have remained so, but for a piece of crass stupidity. Some of the men, I noticed, wore an expectant or bewildered expression—I knew what they were looking for—but I intended to ignore this and rely on the simple plan of getting them off as fast as I could. I had already checked them over and divided them into lorry-groups when Grassogi, in his most important mood, appeared beside me. He had instructions from Vestil, he said, and was to address the contingent before it started. I told him that any delay was dangerous now and that unless he had something really important to say he would do much better to keep quiet; a flamboyant exhortation would be inadvisable. But the bullock-headed fellow would not listen; he had his orders and must carry them out. I shrugged my shoulders and stood the parade at ease.

I have forgotten the exact words Grassogi used, but his speech went something like this:

"According to arrangements made this morning, Lieutenant Scheffler was to command you on the journey to the clearing depôt at Propod-Czerveen, where you will be divided into labour-service units by the divisional superintendent of labour-personnel. As Lieutenant Scheffler has fallen ill, Captain Otraveskov will command. Sergeant Dortov will be superintendent of baggage, and personal baggage will be drawn from him at Propod-Czerveen."

As he spoke my eyes sought Karamachik, who was somewhere in the front rank, at the end farthest from where I stood; but failed to pick him out. It wasn't necessary. Grassogi had hardly said the last word when what I had foreseen took place; so much as I had pictured it that I had the sense of watching a performance seen many times in rehearsal. A rifle fell on the ground—I knew at once it was Karamachik's—and almost immediately another; then two more in the ranks behind. And the men who had dropped them stood quite still, with their hands by their sides.

Without waiting to see if others would follow, I gave the order to slope. It was clumsily, hesitantly done. Automatically I put them back and gave the slope again, and they did it fairly well. Then with hardly a moment's pause I put them into harrow formation and marched them on to the road.

The four men who had dropped their rifles had not moved. They were Karamachik, Kroyadin (a trans-Baikal whom I knew well and heartily distrusted), a youth of doubtful sanity called Perkost, and another whose name I did not know. They stood exactly as they had been placed in the ranks; to signify, I suppose, that they had been ready to obey all orders but the vital one; and we left them there, upright and lonely and defiant. Of their fellows, some were pretending that they had noticed nothing, while some glanced guiltily over their shoulders as they climbed up over the sides of the lorries; the greater part, I think, ashamed but thankful that they were in the course of law and order. Until the lorries started moving I forbade conversation.

Sitting by the driver of the leading lorry, I saw that the sections arrived that morning from Paulskov had miraculously appeared on the parade ground; and just before the huts intervened I had a sight of the four defaulters being marched away. The inevitable crowd of loiterers watched them, inevitably silent.

But I tried to forget about that, and what it might mean to Anton, as my driver pushed his engine to a hobbled canter and tugged his lever into high speed. Considering all things, it had gone off well, this long-postponed migration. The fleet with its dour cargo was turning awkwardly on to the narrow road which led away to Mlintsil, and now we gathered speed against the four-verst climb to the spruce-maned Pluvin neck. When that was passed the hut-roofs of Mariki would be out of sight. But there were no shouts from the lorries behind, no singing. At Propod, I supposed, the dire necessity for human kind would make a welcome for these errant warriors; but they, the prodigals, seemed to anticipate the embrace without much spirit. Perhaps, accustomed as they were to being herded, and thankful to be saved from marching, they did not try to look ahead; only aware that when the pain of the jolting lorry ceased they would find themselves in some new phase of the omnifarious confusion.

21

I was told at Propod-Czerveen that I could get a train for Paulskov on the low-level track at about ten in the evening. That seemed

worth taking; I might get transport from Paulskov to Mariki if someone were going that way, and in any case there was more hope of finding somewhere to sleep at Paulskov than at Propod, a very small town packed with soldiers.

Major Alferov, a red-eyed, dilapidated creature who looked as if his life was sustained chiefly on Swedish brandy, had not been effusive when I reported to him. "You were expected two hours ago!" he said. And then, "I wonder if you can tell me why it is that whenever some wandering officer has charge of a hundred down-at-heel scallywags he doesn't know what to do with, some crack-brained philanthropist tells him to come and dump them on to me? . . . All right, all right, stick the bastards in the yard over there, I'll dispose of 'em." But a young volunteer lieutenant whom I found half-buried under papers in the outer office had been more friendly. "Alferov is a bit shirty today," he told me cheerfully. "You see, he takes the war so seriously, and he had just scraped up a really crack battalion, not one V.D. amongst 'em, to send to Barylski, who God knows could do with it, and this morning we have that man Lyublinov on the telephone saying that this precious battalion's got to go—where do you think?—to Luga! Yes, it seems that nowadays they think the honest burghers of Petrograd more dangerous than the Germans. And they pick on us—on us, God help them!—to send our choicest and our best a thousand miles or so to kick their heels outside that city, waiting for something to happen. You know, it really is a little provoking. . . . Oh yes, I'll see that your throw-outs don't come to any harm. They'll probably go to the railway sheds at Bruletzau, they're badly short of men over there. A drink? Well, I will! The next war—may it be nicer than this one! . . . So sorry you have to go."

The train had a general in the forward coach and consequently it was off to time. It stopped only once, and I was in Paulskov shortly after midnight. I went to the Streshneva Hotel, where, by a lucky chance, the Greek who ran the place knew of someone driving through Mariki that night. It was a Captain Tolsk, he had to be at Cholenoie next morning to pick up a colonel of artillery and meant to start in an hour or so. Having eaten nothing at Propod I dined with this man, who was a dark and serious Southerner, lately translated, I guessed, from some provincial university. The long, narrow dining-room, with slashes across the Hungarian decorations to remind me that a rabble of soldiers had broken in a week before, was crowded with officers and grey with cigarette smoke. Everyone seemed in the deepest gloom; they were saying that nobody took the war seriously any longer, they might just as well pack up and

go home. Tolsk, on the other hand, was mildly optimistic. He had friends among the intelligentsia of the capital who, he said, kept him informed of what was going on; things had looked more hopeful, he thought, ever since the wretched Gregori Novikh's assassination, and it was now on the cards that Nikolas would abdicate. That would settle everything. Petrograd would quieten down at once, everyone would be able to concentrate on the war; the troops, rid of what had become a formidable incubus, would find fresh spirit in a new leadership, and now that the arms position was so much improved he, Tolsk, saw no reason why a large-scale and possibly decisive thrust along the whole front should not be made in August. "It all depends on getting rid of Nikolas!" he said without bothering to lower his voice. "When that happens the best element in the army will come to the top, the worst will starve for want of a grumble." He was a nice youth, with something of the poet in his dark eyes. He obstinately refused to let me pay for his dinner.

His car had been left in the meat-market with a soldier to guard it, and as we walked there along the Tcherkaskaya—it was now a little after two—I saw no fewer than four orators who, in full voice, had each a crowd of thirty or forty men about them; some of them in uniform. Tolsk was rather amused when I asked him what excitement had provoked these meetings. "They are at it every night," he said, "wet or fine, just the same. A picket comes round to disperse them at intervals, and occasionally someone is arrested, but they always gather again. You'd find them hard at it if you came back at six." So! I realized then how remote Mariki was from the new world which this youngster found so familiar; and like a shy child in the presence of its elders I said nothing more till we reached the market.

There we found that the guard had gone off duty. Two dirty children and a scurfy mongrel, all bound together in a complicated embrace, were asleep in the back of the car, and an aged woman who had curled herself on the front seat would not be moved till we had bribed her with fifty kopeks. "God will punish you," she said morosely as we laid her on the cobbles, "in the day when every adulterer and every whoremonger is brought by the blessed Michael before the Throne of Grace." The dog ran after us, barking viciously, all the way to the Alexander Square. From there, despite the fearful jolting, I think I must have slept; until Tolsk, in a kindly way, shook my shoulder and I saw, blinking, the familiar outline of the Mariki huts.

§

Starved of sleep, I might have stayed unconscious next morning until Techesig woke me; but that sense of something impending which persists in the brain throughout unconsciousness was enough to rouse me when I had been in bed not much above two hours. In obedience to the same instinct I got up and lurched to the window. It was just growing light.

Anton: that was what pricked me. Anton was in trouble. I could get no further than that.

Automatically I lathered for shaving and stropped the razor, but when I had twice cut myself I gave it up. I pulled on a pair of civilian trousers, tucked them into my rubber boots, put my greatcoat over a woollen jersey and went outside. It was very cold, with a moist wind blowing from the north, but the bite of the air did not free me from my drowsiness. I walked unsteadily along the cinder-path, came out on to the roadway, and stopped there to light a cigarette, still wondering why I did not go back to bed. Then, with no defined objective, I made my way slowly along the road to where it became the village street; and there, seeing the door of Prouskov's cottage open, I went inside.

The lower room was empty, but when I called up the stairs Vetushka appeared; fully dressed, in the high-necked kirtle and the greasy calico apron which she always wore, her hair bound with the black scarf which never seemed to be changed; and showing no surprise that I was there she came slowly down the stairs, bringing with her the rather unpleasant odour of people whose life is confined within small houses. I asked her sleepily: "Is the Lieutenant here?" and she said with surprise: "The Lieutenant? Haven't you heard . . .?"

When I tried to make her tell me what had happened she shut her mouth tightly and would say nothing more. This I put down at first to her peasant caution; but by degrees I realized, bemused as I was and despite the room's poor light, that she was struggling to keep herself in control. She had begun to move about the room, stirring the red embers in the stove, filling up the samovar; and her movements, as a rule so deft, were today as clumsy as my own, so that a glass she had just put down fell over and rolled off the edge of the table. Looking more closely, as she turned for a moment towards the window, I saw that her brown face had become unnaturally sallow, her eyes big and bleached with crying. Presently she said in a cracked voice: "You will have some tea, barin? I've got it here, I'd like you to have it." Of course, yes, I would have a glass of tea. And we drank it together, I sitting on the bench, she respectfully standing, both silent. I could see that she wanted to weep

again, but would not so far betray herself in my presence; a woman in the middle age, lean from work and childlessness, she had grown that roughness which defends the poor against life's severity. She stood as those of her race and kind do habitually, her weight on one leg and the other thrust forward, her free hand slung in the loop of her apron; and her eyes, looking out into the street, were bitter and enduring, like those of many I had seen who stood in cottage doorways when the wall behind or the roof was missing. She said at last, without looking at me: "They wouldn't let me see him. I took some cigarettes he'd left here, and that book he was fond of, and they wouldn't even promise to give them to him. I told them I only wanted to give him a blessing, but they wouldn't let me see him!" Trying to ask her what exactly had happened I found that my speech was too uncertain, for I almost knew the answer she would give me. Throughout that curious breakfast I found nothing I could say, and with a woman of such virile kind it was unthinkable to make a feeling gesture, to lay my hand on her wrist or shoulder. All I could do was to sit and drink my tea, still struggling to keep awake.

In spite of that effort my eyes had closed, and I may have been across the threshold of sleep, when the crunch of feet in the wet roadway, feet marching in imperfect time, quickened my senses. As I looked up I saw that Vetushka had already moved closer to the window and was staring intently in the sound's direction. Her mouth was a little way open, she breathed like a patient with bronchitis, with a faint, long, singing noise. When the marchers came into sight she dropped on her knees and began to cross herself.

The first man I saw was Grassogi—I should have known him just by his Sadova Street gait, hardly re-fashioned to the military stride. He wore his most serious expression, that parody of conscientiousness which I had found at first so laughable and by degrees so tiresome. Mariosik, showing his usual duty-face, was close behind him, and next came a rank of soldiers whose faces were unfamiliar, in the Tekinski uniform. After that four men in file, who did not trouble to keep the military pace, and indeed could have done so only poorly, for their hands were pinioned. Of these I noticed nothing in the first except his pallor, and in the second, Perkost, I saw no change from his habitual mien of vacant self-satisfaction. Behind Perkost came the shabby, large and loose-knit figure of Kroyadin, and to my horror he, casting his eyes this way and that, looked right into my face. I do not suppose, now, that he saw who I was, for the window-pane was of the poorest glass, and not too clean; but in that moment I thought that all the hatred in his frightened,

vulpine eyes was meant for me alone. Karamachik came behind at two or three paces' distance, as if his dignity would not allow him closer to the others; and certainly that puny creature, with his child-sized face and rounded shoulders, proclaimed in his walk, his carriage, a manifest superiority to the three before him. In the few seconds which he took to pass the window my brain made a photograph of his face which has not yet lost its sharpness: the very big forehead with what are called Socrates' bulges, the narrow, slightly hooked nose, the acutely M-shaped profile of his chin; a face made altogether from the inside, neglected without. He was faintly smiling, scornfully, as when I had seen him answering Lyublinov; and the fact that no one saw him—so he must have thought—did not make any difference, for what he smiled at was some private pleasure. He seemed, indeed, as unaware of what was about him as royalty of the crowds applauding them; and through the distinctively Russian eyes which looked away to nothing I saw, inside the mean and dirty body, a man who marched triumphantly. For a reason that I can't explain I wanted him to look at me, and I thumped the window-pane, trying to draw his attention. But he didn't hear, or would not, he walked straight on without the slightest change in his expression, and when the corporal behind him prodded his buttocks with a rifle, telling him to keep up closer, he took not the smallest notice. The last of him that I remember is merely the long hair brushing against his collar, and the crossed marks made made on the oil-smeared tunic by the rub of his straps and belt. All that was over very quickly, like a dream that one has just before waking, so vivid and so unreal. The gritty scrape of their feet lowered to silence, and except for the stir in the puddles they had trod through, the street was still again.

I heard Vetushka say—it seemed a long time afterwards—"But he wasn't there, he wasn't with them!"

I wondered vaguely why they should have come through the village. But later I remembered that a verst or so long the road, that way, there was a slice of ground, too much pitted and stony for cultivation, which had been used for bomb-throwing practice. There, presumably, the job would be done.

22

I wanted another hour's sleep. That might take away the heaviness inside my forehead, the sense of being disconnected with my own body and with all material things. But the grace was denied

me. As I limped along the cinder-path a window went up and Virchov called to me: "Hullo, Otraveskov, I didn't know you were back! I say, come in here, will you, I want to see you." Too lazy to make excuse, I crossed the wet grass and pulled myself in through the window.

Virchov himself was not much merrier or wider awake than I. Unshaved, with his hair all over the place, he wore a heavy woollen jacket, his breeches were unlaced and his feet stuck into dog-skin parlour-boots. His hands were smeared all over with ink, the table was covered with sheets of paper, there were scribbling papers mixed up with his sword and boots and tunic all over the bed. He said, walking up and down in a hopeless way: "I've got to get this bloody summary in to Vestil by nine o'clock. Nine o'clock, my God! Sit down, won't you—tip all those sheets on to the floor, they're all throw-outs. Only don't for God's sake monkey with those on the table, they're all fair-copy, not very fair, but it'll damned well have to do. The cigarettes are on the floor somewhere." I said: "Look here, Virchov, I can't stay long, I'm half-asleep, I don't feel up to gossip," and he answered with a petulance quite foreign to him: "Well, I'm not going to ask you to stay all morning."

He cleared a space to sit on at one end of the bed, took off one of his socks and attacked a chilblain. "I want you to know," he said, opening his mouth as little as possible, "that I had nothing to do with the business. I was there, but only to take notes. I was sent out before they started to chew it over."

"You were where?" I said vaguely.

"At the court-martial," he answered curtly.

"You mean—Scheffler?"

"Who do you think?"

"Then it's—it's over? I thought——"

He said: "What, didn't you know? Oh, of course, you were amusing yourself at Propod. Yes, it's over all right. I thought it never would be. Two hours, it went on, two blasted hours, and everyone knew from the start what was going to happen—Odoevski knew, and Vestil knew, and Scheffler knew. They might just as well have started where they finished off. It was just going over and over the same ground, and making the poor devil explain to them fourteen times over that he'd broken every law in the canon. And that fool Kyeltsi——"

"But what happened?" I said impatiently. "What are they going to do to him?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know. The summary has to go to Lyublinov. . . . But it seems pretty obvious." He drew the

back of his forefinger across his throat. "I'm sorry, Otraveskov, I'm awfully sorry, I liked the fellow, he was the only person on this station with any culture; he belonged to Petrograd, these people here are all provincials. And I tell you, he put up a magnificent performance. The court, as far as he was concerned, was just a picturesque formality that he'd condescended to witness—you'd never have imagined that he was being tried on what looks like a capital charge. He was terribly amusing, far better than I've ever known him, he picked everything Vestil said to bits and spread it all out and jeered at it. He kept on raising obscure legal points to prove that the court was quite unconstitutional, till Odoevski nearly squirmed out of his breeches. And while they were thinking out some answer to that he suddenly went for them over Karamachik—he knew, you see, that they'd disposed of Karamachik already—and that wasn't at all amusing. I tell you, if I'd been Vestil, I'd have dropped under the table, I've never heard a man get such a scorching in all my life. They couldn't stop him. Three times, three times Odoevski tried to call him to order, and he simply said *'Listen to me, you!'* as if they were a pack of naughty children. And they did listen to him, they bloody well had to. But he's got to pay for that, there'll be no getting out of it now. You know, Otraveskov, he's only got himself to blame. I'm sorry, but there it is. He's been asking for trouble ever since he came to this station, and now he's got it. . . . I wish you'd read through that top sheet and tell me if the grammar's all right."

I told him that the grammar was individual, but that Vestil would see nothing wrong with it. And then I went away. To try and explain Anton's case as I understood it would have been quite useless; neither of us was in wit enough for arguing, and now that the thing was settled, what use to argue? I left him kneeling on the chair and sprawling over his fair copy, perplexed and unhappy.

§

Even now I was to have no rest, for when I got to my quarters I found that M. Strubensohn had miraculously arrived there. He apologized profusely: wishing to make a few notes, he had been bold enough to seek hospitality in my chambers, and had taken the further liberty of clearing my table for his own temporary use.

Vexed as I was to lose my coveted privacy, I could not be sullen with so urbane a creature. He had carefully removed everything from the table—a pair of socks, a soapy shaving-brush, a photograph of Natalia, an empty cigarette carton—and had laid them with the greatest neatness along the top of my valises. In their place I saw

a copy of Svetchin's Commentary on Russian Military Law—that abstruse and pettifogging textbook which every young officer is supposed to master and none will read beyond the fourth chapter—a small, leather-bound notebook, a ruler, a clean piece of blotting paper. Strubensohn himself was tired—I could see that in his eyes —but as spruce as when I had seen him before and no less alert in his movements. He said, still in the tone of apology:

"I've had quite a busy time. Most of yesterday afternoon I was in Paulskov, getting to know some of the gentlemen there, then I came back here, and early this morning I had to make another trip to meet a man who knows something about General Lyublinov. Quite a busy time!"

I went to the window and shouted for Techesig, intending to give Strubensohn coffee before I broke the news to him. But when, excusing himself, he sat down to go on with his note-making, I saw that it was no good delaying. I said:

"M. Strubensohn, I'm very sorry, but I'm afraid your trouble has all been wasted. Scheffler was tried last night."

Without ceasing to write, he said: "Last night, yes, at one o'clock —a curious time, they seem to have been in a great hurry."

"But who told you?" I asked.

"Colonel Vestil. I went to ask his permission to serve as Count Scheffler's counsel. Of course he wouldn't give me that. He said that I was not qualified according to the terms of the standing order, and as he happened to be right I didn't argue about it. However, he gave me some useful information—the exact nature of the charge, who was presiding, and so forth. I told him that his horsemanship was often spoken of in the Petrograd clubs, and I found him quite easy to get on with. . . . You will pardon me if I just finish this little resumé I am making."

For half a minute I held myself in patience. Then I said: "Tell me this: what's the worst that can happen to him? Can they shoot him on this charge?"

He wrote another sentence before replying. Then, in the rather mincing voice of those who criticize French wines, he said: "Colonel Vestil thinks so, but I myself am doubtful, extremely doubtful. It rests, of course, on the question whether Anton Antonovitch was technically on active service. To disobey a command 'in the field,' as it's loosely phrased——"

"Technically," I said, "he was undoubtedly on active service. This establishment is under the jurisdiction of Paulskov, and Paulskov is an active command."

"Well, yes, that's how Colonel Vestil explained it to me. And

of course I didn't presume to argue with him. But my investigations at Paulskov—where the records officer was extremely helpful—did not reveal any instrument by which Anton Antonovitch had been converted from a repatriated soldier, who is *ipso facto* non-combatant, into a soldier on active service; and the evidence is clear enough that the order disobeyed was not an order to make assault upon the enemy by firearms or other means, or to stand against the enemy, or even to withdraw from the front of the enemy in orderly retreat; it was simply an order to supervise the transfer of certain men required for labour of a non-military character; and as I see it, it comes into the same category as an order given to a clerk in the General Staff office at Petrograd. If the case were to be decided according to the French or the German code I should argue rather differently; but one must always bear in mind that our own code differs strikingly from both of those, and it has the advantage, from the legal point of view, of far greater fluidity. Even the English are not so fond of exquisite ambiguities as we are."

I said rather wearily: "I'm afraid, M. Strubensohn, that that argument is too subtle to carry any weight at Paulskov. We are not very scholarly in this part of the world."

He nodded: "Yes, at Paulskov, as you say, they seem to have the executive rather than the logical intelligence." And he added with a note of authority: "Probably before we can do anything we shall have to get the case away from Paulskov altogether."

I ceased to interrupt him then. And presently, with a little sigh, he ruled a double line, blotted it carefully, and turned round his chair.

"Yes," he said, "I think that the gentlemen at present in charge of the case have had time enough now to get their fingers sticky. . . . Some coffee? Ah yes, thank you, that would be delicious. . . . Now the first thing I want to know—if you will be good enough to help me again, as you did so kindly yesterday—is about Colonel Odoevski."

"He is A.D.C. to Lyublinov."

"Yes, yes, I know! What I was going to ask is this: Was Odoevski present on any occasion when Scheffler was interviewed by Colonel Vestil in relation to the alleged act of disobedience? I ask that because——"

"Yes," I answered. "He was present at what amounted to an informal trial."

Strubensohn put his hands together and nodded like a mandarin. "I see. So he had a very precise, intimate and personal knowledge of the facts relating to the case, and in spite of that he came to preside over the court-martial. That, Captain, is what I should call

a triumph, a little masterpiece, of irregularity." He stretched back an arm for the Svetchin. "Perhaps you would like to see the passage, and what Professor Svetchin says about it?"

"I'll take your word for it," I said.

"Thank you! And now, I want to find out, if I can, what time the summary of findings is likely to be despatched to Paulskov. Of course it may have gone already, but I think that's unlikely——"

"It hasn't," I told him. "It isn't finished yet—it has to be in Vestil's office by nine o'clock."

For the first time I had been able to surprise him.

"But how do you know that?" he asked sharply.

"I've just seen the man who's drafting it," I said. "It's Lieutenant Virchov. The man you saw yesterday."

"Virchov? Ah yes, the youngish man with the French eyes! You say he is writing it now? But that's most important—where is he? —where's he doing it?—did you see anything he'd written?—could you get a carbon copy, do you think?"

I was far too sleepy to respond to his excitement, and I could not get away from the feeling that all his activity was hopeless. He did not understand, as I did, that the necessities of war are more powerful than the niceties of dialectic. Anton had wilfully challenged the war's authority, and authority would roll over him like the lava from a volcano. It had happened already to Karamachik and his friends; for Anton it was only a matter of time, and not a long time. I said, perhaps rather ungraciously:

"I couldn't ask for that. Obviously his summary's confidential, he's an honourable man——"

"Of course!" Strubensohn said heartily, the too-familiar "honourable" at once pointing his direction. "Yes, yes, I understand entirely, I should not like anyone to think that I had used underhand means. No, no, my dear Captain, I want to act quite straightforwardly. . . . This Lieutenant Virchov, has he any special duties in this establishment? Hygiene, anything like that? . . . Oh, he is responsible for secondary stores—would that include motor-spirit? Ah yes! . . . I wonder if perhaps I could just see him for a minute or two? There could be no harm in that."

"I doubt if he'll see anyone before nine," I said. "It'll be all he can do to get his summary finished—he's not a ready writer."

Strubensohn fastened his lips tightly and scratched his chin. Really, as I see it now, he was wonderfully patient, with that purposeful modesty which belongs to his race; for what Gentile of his eminence would have heard so calmly that a chit of a junior officer was too busy to see him? After a few moment's pause he said

slowly: "I don't want to suggest anything which you, as a man of honour, would not approve." (No, there was no trace of sarcasm in his voice.) "But I wonder if it would be very wrong for you to tell the Lieutenant that you've had a message from Colonel Vestil and the summary need not be in till nine-thirty? Then, perhaps, he would spare us a few minutes."

Virchov, as I knew him, was not the man to accept so palpable a cock-and-bull story as that; but I realized that Strubensohn had made up his mind to see him and I had not the energy to argue. I said, "I'll do my best," and went along to Virchov's room.

I met him in the doorway. He had finished his summary, and was just off to Vestil's office with it. "It'll have to do!" he said with the cheerfulness of accepted failure. "As far as I can see, none of the sentences end properly, and most of them seem to have got no verbs. But if Vestil doesn't like it he'll have to re-write it himself."

Without binding straw to my boots I told him that M. Strubensohn, who was in my room, had asked the pleasure of seeing him for a few moments. He said: "Do you mean that old Jew who was mooching about and bothering everybody last night? Why does he want to see me? Is he a press reporter? I'm not allowed to say anything about the court-martial, if that's what he wants."

I asked: "Will you, as a personal favour to me, see him for just five minutes?" He agreed then. "But if he tries to pump me I shall simply walk out." In guarded triumph I led him along the corridor.

Strubensohn had raised himself to a new level of amiability. "It is so very kind of you," he said to Virchov, "to spare a few moments of your time to an elderly civilian, busy as you must be. Captain Otraveskov tells me that you are the hardest-worked officer in this camp—except himself, h-h-h! And I hear you've been up all night over this terrible business of Count Scheffler. That must have given you a great deal of anxiety!"

Opening but slowly to this sunshine, Virchov said: "Anxiety? It's given me a lot of work, but I don't know about anxiety. It's no affair of mine, I was simply the minute-clerk."

Strubensohn looked grave. "Yes, but the reporting of so important a case is always an anxious business—I once did that kind of work myself, so I know what it is. Especially when one has to sign one's report."

Virchov smiled. Anxiety was not a common feature in his mental courses. "They haven't asked me to sign it," he said cheerfully, "and I don't suppose they will."

"Good! I'm glad of that!" Strubensohn said warmly. "I don't know, M. Virchov, if you would be offended by an old fellow like myself giving advice, but I've had a good deal of experience in such matters: my advice—if I may give it quite impersonally—is that you should not on any account sign the report. You see, if your signature were to appear on that document, you might be regarded as responsible not only for the accuracy of the report itself, but also for the verdict reached—as a witness of the proceedings attached to the tribunal. . . . Of course, it's nothing to do with me, it's a matter for your own judgement entirely. But I myself—being perhaps an unduly cautious person—would never allow my name to be connected with the conduct of a trial which was in the highest degree irregular. I mean—supposing that the case were to be reviewed, as it well might be, by the standing juridicial committee of the General Staff——"

"But was it irregular?" Virchov asked.

Strubensohn smiled and shrugged his shoulders, as if to discount the value of his opinion. "As I see it," he said diffidently, "the trial could hardly have been ordered less correctly by the fishwives of Astrakhan. For one thing, I understand that Count Scheffler was not defended by counsel, to which he was entitled——"

"Oh, but he was! Captain Kyeltsi served as his counsel."

"Kyeltsi?" I said. "He surely didn't choose that lunatic!"

"He didn't choose him, no. But that didn't matter. He said to begin with that he didn't want counsel, he was perfectly able to conduct his own case. Then Odoevski said he must be formally defended, and he asked for you, and as you weren't available they gave him Kyeltsi. Of course Kyeltsi didn't get a word in edgewise. . . ."

Politely but resolutely interrupting, Strubensohn asked: "I take it that you have recorded that in your summary: that Scheffler was not allowed to have the officer he asked for as his counsel?"

"No," Virchov answered, "I was told merely to record the fact that Kyeltsi served as officer for the defence."

Strubensohn blinked as if a strong light had suddenly been flashed into his eyes. With his face turned a little away from us, he said in a worried voice: "I suppose—I suppose that's all right. It seems a little dangerous—omitting a fact of that kind. Still, if those were Colonel Odoevski's instructions——"

"Not Odoevski's—Colonel Vestil's."

"Colonel Vestil's? . . . However, if you have been instructed to omit that passage in the proceedings you can't very well do other-

wise." He spoke in judicial tones now, as if Virchov were consulting him professionally. "The important thing, I always believe, is to omit no material part of the evidence given. But I've no doubt you realize that. And Colonel Vestil would not have instructed you to omit any positive statement of Count Scheffler's."

There was just a note of interrogation in that remark; it was enough to provoke Virchov's reply.

"Oh no. The only parts of Scheffler's defence I was told to omit were his digressions."

"Digressions——?"

"Yes, he wandered from the subject a good deal. He complained at great length of the way Karamachik's case had been dealt with—he said that Lyublinov should be given at least twenty-four hours to consider the findings before confirming them—all that was nothing whatever to do with his own case."

Strubensohn nodded approval. "Oh yes, I quite agree, I think your position is perfectly sound. It would be a mere waste of paper to include such irrelevancies in your summary. As long as nothing is omitted that bears on the defendant's own case——"

"You mean, on the charge for which he was tried?"

Appearing puzzled, Strubensohn said: "I—I don't quite understand——'

"Well, what I mean," Virchov said, growing interested, "is that Scheffler complained about being confined to his quarters under guard, long before any charge was formally brought against him—he maintained that this was irregular—and I've been told to leave that out of the summary. You'd agree that that's quite right?"

Strubensohn pondered the matter. "Certainly the point raised does not relate directly to the charge," he said judicially. "The only question is whether the irregular incarceration was such as unduly to hinder Count Scheffler in the preparation of his defence. . . . But really, M. Virchov, I have no right to waste your time like this. I only wanted to ask you if I might obtain a few litres of motor-spirit from your store. The motor which brought me out from Paulskov has run short—the man was very careless——"

"But of course!" Virchov went at once to the table, took an envelope from his pocket, and scrawled on the back of it that the bearer, M. Strubensohn, had permission to buy up to thirty litres of spirit from the station petroleum store at the price of twenty-five kopeks per litre. "If you give that to the corporal in charge," he said with the smile that made him often so attractive. ". . . No no, it is I who have to thank you—I'm more than grateful for your

advice about signing the summary. I should never have thought about its involving me in responsibility. . . ."

§

"Your friend is delightful!" Strubensohn said gravely as soon as Virchov had gone. "I cannot quite explain it, but it always seems to me that the military life gives a charm and polish which one seldom finds among the sedentary professions. I suppose that a man who has to make quick decisions, one who must always make himself plain to his subordinates, develops naturally that frankness of character and manners which to a city man like me is so refreshing. . . . If you will excuse me, a few moments!" He turned his chair round and began writing again; but as his pen sowed hieroglyphs in even rows across his notebook he went on talking in the precise, measured voice of one who demonstrates machinery.

"We now have quite a useful collection of facts for starting our crusade. First of all, we can argue that the tribunal was constituted according to the special provisions for trial in the field, and that the conditions which would necessitate that procedure did not, in fact, obtain. Secondly, we have the grave impropriety of a man privy to the case for the prosecution acting as president of the court. Next comes the very important fact, to which Lieutenant Virchov has testified in my presence and in yours, that the summary of evidence and findings has been maliciously doctored by one closely allied to the prosecution. In the course of that doctoring three facts have been concealed, of which at least one can be regarded as of the first importance, namely that Scheffler was refused the service as his counsel of the officer whom he chose and who could have been summoned within a few hours. The reference to the trial of Karamachik —whoever he may be—was probably irrelevant, as Colonel Vestil maintains, and I cannot make direct use of it; but if Scheffler argued that that trial was an improper one—and he is most unlikely to be wrong on such a question—we have at least an additional means of making Lyublinov as uncomfortable as I intend him to be within a few hours from now. The wrongful restraint of which Scheffler complains can be amplified, I think, to look like deliberate obstruction of his case. We can argue that the unwarrantly harsh treatment of the defendant is evidence of prejudice, that his health of body and mind were harmfully affected, that he was denied proper opportunity for preparing his brief. Don't you agree with me that when those facts are all placed together the affair begins to look less like a trial than a murderous conspiracy?"

I said: "But when one re-examines your points severally——"

"Then," he broke in, "we shall probably find some new facts to induce a most desirable confusion. The important thing, at the moment, is to convince General Lyublinov that the case demands to be re-examined, and that the sooner he passes it on to someone less exclusively military in outlook the safer he will be. . . . But all this must be very boring for you, these academics of strategy. I was going to ask you for one more kindness: is it possible to send a private telegram from here?"

I told him it could be telephoned to Paulskov.

"If you would be so kind as to arrange that!" He began writing again. "I will paraphrase the message so as to avoid curiosity. . . . There! It is rather long, I'm afraid."

I took the slip of paper, on which he had written his telegram. It was addressed to "Perevozhenko, Gorokhovaya 97, Petrograd," and read: *"I have found the typewriter of which I spoke to you last week in faulty condition owing to a badly constructed container. Please see Stepan Nikolayevitch and get him to register complaint at head office for immediate transmission to Paulskov office. I will telephone shortly."* Watching me read it, Strubensohn allowed himself a little smile.

"Yes," he said, "a very badly constructed container! . . . Perhaps you could tell the telegraphist at Paulskov that I shall arrange to see him early this afternoon, and that if he has the answer ready for me he will earn thirty—no, say twenty-five roubles. And now, having trespassed egregiously upon your hospitality, I must take my leave." He smiled once again. "I am hoping that when I have had half an hour with General Lyublinov he will feel as if he were the foremost anarchist in Russia."

I could not appreciate that, my mind had become too sluggish for any spur to provoke it. When I had telephoned Strubensohn's message from the quartermaster's office I went back to my quarters, sat down to take my boots off, and immediately fell asleep.

§

Later in the day I approached Vestil and asked permission to see Anton again. He said nothing, he simply shook his head I went circumspectly to Prouskov's cottage, but naturally he had not been taken back there. No one seemed to know where he was. Next day I got it out of Grassogi that he had been taken away from Mariki altogether; to Paulskov, Grassogi thought, but he did not really know.

23

The next news I had was a letter from Anton himself, which he had somehow got posted at Paulskov and which reached me, about a week later, just before I finally left Mariki. "I'm sending you this just to relieve my own feelings," he wrote. "Perhaps it's ungrateful, but I'm disgruntled over the way things have gone. The ridiculous tribunal at Mariki—did you hear about that? it was amusing in its way—that should have finished off the whole business. I'm weary of arguing with people who are no more likely to understand my views that I am to accept theirs. And now, for some reason that no one can tell me, I'm to be shifted somewhere else and put through the whole thing again, just as if they hadn't made up their minds long ago what they're going to do with me. Here in this dingy barrack-room which stinks of mice I haven't even poor Vetushka to talk to, I hear nothing of what's happening in the world outside—if there still is a world outside—and worst of all I get no spiritual nourishment. I asked them to get a priest for me, and they sent me an aged and ignorant Father of the Greek Communion who had a shocking cold and could not even hear what I said. I want to reason out my position, to get my conscience finally at rest; and how can a man do that all by himself? . . ."

That letter, with two of Yelisaveta's, and the quaintly worded document which gave me my "provisional release from further military service" was all the reading I had for the roundabout journey back to Petrograd. Enough, for one could not read much in the compartment I shared with a dozen men or more, one of them snoring on my shoulder, the boots of another between my knees. As far as Bruletzau we were quite all right, six or eight of us, respectable people, including one or two whose shyness revealed them as deserters. At Bruletzau the platforms were crowded from end to end, and a group of Siberian Tartars chose our carriage for invasion; the door was locked but they had the window smashed and were swarming through it before we could shout a protest. I still had my epaulettes but that made no difference; they wanted to get to Kursk, it appeared, and they had an idea (quite wrongly) that this train would take them there. It was useless to contradict them, they spoke hardly any Russian and could understand none. I could just make out from their talk that they wanted to get to Kursk in time for "the revolution." The revolution? Yes, the sergeant beside me said, he had heard it rumoured they were having a revolution in Petrograd—the Volhynians had joined the rioters; but what of that? in Petrograd there were always revolutions, that was what the police were

for. The Siberians settled down in great contentment, finding sufficient comfort of their own kind. They moved an inoffensive corporal on to the floor and took his place, they leant against our knees, they smoked and jabbered and spat and urinated into the corridor. They were homely creatures, who really wanted more generous space for their big, sweaty bodies.

Yes, the sergeant said, the people at Petrograd were having a revolution—so they were saying in the stlovyas at Paulskov—and that was not surprising, since the wealthy civilians in Petrograd had nothing better to do. It would make no difference to the war; the Tsari batiushka was in charge of that and he would pay no attention to any nonsense that might be happening in the Capital. He, Sergeant Gogik, was only troubled about a wagonful of potatoes for which he was responsible and which, by superhuman exertions, he had got attached to this train at the Varka junction. The potatoes were destined for the re-equipment depôt of Trepov's Division at Shorogovetz, he had sworn by all the gods he knew to the Major of Supplies at Paulskov that he would deliver them safely. And now, what could he do? If he left the train for a single moment his place would be taken, he might never get on it again. None of the railwaymen could be trusted, they would take off a wagon or two if the engine-driver said the load was too great, or a staff coach had to go on, or for no reason whatever beyond a disposition for meddling. Besides that, it was an old wagon, the boards were rotten and the hasps leant out from their rusty screws. What was to prevent any one of these Siberian gentry who chanced to be hungry from tearing down the door and pulling out a dozen sacks to go on with? and how was he to explain the default to a sceptical Quartermaster's staff at Shorogovetz? They would say he should have travelled in the same wagon with the sacks—it was easy to talk like that if you'd never tried a journey of three or four hundred miles on a mattress of potatoes. . . . I think it gave him some comfort to pour out his troubles, which he did in the most respectful way, and rather monotonously. As far as Tchekomak, where he slept for half an hour, his sad little voice was still flowing, and I do not remember that he touched on any other subject than his potatoes and what they would say at Shorogovetz if he arrived without them.

In spite of the human padding and its vast exhalation the compartment was very cold. This, more than my cramped position, the hubbub and the shaking, prevented me from falling asleep; and my brain, cheated of the rest it wanted, laboured as painfully as the ancient single-driver engine which was dragging us across the Suprin steppe. "I want to reason out my position, and how can a man do that

all by himself?" Though the words had come to me on a crumpled piece of paper I could hear Anton saying them, and I saw his face in that perplexity which sometimes crossed it like a curtain hiding the shift of his moods. It was only proof of his affection that he had sent me that letter, but I felt a reproach there which grew large and heavy as my mind churned it. I had lost him now, I should not see him again; and had I, in the hours we shared, ever given him the sympathy his loneliness cried out for? The events of the last few weeks came plodding again across the darkened stage, I tried to see clearly where we had been forced to separate, why I should be free now and he a prisoner, why I had not been on his side. It was easy to say that one could not be led by another man's conscience; that was no answer, when the issues of the battle he fought were as plain to me as to him. The difference between us—I saw it by degrees in longer glimpses—was that I had accepted things as they were while he withstood them. I could justify myself—how often, how wearily I did so as every join in the rails jerked my shoulders against the hard flank of the compartment—by the ordinary ethics of obedience, by my oath of fealty. What safety, what order could there be in any society where a member moved to right and left by every hazard of his moral judgments regardless of his previous undertaking? Yes, but how long should acquiescence last in face of callousness and folly? Feeling my way between those dialectics, I could not lose the memory of Anton's gentleness as he lay beside me in the prisoner-train, his tirelessness at Krozkohl, the patient way he listened to the long, meandering complaints which the soldiers brought to him every hour of the day; and I puzzled that a man of his kind, wishing so little harm, loved by so many, should be the one to be caught and twisted in the wheels of rational administration. My tired mind stretched to the limit of its reach, and I saw then, confusedly, that the very qualities I had loved in him were those which had taken him away from me. If he had been smaller-hearted, content to pity without protest, or readier to deceive himself, he could have squeezed into the framework which took my smaller shape so easily.

The train stopped violently, throwing one of the Siberians against my bad leg and setting the rest to oaths and laughter. Sergeant Gogik, roused into full anxiety, begged me to hold his place while he went to look at the potatoes. They were all right, he said happily as he climbed in again through the window, the hasps were still holding.

No one knew why we had stopped: outside no lamp was visible, the sky's faint light showed nothing but a patch of scrub on the desolate plain, the only sounds were those from inside the coaches. A man working his way along the footboard shouted into one carriage

after another that the train had been stopped "because of the Revolution"—the driver saw no point in carrying soldiers about the country any longer; but the fellow was drunk, and no one took any notice of him except a Siberian who threw a lighted cigarette-end into his face. We seemed likely to be there for ever, and I had just dozed off, with a handkerchief between my face and my neighbour's beard, when the train quivered and rumbled on again. With my eyes closed, I fancied that the man beside me was Strubensohn, and I talked to him in a wandering way. "I appreciate what you've done for Anton Antonovitch, but I'm afraid it's quite useless. There isn't a case, you must know that, there isn't any kind of defence. You've only prolonged his suffering, they'll have him in the end, that kind of man can never be protected." He didn't answer, he only jerked his shoulder to push me farther over into Sergeant Gogik, and I wondered why he had started to smell so horribly. He was a vulgar person, that was the truth of it, he had rescued Anton by a piece of cheap chicanery and I could not like him for doing so. Rescued him? But what had happened, where was Anton now? I said aloud, "Tell me, I want to know, what have you done with him?" The sergeant, touching my arm, said kindly, "It's all right, Vashe Blagorodie, it's quite all right!" I opened my eyes and saw nothing in the dim gas-light but a tangle of slumped bodies and a dark, hirsute face, the eyes screwed away under vast black brows, the mouth wide open. I said to the sergeant: "Have you seen my friend anywhere, my friend Lieutenant Scheffler?" "No," he said, "I've not seen another officer on this train." I remembered then that Anton had gone; someone, I thought, had killed him; but through the night I constantly pursued his image, tearfully calling his name, crying that my leg was bad and I wanted a drink of water. Again and again I fancied that the huge creature leaning against my left side was Strubensohn, and that Strubensohn was hiding him.

We halted, for no plain reason, at the station of a little place which I think was called Tostopie. Only one light showed, and except for a group of country people lying asleep on the platform there was no one about. We had been there for five minutes or so when a youth in a torn blouse came out from the station building, shouting in a drunken voice something I couldn't understand. One of the peasants called to him to keep quiet and was kicked in the face for her indiscretion. He came across to the train, this excited boy, jumped up on the top footboard, yelled his news through the window, and fell back on the platform, where he lay miraculously unhurt, and roaring with laughter. The news came along the train in a few moments: the Emperor, they said, had thrown in his hand and gone

off to Sweden, there would be no more Emperor, no more fines for cattle-thieving, no more prisons. Someone shouted down the platform that the boy was a bloody liar, and he yelled back, "Wait till you get to Petrograd, you'll see how it is when you get there!" In my compartment the news was received without excitement; the Siberians couldn't make it out, and the others didn't believe a word of it. But the men in the corridor were saying, soberly, that that was a good thing: with no Emperor to fight for the war would have to stop —they supposed it had stopped already—and now they could all get back to their holdings. Further down the train was cheering. I looked out of the window and saw that men were climbing down from the open trucks in the rear and staggering off into the town: no more Emperor, that meant they were all their own masters, they could do what they liked now. A few of them came back and clambered up the side of the trucks just as the train was moving off again. I saw them hanging on in a feeble, negligent fashion as our speed increased, and one or two dropped off a little way outside the station, drawing shouts of ribaldry. Everyone was in high good-humour. Sergeant Gogik asked me timidly if the news was true; and did I think that, if the war was over, the soldiers at Shorogovetz would still want their potatoes?

To me, it seemed to make no difference. The bitter wind that drove in through the broken window would grow no milder, the pain of my leg would not be slighter or the carriage wall less hard if all the thrones in Europe were overturned. I wanted only to lie at full length in some warm place and go to sleep. But an odd phrase of the drunken boy's, "Wait till you see how it is in Petrograd!" was repeated in my mind's ear like the dreary call of a cuckoo, reminding me that Petrograd was my destination; and as soon as my restless thoughts were shown that track they dashed full speed along it.

Not with much happiness. The echo for Vava's presence had worn itself to dullness; he was cared-for now, and he could not belong to me so much as when I had found him helpless in the dreadful house of the woman Koroschik. Of course I should take him away from Yelisaveta; he must be with me now, I must tend him myself, feed him, wash him, amuse him, as I had done for those few short days in Katie's flat. But where should I live, who would keep house for me? And Natalia, what must I do with her? "Natalia is a good deal better," Yelisaveta had written in her last letter. "I see her nearly every day, and I am allowed to take her for little drives into the country. She talks freely, but will not keep to one subject for more than two or three minutes at a time. She speaks sometimes of her life with you at Krasnyesk, and says that she was happy there.

But when I talk of you as living now, she laughs and turns the talk some other way, and sometimes cries a little, and she will not connect her husband with 'the gentleman who came to see me a little while ago.' She has spoken only once of Vava—'I used to have a little boy, but he died'—and Dr. Torklus agrees with me that it isn't time yet to show Vava to her, especially for the boy's sake. I am telling you this so that you will understand already how things are when you come back to Petrograd, and will know how to treat them both. That will be soon, I hope, because I have told Maurice Boyanowskivitch that he is to arrange for you to be got out of the army as soon as possible. . . . I was glad to have a letter from you, but I do not like sentimental letters, and I see no reason why you should be effusive about my looking after Vava. The chief reason I took him was that you didn't want me to. So why should you be so grateful? Am I the only person in Russia who ever talks honestly about their feelings? If you really want to 'repay' me, as you say, you must get my ridiculous Anton out of this trouble. Has Kahn Abramovitch reached you yet? They say the old devil is fearfully clever. . . ."

Yes, yes, it was all so easy: when I got back to Petrograd I should know how to treat them both!

In that state of dim consciousness, with the carriage light showing as a dull violet through my eyelids the train pitching and shaking my body, I confused this journey with the last I had made to Petrograd. I thought that I had still to find Natalia, and as if no other image had ever interposed I saw her again as my beloved, sitting in the bedroom of the Furshtadskaya hotel where I awaited sentence, standing in her high snow-boots in the Krasnyesk roadway. I felt myself weeping then, rather from a happy tenderness than from sorrow, for she whose face I saw now could not be far from me in spirit. But one of the Tartars, leaning over and hammering on my knee, was roughly asking me for matches; and as my eyes opened a little way the later picture fell across the old one, I saw the high stairway in the Euphrosina Hospital, the room she had there, her known eyes watching my face unknowingly. I said, "No, I haven't got any!" and angrily pushed the man's hand away. My eyes had shut already, I twisted round to get a better perch for my head, and soon Natalia in her tenderness came back to me. A violent lurch woke me again, and the vision was destroyed; and several times I passed through that brief serenity to feel the loss of it with greater bitterness. Oh, I had been happy then, on that former journey; happy even at Mariki, where in the daytime every thought was interrupted by some petty duty and at night the tiredness of walking from hut to hut pitched you into sleep on the narrowest of broken bedsteads.

There you could swaddle your thoughts in dullness, no one asked more of you than to play a standard part, to wear a uniform, to be at stated times in stated places. I prayed now, forgetting I no longer had God to pray to, that something would stop me from getting to Petrograd; where a man must alter himself for every encounter, and the pieces of a life I distantly remembered would lie about me, broken, but so like their old reality. Could I not go back? No, Mariki was no refuge, for there I must pass every day the cottage where Anton and I had lived together, and men would nudge each other, whispering, "He was the man who took the last contingent to Propod-Czerveen; Karamachik and those others got shot because of that."

At one of the train's jerks the man on my left side was thrown forward on to the floor, where he stayed, folded over another man's legs, still asleep. Thankfully, I shifted round to take up the extra space, thinking that I should sleep now; but now my eyes stayed open, watchful against the return of ghosts. I was very thirsty and a little sick from the odours of the carriage. Unexpectedly the sky grew lighter, we seemed to be jolting into a crimson sunrise. I realized by degrees that a light so strong and flickering could not be natural, and then I saw that it came from a fire. It was a big house burning, we passed it within a distance of perhaps five versts; I saw nothing but the pulsing flames and the ragged line of its façade; but that was enough, for I had seen such work in Borisoff twelve years before. The glow lit the inside of the train more brightly than the feeble gas lamps, a man woke up, blinking, and cursed it. From the trucks in the rear I heard another burst of cheering; I suppose they were not getting much sleep, those fellows, and were grateful for any diversion. The man who had woken went off to sleep again, and before the fire was out of sight the train was once more quiet except for the rattle of bogies and the continuous snoring. We were only passers-by, and if the folk of this region had started to fire their châteaux it was no affair of ours. Gogik, touching my arm again, said anxiously, "You saw that, Vashe Blagorodie? The Revolution!" Ah yes, I had forgotten about the Revolution, I had no room among my tired thoughts for things like that.

§

About four o'clock in the morning we came into Xablososhna—I knew it was that place by the line of huge petroleum tanks which I saw as we crossed the river. According to custom we stopped for twenty minutes or so in the outskirts of the town and then jogged

on at a walking-pace till we reached the station. In contrast with Tostopie the platforms here were crowded, mostly with Cossacks on their way south from Presk. Few of them stirred to look at us, they slept like the dead, wound up in their coats, heads on their kit or a neighbour's stomach, rifles strewn all over the place. We might be here for five minutes or forty, you never could tell; and having made the Tartars understand they must keep my place I went to find out for myself. There was no one on the engine, but I found a boy lying underneath it with his head just protruding. "How long are we stopping?" I asked him. He couldn't say, I must ask the driver. "The driver, where's he?" "He's gone into the town, he has a friend there." In time I got the further information that a lubrication-valve had broken; the fireman was doing his best but he'd never dealt with a thing like that before, he thought they might have to send back to Bruletzau for someone to come and repair it. From this I gathered that I needn't be back in the train for at least an hour.

It was not enough to stretch my body and to breathe clean air, I was desperate for something to drink. There was nothing to be had in the station, but a man in a railway cap thought I might get kvass in the town somewhere—there was a place called the Closet of St. Anthony on the other side of the river-bridge which was generally open. How long would it take to get there? Five—ten—twenty minutes, he really couldn't say. In any case he advised me not to go there, officers were no longer popular in this town.

I found that the station area had been fenced across with barbed wire, a barrier six feet high with a strand every nine inches. The single entrance had a wired gate across it and was guarded by two sleepy sentries carrying fixed bayonets. "Why all these precautions?" I asked one of them. He said laconically: "Look over there!" and I saw, as my eyes sharpened to pierce the darkness, that along one side a little crowd of civilians was standing close against the wire, staring intently towards the station building. I asked "What are they waiting for, at this time of night?" The sentry laughed. "Food!" he said. "They think that every train's got food on it, they're always here when there's a train in."

He was reluctant to let me go outside—he had that fatherly manner which belonged to old soldiers of the southern borderlands—but I would not listen to such nonsense. Having loaded my colt revolver as a precaution, I made him open the gate for me.

Released from the confinement of the carriage I felt less sleepy but rather light-headed, as if from alcohol, and I found myself walking clumsily. I took a street which seemed by direction to lead to the river and came into the great square, which the impressionist

Mogrov has painted as a pattern of shadows on brilliant sunlight and which now, with no light but that of the starless sky, looked scarcely more imposing than a prison-yard. As I saw it first the whole of this wide space was empty, but while I crossed it I caught the murmurous noise of many people talking, and when I came to the far side, where the kremlin is, I saw men leaning all along the wall or squatting on the cobbles, as if they waited for some performance to be given in the centre. I was passing right through a group of them when one caught me roughly by the shoulder. "You!" he said. "Tell me, is it true, this about Nikolas?" I pretended not to understand him but he held me firmly—he was very strong—and I said at length, "No, I think it's only a rumour." "Thank you, little officer," he said with a smile, and then, throwing me forward, "You dirty liar, you, you know it's true!" I picked myself up and walked on rapidly, followed by their laughter. There were soldiers standing about, but none made any move to help me.

The street into which I turned, narrow and stercoral, seemed to be full of barefooted women; I constantly jostled against them in the shadows; and when I came out to the river bank I found more of them there, sitting in groups on the steamer-landing and among the bales which were lying in disorderly heaps along the towing-path. Here, by the lamps on the waterside, I could see more clearly, and I knew by the way these women wore their shawls that they belonged to the country. Many were asleep, dozing with their heads unsupported in the way that only peasants can, but some were talking, in the plaintive, monotonous gabble of the southern bazaars. Foolishly, I stopped to ask one of them where I could get something to eat and drink. She did not understand, she thought I was offering her something, and when I turned away she rose and followed me. The news went along the line quickly: the lame officer was offering food to anyone who would come and get it; and in spite of my protests I found by the time I reached the bridge that a score of women were trailing behind. I stopped there and faced them. I said, in the best I could manage of Little-Russian: "I'm sorry, you've made a mistake, I haven't any food, I'm badly in want of it myself." At first they didn't seem to hear, they pressed closer, looking up into my face. I repeated, rather angrily: "I've no food, I tell you, I've nothing to give you!" and then two or three of them started crying. Someone shouted that I had stolen their food, I had taken all the food out of the town and given it to the soldiers; and a gaunt woman with her dark hair loose about her neck squeezed between the others to shake her fist in my face. "Yes!" she spat, "it doesn't matter what happens to us as long as the soldiers get

their food! Who wants the f—— soldiers? Who wants the bloody war?" Acting on impulse, I felt in my pocket and found a note for twenty roubles. I held it out to her. She took it under the lamp a few yards behind me and examined it carefully. I should have slipped away then, but I was held in fascination by their terrible faces, the pinched, pale faces, the breastless bodies and skeleton hands. One of the oldest, bareheaded and quite bald, snatched the note away and held it up to her eyes. "It's Czar's money!" she said. "It's no good now, they've done away with the Czar, the money's no good." But she would have put it away in the market-bag she carried if it had not been seized by a third woman, who brought it back and held it up with both hands in front of me. "Money!" she said shrilly, "and where's the food to buy with it? Tell me!" she screamed, "where's the food?" And with a movement that was consciously theatrical she tore it into two pieces, which floated down to the ground. That was too much for peasants to see unmoved. Those that were nearest fell scrambling for the pieces, the others tumbled on top of them. I turned, more frightened of those women than I had ever been of the Austrians, and broke into a lopsided run, not stopping till I was sure that the darkness hid me.

I should have lost my way in the mesh of streets, but the men I saw now were all going in the same direction, some of them running, shouting to each other "It's true, it's true!" and I guessed that they were making for the great square. When I got there I found the whole space covered with people, who seemed to have gathered there for no special purpose and to be rather at a loss for something to do. They had set a lorry on fire in the middle, giving the square a ghostly cheerfulness, and some of them had gathered round to enjoy its warmth, singing rather lugubriously their traditional harvest songs; but many seemed to be frightened by the brilliance and hung back in the shadows, the Jews standing in close groups—they remembered, perhaps, the saying that a bonfire was incomplete without a Jew on top of it. A man ran out from one of the side streets dragging a flag behind him. He went as near to the fire as he dared and heaved the flag into it. Those who were nearest cheered him, but the people standing beside me were disapproving: why should he burn that flag? it came from the Church of St. Simeon and must have cost at least a hundred roubles. On the whole, however, everyone was happy. They did not make much noise, the singing and shouting came from some distant street; they walked about in family groups, enjoying their splendid freedom, an old woman with half a dozen children trailing behind her, a party of peasant girls with their arms linked; they called little greetings, and

embraced each other as on Easter morning. An old man with long hair, tears pouring from his happy eyes, came up and put his hands on my shoulders and kissed me on both cheeks. "Brother-Officer!" he sobbed, "Brother-Captain, Brother-General, we are all brothers now. The Czar has gone, the war's over, we shall all have food now, we shall all be happy." He crossed himself. "God bless you, little Brother, God's holy peace shine into you, God's holy Mother protect and guide you!"

A party of the crowd, finding that nothing was likely to happen here, was moving on towards the station, and I saw when I got there how sensible a precaution the barbed wire was, for the whole of that area was now thick with people and hundreds of them were looking hungrily towards the station building as if it were some promised land. At one side, where the ground rose a little, a hunchback had mounted on a tarantass to harangue the crowd, and a hundred men or so had gathered about him, listening with a kind of stoic patience; his wild, white hair and his waving arms showing oddly in the flickering light which leaked through from the square. Hurrying towards the gateway, I did not hear much of what he said; only scraps of jargon: "Who does it belong to now? It belongs to you, brothers and sisters! Who does the land belong to, the cattle, the corn? Comrades, they belong to you! . . . Freedom, freedom, I tell you you have lived to see the day when Russia is free!" When I last looked back a strapping girl, pushing the hunchback roughly off the cart, had taken his place, and the crowd with no movement or change in demeanour were listening to her. She had torn open the front of her blouse and was striking her bare breast with her fist. "In the New Russia!" she shouted, "the women will be free!" At the gate I signalled to the sentry, who waited for a good moment and then let me slip through. "You enjoyed your drink, Vashe Blagorodie?"

I think that a small gap must have been cut at one end of the barrier; a number of youths who had obviously no business there were swaggering about behind the sentries (who were powerless to interfere with them) and I saw that more were filtering in and making their way through to the platform, boisterously singing.

The Cossacks who had been sleeping when I left the station were all on their feet now. A young soldier, partly drunk, with his uniform in shocking disorder, was trotting up and down the platform shouting that the war was over and everybody could go home. For my own satisfaction I caught hold of this fellow as he passed me, shook him, and told him to hold his tongue; when he had recovered from his surprise he said with a grin, "All right, Comrade Bastard,

you'll pay for that later on! There are no more officers now, see?—we obey no one but the Soldiers' Council!" and with that he made off as fast as his crazy legs would take him. It seemed impossible that anyone could believe the rascal, but on all sides I heard it repeated, "The war's over, did you hear—we can do what we like now, we can all go home." Some of the Cossacks were trying by force of numbers to fight their way into the train, others were clambering on to the roof. Nowhere could I see anyone exerting the least authority.

Barging my way towards the front of the train I came across a group of N.C.O.s smoking and talking together. I asked where their officer was; they replied, saluting me rather casually, that he had got off the train at Tostopie and they hadn't seen him since. Well, had they nothing better to do than chatter, with all this scuffle going on? A fat sergeant shrugged his shoulders: what could you do? the men were excited about the Revolution, it would only make trouble to interfere with them. I said sharply: "The Revolution doesn't make any difference to your duty." He replied, quite simply, and with forbearing courtesy, that the men no longer respected any authority, they were best left alone.

The important thing was to get the train away as soon as possible. I found a corporal who seemed to be more alert than his fellows and sent him to find the stationmaster while I went to see what was happening to the engine. The fireman was underneath the cab again and I found that he had fallen asleep there. I roused him and asked if he had got the valve put right. No, he couldn't do anything with it. Did it really matter, I asked, would the engine not go with the valve broken? Oh yes, he thought it would go, but one of the connections might seize, you never could tell.

"Has the driver been back?

"No."

(That did not surprise me.)

"Could you drive the train yourself?"

Oh yes, he could drive it, if he had someone to do the firing; he had once driven a train the whole way from Kursk to Krisnikovo. Just then the corporal returned with a seedy creature in civilian clothes who said that he was in charge of the station—the stationmaster had gone to Seppe to see about a mare he had grazing there. I asked: "Is there any reason why this train shouldn't start at once?" No, as far as he was concerned it could go off any time—indeed, he would be glad to have the line cleared for another troop-train from Presk; but the driver didn't seem to be about, had I by any chance seen him? I said that the fireman would drive the train; I should

provide a man to shovel for him. At that the fireman himself began to protest. He was sleepy, he said, he had been stoking all the way from Varka; he had never meant to join the railway service, it was all a mistake, he had meant to be a forester. I said: "The train is to start exactly ten minutes from now. You, Corporal, will travel in the cab with your rifle, and if this boy does anything wrong you will shoot him." I knew that he had no cartridges. Then I went off to find a stoker.

I doubted if the boy would get the train more than a verst from the station, but it seemed worth trying.

The crowd on the platform was still getting thicker, and I saw now, standing on a stack of poultry-crates, where it was coming from. They had got on to the line at the far side of the river and were approaching over the railway bridge; in the light broadcast from the great square I could see them swarming like insects over the sleepers, I could hear their fitful singing and the shouts of "Russia for the Russians! Down with the war!" They meant no harm, I supposed, they were in the mood of holiday; but the sooner the train got away the better. I found the fat sergeant I had spoken to before and told him peremptorily that a man with some muscle was to be sent up as stoker; he replied in a feeble way that he'd find someone if he could, and I had to be content with that. As I went on towards the rear of the train I shouted to groups of civilians that if they didn't clear off the station the troops would fire on them; but most of them took that threat at its proper valuation and paid no attention at all. Some of the soldiers were mechanically saluting, some turned away or pretended that it was too dark to see me. In one of the carriages I saw that a party of Moskovski had got hold of a girl and were starting to undress her. When I shouted at them they let her go, but with the air of doing me a personal favour. "Just as you wish, Comrade Captain!" one of them said. All the way down the train the struggle for places was still going on, and I saw more than one of the unsuccessful candidates lying insensible on the platform. But the soldiers were still, for the most part, in the highest good-humour.

Out of the dark confusion someone came and touched me on the arm. It was Gogik. He was very anxious, he said, about his potatoes; these hooligans on the platform thought the wagon was full of flour and they had tried already to stave in the sides; would I come and drive them away? He slipped down between two of the coaches and under the coupling, and with some reluctance I followed him.

On this side the station was comparatively clear, but a crowd

which may have numbered forty or so, mostly young artisans with a few peasants on the fringes, had assembled on the open line just opposite the precious wagon. Gogik had put two men on guard and they stood against it with fixed bayonets looking sheepish and rather sullen. "I tell you it isn't flour!" one of them was shouting, "it's nothing but potatoes!" against a babel of "Whose potatoes?" "Who grew them?" "Who are they for?" "Why should the soldiers have them?" "What good are the bloody soldiers, why should we starve?" "Down with the war!" As I came near them I showed my revolver and shouted: "Get back, all of you, get right away from that truck!" They moved back a little way; they were not much more than children and a loud voice was enough to sober them—the cries of "Down with the bourzhui officer!" came from those who were hidden in the rear.

A moment later the crash of splintering wood warned me that the door had been forced from the other side. I said to Gogik: "Better leave it alone!" but he was off already, I just caught sight of him darting between the trucks. I followed, and when I saw him again on the other side he was holding a rifle with the butt over his shoulder, his back to the place where the lower half of the door had been torn open, shouting "Get out of it, get away, you!" to the crowd yelling and jeering in front of him. As I looked I saw him bring the butt down on the shoulder of a man who had ventured too close. I called out: "Come on, Gogik, better let them have it!" but he couldn't have heard me, and as I thrust towards him a man who felt like Samson caught me by the arms from behind. I heard a heavy voice say: "You keep out of it, Comrade, you leave the people alone."

It was no good struggling in that grip. I did drag the man a few paces forward, but a blow from his knee under my buttocks was enough to keep me still after that. I shouted to Gogik again, but he seemed to be holding his own; the man he had struck was on his knees and whimpering, the rest had shuffled back. Suddenly a woman broke through from the front of the crowd; a big woman, respectably dressed, who might have been a merchant's wife; she ran right up to Gogik and screamed in his face: "It belongs to us, that stuff, it belongs to the people!" He stared at her, for the first time losing his resolution; she screamed at him again and tried to duck under his arm. He caught her then, by the collar of her coat, the coat tore, she swung round and struck at his stomach, he seized her by the hair and threw her on the ground. That was enough. I saw three or four men jump forward, I saw Gogik's rifle falling, I could almost feel in my own body the crack as they threw him back against the

wagon. He was lost after that. The crowd behind took no more notice of the struggling heap than to swarm on top of them, fighting to get at the wagon first; in a moment they had the upper door ripped out and two of them were inside, yelling like maniacs, "Food for the people!" Sack after sack came tumbling among the outliers, who battled like devils to seize them, until the opening was completely blocked by the men fighting to get inside. Some shots were fired from somewhere behind me, but that made no difference; it was probably blank cartridge and the reports were hardly heard in the rising din. A man jumped down and worked at the coupling, trying to get it loose, two or three more swarmed up to the wagon's roof and stood there waving their arms and roaring encouragement to their friends in the skirmish. One of the sacks, thrown high, struck the side of my head as it fell, and I was dazed for a moment. When my eyes opened again I saw that the men on top had got half a dozen petrol drums and were cheerfully emptying them down the sides of the van and on to the people below. Then, as the crowd parted for an instant, I caught one more glimpse of Gogik's uniform. Some part of his body, I suppose, was still inside; and the woman who had attacked him lay close by.

The giant's hold on me relaxed for a moment, I twisted and got away. I don't know if he would have chased me, I don't even know what he looked like: the rearmost of the open trucks were a few feet off, I got there almost in one jump, knocking a man over as I thrust past him; I caught a chain that hung on the corner, swung my left foot on to the buffer, stretched up my left hand, tugged on the chain with all my strength. A soldier in the truck caught sight of me, leant over and seized my wrist. But for this aid I should have fallen, for at that moment the train moved forward with such a jerk as I had never felt in all my travelling, my foot slipped from its perch, I felt myself flung back and then tugged violently against the tailboard. A second man leant down and grasped my belt, the first let go, for a second or two I hung by the waist, my right arm and shoulder bumping against the ironwork. I heard a scream which pierced through every other noise, I thought it came out of my own throat till I realized that it rose from below me. Then I saw—they had got my thighs now and were hauling me in legs-first—that the man fiddling with the coupling had got his hand caught and was being dragged behind us. The onlookers were yelling with laughter. His agony did not last long: at the train's next jerk the coupling slipped, the wagon followed us a few yards running free, its buffer bar caught the fellow's head as he dropped.

They stood me in a corner of the truck and I leant over the side,

faint and stupefied, as we moved in a series of jerks through the station. The crowd, soldiers and civilians jumbled together, ran after us wildly cheering, jumping at the side of the trucks to grasp our hands, shouting "Long live the Revolution!" till we drew away into the darkness. Looking back I saw the potato-wagon standing all by itself, deserted; and before it was out of my sight a flame shot up from it.

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The soldiers in that truck were very kind to me; they seemed to have caught from Xablososhna the essential friendliness which had broken out there. One put his own coat over my shoulders, one let me drink from a little tin of kvass he had. They talked to me in a serious way, half respectful and half friendly, about the Revolution: was not I happy, with them, that the war was over and done with? The land would all belong to them now, but if I would write down my name and address, one of them gravely told me, he would arrange for a good portion to be allotted to me. In spite of the cold I slept soon, doubled-up on the floor of the truck between their legs. But when I woke, with a meagre daylight showing the Pleslau grassland crawling past us, they were still talking with quiet joyfulness about the New Russia that the night had borne for them. "And you, Vashe Blagorodie," they said, "Christ will find happiness for you as well!"

PART IV

24

PRINCE ROUMANIEV said he was confident that things would settle down presently and all would be well. He seemed to have a job of some kind under the new Government, he spent much of his time at the Taurida Palace, spoke rather vaguely of attending committees, came home at all hours of the day and night with men his wife didn't know and demanded food and drove off again. A little anxious, I thought his eyes looked, but he was immensely energetic and always ready to laugh.

"In a few days' time things will be much quieter," he said. "I have a great deal of faith in Lvov, and Miliukov is a thoroughly reliable fellow. I'm not so sure about Kerenski, I've never quite grasped the fellow's politics, rather an impatient young man he seems to be, but perhaps I misjudge him: in any case I'm sure the more sober elements will prevail in the end, the maximalists and the minimalists and all the rest of them make a great deal of noise but it won't ever come to anything. . . ."

Tatiana Vascovna, who rarely listened to anything her husband said, accepted his optimism with certain reserves. She could not help feeling, she told me (in the confidential way that she was always so flattering) that with Nikolas's abdication life had lost irretrievably a good deal of its elegance: no doubt the Imperial family would continue to entertain at Tsarskoe in their private capacity, and such functions might gain in liveliness from a slackened formality; but it would never be quite the same thing, the brilliance of the opera would be sadly dimmed. Poor Alexandra, it was a thousand pities that she had ever taken up the Boji tchellovik, though people said that in many ways he had been a good man. "The trouble with goodness is that people can so seldom keep it to themselves, and it seems to upset the people who get mixed up with it, like Yelisaveta with poor Anton Antonovitch. It's like that vaccine they give you to stop smallpox, it's all right in cows, I suppose, that nature meant it for, but when they put it into me my arm swelled up like a balloon and gave me a temperature." As for the Revolution itself, the Princess did not care for it. Since the beginning of the month people had been crying off her little dinners at the last moment because they were afraid of being held up as they drove through the streets. At tre-

mendous pains she had brought Froederstein the 'cellist from Stockholm to play at a little party she was giving, the rioters had chosen that very evening to clash with the police just outside the house, the noise of the machine-guns had been deafening, three of the ground-floor windows had been smashed, Froederstein had lost his temper altogether and gone raving up and down the ballroom shouting *Donnerwetter! Diese verfluchte Russen, können sie nicht ruhig bleiben während ich nur ein Präludium spiele!* These were transient annoyances. But the winter seemed unbearably long this year, the Neva was still frozen, and the most tiresome thing of all was the lack of servants. "I have nobody, simply nobody," she said, "to do anything I want." There was Gobodin, of course, the aged Caucasian, servant to the Roumanievs for thirty years; but he was very stupid, very deaf, hopelessly short of wind; by the time he had got upstairs Tatiana had generally forgotten why she had rung for him. Chachobel the chief cook had stayed, and the second cook, and the boy Pikita, and two or three of the parlour servants; but these were trying to cope with the work of those who had gone, they were fussed and negligent, you never knew where to find them. And Lubogatch, such a dear and so amusing, to say nothing of his intelligence, the quick eye for dress that Tatiana found so helpful since Akiniev never noticed anything, Lubogatch had packed his bag and disappeared on the very day that the first shots were fired in the Orshaskaya, telling Gobodin that he must be in Vologda to claim his share of the Pan's estate. Yelisaveta had come to stay with her parents since her own house had been partly wrecked, and she, it was true, had brought some of her servants with her. But the woman Bajouska, like Yelisaveta herself, was wholly taken up with the poor little boy, Emelian was up there whenever he got a chance, the rest would do nothing at all except for their own mistress. Gobodin himself was being as tiresome as possible. In the very middle of a luncheon party he would stumble up and shout in her ear, "I suppose you know, Tatiana Vascovna, that nobody's cleaned the dessert silver! The Countess borrowed it last night, and it's her servants' business to clean it!" She would say, "Be quiet, Gobodin! Gobodin, darling, do go away and clean it yourself, quickly!" and he would go mumbling away and bang the door and come back with a basket of nickel-plated forks from the kitchen and slam them angrily on to the table. And now he had given Pikita a thrashing, because Pikita had called him "Comrade," and Pikita was lying in one of the attics wailing so loudly that you could hear it in the drawing-rooms.

Yes, as soon as the weather was suitable for travelling Tatiana meant to go into the country, taking Gobodin with her, of course;

because, after all, one could not live without Gobodin. She had already got Nastia to pack some of her dresses. There were obstacles, however. Akiniev seemed to be enjoying himself and would say whenever she broached the subject that he was far too busy to leave Petrograd. "It's a question of money, my birdlet. With things as they are, you've got to keep your job under the seat of your trousers; the moment you leave it someone comes up and walks away with it." Money? She had never imagined that Akiniev worked for money, though she supposed they gave you something towards the endless entertaining that dear Akiniev's posts always required. Akiniev surely worked as a way of occupying his time, or from simple patriotism; his money came chiefly from his estates in the Voronetz Government, as hers did from Tambov. He had said, when she put it to him like that, "Yes, my lambkin, but what if the money stops coming?" "But surely, Akiniev, the postal service isn't going to break down altogether? You, with your influence over the new Government, surely you can at least prevent that happening!" And then he laughed and kissed the back of her neck, and murmuring, "I shall do my best, my sweet," he had rushed off to meet General Sopojnikin at the Marshals' Club. He was adamant, however, in refusing to leave town until the supremacy of the Moderates was established, and Tatiana would not go off without him. "You see, I should have to take Gobodin, and without Gobodin, Akiniev would never know where to find his clothes and things."

Another difficulty was Yelisaveta. "I'm very worried about Yelisaveta," she told me, "I'm sure the child's not at all well, her nerves must be déchirés, do you know she was actually lying in bed when those rascals broke in and fought each other all over the dining-room, throwing chairs at each other and using the most horrible language, Emelian says. It is so disappointing, she was so much better, I thought. I'm sure it has been the greatest blessing for her, having your little boy to look after, it has been such an interest for her, really you know I think she has grown quite fond of him. And now this Revolution seems to have upset her again, and she's worrying herself about Anton. She keeps saying she won't leave Petrograd till she has some more news of him—and it isn't as if she could do anything to help him. You know, I've never been able to understand why Yelisaveta should take all this business so terribly to heart—of course she was fond of him in her own way, I suppose, but they never seemed very happy when they were together, they used always to get on each other's nerves. You mustn't misunderstand me, Alexei Alexeivitch—oh yes, I know as well as you do that young people often act strangely in public: that Studzinski boy, he and his wife

do nothing but bark at each other, and they say they're like Venus and Adonis when they're alone together. But Yelisaveta didn't seem at all upset when Anton went to the war, and all that time when he was missing she wasn't fretting as far as I could see. I know that a mother's the last person ever to be told about her daughter's feelings, but sometimes I think Yelisaveta might give me her confidence a little more. I scarcely see her from morning till night. Of course I have no idea what Anton's feelings are. . . ."

I did not need her shrewd glance to tell me that she hoped for enlightenment from me. I said cautiously:

"Anton has always spoken of his wife with very deep affection——"

"But of course!" she said quickly. "Anton—I always feel that he is a very chivalrous man, though so peculiar in his thoughts and ways. . . . But really, now that this Strubensohn man is doing anything that possibly can be done for him I don't see why Yelisaveta has to stay in Petrograd and worry herself about it. Sometimes I can't help thinking that she is posing just a little, though I know she wouldn't mean to be artificial, not with me at any rate. Naturally I don't want to discourage her, I'm only too glad that she should be so fond of him—it would have been so much better if they had had a child—but on the other hand I don't want her to hurt herself with her own imagination, if you can understand me. And really I wonder if it's wise to make such a fuss about a man just when he's been so extraordinarily obstinate and stupid—but that is the way with women, a good husband is always neglected, it's only when they get into trouble, infidelity and all that kind of thing, that we start to sigh and weep about them. Perhaps you could have a talk with her sometime, you might persuade her to be more sensible. Only I shouldn't say too much to Yelisaveta about Anton's affection. With things as they are at present that would only upset the child—I'm sure you see what I mean. . . . Oh, and if you could find Gobodin anywhere on your way downstairs you might tell him that this stove wants attending to. . . ."

That was the general feeling: that Yelisaveta was posing. Even Bajouska, who seldom spoke of her without the loving reverence of an old nursemaid, said to me in a burst of confidence, "I cannot think what is the matter with the little Princess, why she should worry herself about that husband. Husbands are chosen for us by God, with the Blessed Virgin advising Him, I know that well enough; you ought to make the best of the one you get, whatever he's like; but when you think they never slept in the same room from a month after they were wed. . . ." "Of course," Mme Kotchoubey said,

speaking in my presence and in Yelisaveta's own drawing-room a moment after she had left it, "Yelisaveta has always to be playing one part or another. Recently it's been the devoted foster-mother, but that's getting a little stale now, so it's become the devoted wife." I had to interrupt then. I said: "Yelisaveta Akinievna has done more than play a part in looking after my little boy," and she answered, "Yes, dear Captain, I expect you think that Yelisaveta is a golden-hearted woman with a rather raffish exterior. It will be so interesting for you to explore the depths of her character. . . ." Only Roumaniev gave me a different opinion. I happened to come up one morning just as he was leaving in his car; he saw me, lowered the window, and plunged as usual into a long conversation while his driver sat shivering. ". . . Yelisaveta is fundamentally an honest creature," he said, "though she often behaves like a cross between a femme-de-joie and a consummate nincompoop. And I don't see why she shouldn't be attached to Anton, I like the fellow myself. It's a pity he's got himself into all this trouble, I'm afraid it's worrying the poor girl. Of course we shall get him out of it all in good time; I've great faith in Strubensohn, he's helped me over a tricky fence before now; but it's not plain sailing, it's not a simple matter at all, so Strubensohn tells me, the silly fellow seems to have done every single thing he could to get his neck twisted. I shall be more than grateful, more than grateful, for anything you can do to help Strubensohn with the case; for Yelisaveta's sake, I mean. And by the way, I really must apologize, my dear fellow, I never managed to send you those bandages or whatever it was that you wanted for Mariki-Matesk. Frankly, it quite slipped my memory, you really must forgive me, I was terribly busy then, I was being rushed off my feet. . . ."

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At that time I saw Strubensohn nearly every day. He used to arrive at the house (Orshaskaya 12) quite early in the morning and would get himself announced to me if the door-servant was about; or sometimes, if the door was open, he would come straight up to the room which the Roumanievs had lent me to live in for the time being. In that way he could usually avoid meeting the Roumanievs themselves, which he found desirable: Tatiana Vascovna treated all lawyers as doctors, fit subjects for the reception of physical, mental, and political complaints, and he was very much frightened of Yelisaveta. "I find the Countess a little *difficile,*" he confessed to me. "She is never satisfied with anything I have done, she seems to think that I should collect a squadron of cavalry and

storm the offices of the Military Judicial Committee until they release her husband. And really her attitude seems to be so strange: she rails against Count Scheffler for getting himself into trouble, she calls him an idiot, a barbarian, a criminal; and when I ask if she would like me to institute divorce proceedings she pretends to be grossly insulted."

He had not, however, lost his optimism about the case. Count Scheffler had been brought to Petrograd: that much had been established, and that was exactly what he, Strubensohn, had planned. Up to the present he had not been able to find out where the Count was imprisoned, but that was immaterial. The next move was to satisfy the Judicial Committee that the proceedings at Mariki-Matesk had been *ultra vires,* or, alternatively, improperly conducted, or, alternatively, conducted with prejudice. The Committee might then be jumped into releasing the defendant forthwith, or at worst a new Tribunal would be ordered, and here in Petrograd Strubensohn could make a Tribunal go more-or-less as he wanted—it would have been useless to attempt it in the barbarous conditions of Mariki. The only trouble was to find and identify the Judicial Committee.

"All our work has been complicated by these political changes," he said vexedly. "You don't know from one day to another whom you have to deal with. You get somebody's signature in the morning, in the afternoon you are told that the man is discredited, he belonged to the old régime, someone else is responsible now. And higher up they won't concern themselves with Military matters at all, they seem to have forgotten all about the war. I was hoping that Prince Roumaniev's influence would be useful, but his own position appears to be rather insecure at present—he is by no means *persona grata* with Alexander Kerenski, and that is a grave handicap. No, Count Scheffler must be extricated through a back door, and so far we have not quite found it. We must be patient, that is all. You will present my compliments to the Countess, and say how sorry I was not to be able to see her?"

He was always thanking me in his courteous, rather stilted way for the help I gave him. But in fact I gave him nothing except encouragement. As far as Anton was concerned my presence in Petrograd was useless; I was far from happy as Tatiana's guest; and I meant to leave the city as soon as possible.

My release from service had not yet been formally confirmed, I had to attend every day at the Department of Personnel, where I waited for hours in a room packed with impatient officers and was invariably told at the end of the morning that no more interviews could be given before tomorrow. But supposing that this could not

go on indefinitely I wrote to Konstantin Viktorovitch, my father-in-law, at Chaveschok, asking if he were sufficiently recovered from his illness to receive visitors; if so, I should be grateful for his hospitality to Natalia, Vava and myself while I looked for a new home, since I had decided not to return to our house at Voepensk. He replied, within a few days, that he was very much better, but still forbidden by his doctor to walk far or to do much reading.

". . . I have, however, read a few books lately, and I had intended to write to you—you must forgive the procrastination natural in those 'of riper years'—about a most interesting work by an American author, Dr. Stuart Percival Flascher, about *The Idea of Virtue in the Lower Animals,* which I have found particularly interesting; especially in the later chapters, where it is suggested that man, in his search for new and better forms of social organization, might do well to study those principles, usually called 'instinctive' but regarded by Dr. Flascher as consciously ethical, whereby certain species of the animal creation maintain themselves peacefully in tribal units. I myself am of opinion that Dr. Flascher allows his ingenuity to carry him too far in theorization—a common fault, I may say, with American philosophers. Nevertheless, I feel that he has opened up a line of inquiry. . . .

"I am much disquieted by such news as reaches me, chiefly through Ludmilla, of happenings in the Capital. The unrest, undoubtedly due to the Emperor's abdication (which, recognizing it as inevitable according to the laws of political evolution, I nevertheless regret), will, I hope, be short-lived, so that all our national energy may again be directed towards the successful prosecution of the conflict with Germany. Here, also, there has been some rowdyism, which has disturbed my reading, and I have noticed that a spirit of indiscipline is abroad. My sympathies are with those who suffer and who do not cry out in the marketplace.

"I rejoice that you, Natalia, and the little Ivan are to visit me shortly. Ludmilla will find the bed-linen that is necessary, and ply her needle where that is required. It seems to be a long time since dear Natalia wrote to me; Ludmilla tells me that she also has been in poor health, but I trust that that is of the past.

"In Jesus' name I ask each night for a blessing upon you both and upon the little one."

I can hardly say how gratefully I received that letter; for I longed increasingly to get away from Petrograd, where in the long straight

avenues the frozen wind blew without remorse upon the city's poverty, on the strident orators, the drab processions of the Porazhentsi, the girls who ran barefoot at every hour with a new edition of *Izvestia;* and most of all to get away from the Orshaskaya. Katie had been too busy to receive me, and having nowhere else to go I had accepted Tatiana's invitation joyfully, thinking only that here I should be with Vava all the time, able to greet him when he woke in the morning, within sound of his voice if he cried in the night. The Roumanievs' generosity had been unlimited; they had given me a room large and light enough for me to put up an easel and try with wooden fingers to use the brushes which had been idle for nearly four years; I was welcome at their table, whatever guests they might have there, or if I wished I could send to the kitchens for anything I wanted in my own room; I was told to invite my friends to the house—Tatiana could never see too many new faces. But my spirit was lost in that great building, where even in my own room I could always hear the sound of voices, of servants arguing their politics along the corridors, Tatiana calling for Gobodin, the lusty laughter of Akiniev's friends. The heat and smell of it oppressed me, the very softness of the carpets felt unhomely, I could not go outside my door without meeting strangers, friends of Yelisaveta as a rule, who strolled about like tourists in a big hotel. After so much loneliness I was shy of familiarity and hid myself in an actor's part, the part of a practised Petersburgher, which, as I caught sight of its reflection, always looked clumsy and ridiculous. I became sensitive about my small possessions, concealing the photographs I treasured in the bottom of a wardrobe, feeling unreasonably annoyed when the chamber woman brought me Akienev's underclothes in mistake for my own. Most of all it hurt me that Vava's regimen was supervised by Bajouska; that she, when Vava had some special need, would go to Yelisaveta rather than to me. I could not even find out where Vava's clothes were kept; when I asked Bajouska she pretended that she could not understand my Russian, herself speaking only the dialect of Bashkir. If she found me feeding him she would firmly take the bowl away and throw the food out of the window, saying (in as clear a Russian as my own) that I had mixed it wrongly. "You must go away now," she would say, "Vanoushka is tired, it's time for him to have a little rest." And if I showed any reluctance she would seize my arm and pull me towards the door. I knew—Yelisaveta had told me—that when Vava was restless Bajouska would kneel beside him all night, her arm stretched to make a rest for his head, her other hand tirelessly stroking his

wrist; but that did not appease me. Even the phenomenal improvement in his health made me faintly jealous.

But remembering what he had looked like in that bestial house in the Mlinovakaya I could not be ungrateful. His face was plump now, his hair luxuriant, the last trace of the sores had gone. He was always smiling, he turned his head quickly to see who was coming into the room. He chattered like any other child, and when he embraced you his arms held you no less strongly than those of a normal boy. His manners were pretty and gracious, there was something like dignity in the way he took leave of you: "I mustn't keep you talking here, batiushka, you ought to be getting your appetite for dinner." "Lisveta has been reading to me all afternoon," he would say, "I'm afraid her kindness will give her a headache. She makes me sorry, she feels rotten so often. Don't you think the blue dress is a pretty one? Would you be so good as to give her forty kopeks —she bought a new winder for my engine and I don't think she ought to pay for that." I wondered whether he realized now how different he was from other children; and one day he answered that himself. "Of course I can't be a soldier," he said, "or even a painter, you have to stand up to do that, I suppose? I suppose I shall have to be an intellectual. I suppose it's not a bad thing to be an intellectual, do you think so, batiushka? I suppose you'd rather I was a soldier, but you can't be that lying flat, can you?"

Actually he no longer lay quite flat: for several hours a day he was allowed to have a pillow under his shoulders and a head-rest, so that he could see about the room quite easily; and when I took him out in the long wheeled-chair he could see rather more of the life in the streets than I wished. A dark, square, rather morose man, who never looked anyone in the eyes and always seemed to be feeling in his pockets for something he had lost, came every day to turn Vava over and feel along his spine with the nervous, kneading fingers of a wool-grader. I cannot remember his doing anything else. But this was Dr. Tsekhovoi, whose name had been well known to me before the war as a specialist in spinal disease, and Yelisaveta told me that he had performed McMaster's operation on the spinal column with obvious success. To me he would hardly speak at all. When I tried to express gratitude he said irritably, "How do you know I've done anything?" I asked him what further improvement might be expected, and he answered: "I am not a fortune-teller, M. le Capitaine." Only once did he give me some information unasked. He said, facing the window and with his back to me, "It's much more the sort of case that Mishlayevski of Moscow deals with. He'd have the child walking, I shouldn't wonder." I said eagerly, "Mishlay-

evski? Can you—have you got his address?" "When I last heard of him," he answered bleakly, "he was with Dmitriev's army in the Warsaw salient. He's probably dead."

It was to Vava himself I first broached the subject of moving to Chaveschok, one evening when Yelisaveta had gone to see Smirnova in the new Tchaïkovski ballet and Bajouska was busy with her ironing. It was foolish, perhaps, to do that before I had consulted anyone, but I was tired and a little thoughtless. I remember that evening clearly, the seriousness in Vava's big eyes, the shadow of his head on the blue French wallpaper, the mist floating into the room through the two inches of open window on which Tsekhovoi always insisted. Returning from the Office of Personnel I had been shot at in the Kamennostrovski Prospekt, I had run for a verst or more in great alarm, and now my leg was troubling me a good deal. I think that Vava too was feeling some pain, though he didn't say so, and the sense that we both suffered brought me close to him in sympathy, as if we were two men of the same age. We had been silent for a while, and then I said:

"You know, Vava, your grandfather is awfully keen to see you. Would you like to go and stay with him?"

He said: "Grandfather?"

Hardly realizing what that question meant, I said, "Yes, your mother's father. He lives at Chaveschok. You'd like to stay with him, wouldn't you?"

With the honesty of children, he answered, "I don't know what he's like."

"He's very nice," I said. "An old gentleman, an invalid at present, like yourself."

"Invalid?"

"I mean, he can't get about much."

Vava nodded. "Get about?—oh yes, I see." And then he repeated: "Invalid, invalid," as if the word were a kind of poetry.

"You'd like to stay with him?" I asked again.

"How long?" he asked.

"I don't quite know. Till we can find a house for you and me to live in."

"Oh. . . . Lisveta would go too?"

I said, hesitantly, "No—but she will come and see you, of course. And I shall be with you. And I think I shall find another lady who will look after you."

"Bajouska?"

"No, not Bajouska. But Bajouska will come and see you too." Then, to cut short his reflections, I said: "Grandfather has a lady

living in his house called Ludmilla, who's very nice indeed. Rather like Bajouska, but not so fat, and she speaks differently, she comes from Kharkov. Grandfather used to have a pony and a German carriage. If he's still got them I expect he'll take you for rides—we could fix you up on the seat."

But he went back, as such a mind as his will do, to the point we had left some way behind: "Did you say he was my mother's father?"

"Yes."

"Does my mother live with him?"

"Not at present, but"—I hesitated for a moment and then the prepared sentence came to me—"Mother's been very ill, but she's getting better now. I expect you'll see her before long."

He did not answer at once. He brought up his left arm with the slow, jerky movement which always distressed me and put it across his eyes. I realized presently that he was crying. I said:

"Vava! Vava, what is the matter?"

He said jerkily: "I don't want to see her. I don't want to go back there. I don't want to see her, I hate her."

I had never heard him use that word before, I was shocked and utterly bewildered. His eyes were still covered, and I could not follow even a few paces into the darkness where he had suddenly retreated. I said recklessly:

"But Vava, listen! She loves you, it'll make her happy to be with you," and he answered passionately, "She hates me, she hates me, she left me alone, I was always thirsty, she slapped me when I cried."

He had twisted and got the pillow over his face, so that I no longer heard his crying; I could only see the violent shaking and trembling of his thin body. But I had realized at last what he was thinking. I had to wait until his passion had subsidized, then I gently moved the pillow from his face and slipped my wrist beneath his neck and put my cheek against his forehead. He was sobbing quite silently, but I still waited. When he was quiet, with his eyes shut, as if he had fallen off to sleep, I said: "Vava, listen, that wasn't your mother! You're talking about somebody called Koroschik."

"No!" he said, "it was Hilda Jakovlievna. She said she was my mother."

"She wasn't!" I said fiercely; "that isn't true, Vava!"

It took a long time to get him quite calm, and then I had to talk to him patiently, feeling my way like one who tries to cross marshland on a cloudy night, terrified of hurting him by saying too much. He had, I think, some vague memory of Natalia, but he could only get back to it by passing through the terrible months in the Mlino-

vakaya, and he saw the shadowed picture of her kindness only behind the monstrous figure of Hilda Koroschik. "I am your mother now," Koroschik had said, "your other mother has gone," and in time—it seemed—he had come to believe that blasphemy. The image of Natalia was no longer visual; he could only think of someone who had seemed to love him, and he could not imagine one who, loving him, had yet given him away. Trying to satisfy him with a piece from the truth, I could only tell him that his mother had fallen ill, that he, being left alone, had been stolen by a wicked woman; and that was hard to explain, for he imagined "wicked" people as a special kind belonging to fairy books, he had never thought of "wickedness" as an attribute of people he might know. Of the villa at Voepensk he remembered hardly anything. "Oh yes," he said, "there was a picture on the wall of an old man holding a bottle," and that was right—he meant my own portrait of the physicist Turbin; but that was all: he could not remember his own bedroom, or the view from the window, or any of the people who came to the house. He had forgotten—thank God he had forgotten—the journey from Voepensk to Petrograd. "Mother was sad sometimes," I said. "I was a long way away, and she was lonely." "Sad?" he said. No, he remembered nothing about that.

I began to talk about Natalia, about her beauty and courage; of how, in the very cold place where we had lived when he was a baby, she used to get up in the middle of the night and put wood in the stove which kept him warm; how on a night when the blizzard had broken the windows and the snow was driving in she had found him shivering, and had taken off her own nightclothes to wrap him up. I told him of the long journey we had made to see a doctor in Nishni Udinsk, how for seven hours at a stretch Natalia had sat on the open sledge, still, bolt upright, holding him sleeping on her knees. He did not take it in: his thoughts had drifted now, and the next thing he said was, "What colour is Grandfather's pony? Do you think I could ride him if Bajouska held me up?" But it gave me a kind of pleasure to talk aloud of Natalia, to turn before him, as it were, the pages of a treasured album. I could always forget, as I looked at those pictures, that what they showed was lost; and I shut my mind against the thought of reconciling to Vava the present reality with the mother I had drawn for him.

He grew sleepy, but did not fall quite asleep, and even when the electric light went out (that happened almost every evening now) he went on chattering in his low, rather excited voice: something about a chute he meant to make, with perhaps some help from Yeli-

saveta and me, to go right down from his window to the street; this, he said, would save Emelian and me the trouble of carrying him downstairs, I should simply have to put the wheeled chair on the top of the chute and then meet him at the bottom, where, perhaps, the chair could be harnessed up to Grandfather's pony. We were holding hands, and when he laughed in delight at his fancy I laughed as well. In the street below a long procession passed, shouting and singing, and once we heard the clatter of a Maxim, not very far away. But those sounds did not disturb us. Our friendship was close and deeper than it had ever been before. I remember now how warm his head felt, the softness of his skin. When Bajouska came with a candle he was rude to her, shouting boisterously that she was to go away. I should have scolded him, but I could not do it just then.

§

I knew I had acted foolishly next morning, when I returned from my daily visit to the Office of Personnel. I found Bajouska in my room, ostensibly dusting, and when I tried to read my newspaper she kept moving me from one chair to another. I did not encourage her obvious desire to talk (which enters the heart of all women when men are reading), but at length she could hold herself no longer. She addressed the sideboard she was rubbing in her usual mixture of Russian and the Bashkir patois:

"Those who have nothing better to do read the newspapers, which the blessed God never made eyes for, or else why shouldn't He have made mine like that? Or else they stand in the streets gaping at the politicians, and that is all the same. God made the priests to tell Bajouska what is right and wrong, how can the priests earn their money if every bastard son of a drunken saddler is making philosophy all along the Gorokhovaya? My father had forty-two stripes from Semion Visarionovitch, he went back next day, he said, 'Give me twenty-one more, little father, then I shall remember.' Semion Visarionovitch, he was a Christian, a nobleman besides, they knew how to act in those days. 'Be content,' he said, 'God has forgiven you.' He would thrash a woman too, if she stole his vegetables. But he didn't hurt the heart of people, he wouldn't put red-hot pincers to a woman's soul. That's what it is, the Revolution they talk about, it means that everyone can do what they like, you can't expect the gentry to treat you like Christians any more. Weeping, she was, the poor little princess, lying on the sofa and weeping. And the little boy, what will he do when there's no Bajouska to wipe him up,

who's going to sew up his little clothes, does the Captain think he can do that? Perhaps they tell you in the newspapers how to sew up Vava's little clothes!"

"Bajouska," I said, "if you have anything sensible that you want to tell me I will listen. But otherwise will you please leave this room, which is perfectly clean, and let me read my paper."

"Yes," she answered, "that is the reward that women get for seeing to children. In a year, in a month, we are driven away and told to join the strumpets at the street corner. God made women to care for the little ones, and Satan made men to be angry and jealous because they cannot bear children. My mother's sister was married to a corn-dealer in Ufa, a wealthy man, he had a store of his own standing right against the bieli gorod. When she bore his fourth child he beat her out of jealousy. And Satan entered into the heart of the jury and because it was a Festival they said it was an offence of the lowest class, so that he was fined only six roubles. Nine roubles and fifty kopeks is what a man ought to pay for a thing like that."

From this I gathered that Vava had already told Yelisaveta of the proposed removal to Chaveschok; and I cursed myself for not having asked him to keep quiet—it was most unseemly that the news should have reached her through him. I went up to her room straight away but she was not there. The door of her bedroom was open and a trail of clothes, frocks, corsets, a dressing-gown, with the usual litter of half-smoked cigarettes and illustrated journals, was spread about the chairs and on the floor. Presumably she had left in a hurry, as her custom was, for a luncheon party.

"Mme la Comtesse is out for lunch?" I thoughtlessly asked Bajouska, meeting her again as I went back to my room. She immediately turned round to follow me. "Madame has gone out in tears to see Darlynia Antonovna," she said, "the poor little Princess was so much upset she could hardly get into her dress, the first underslip she put on was soaked right through, I had to take it away and wring it out in the pantry. . . ." Reaching my room, I closed the door firmly and locked it.

Tatiana sent up a message asking me to be with her at luncheon today if I possibly could. She was going to be all by herself, she said, and we could have a cosy chat. As soon as I entered the drawing-room she asked if I could tell her what was wrong with Yelisaveta: she had met the poor child on the stairs; Yelisaveta had obviously been crying, the powder on her face was all streaky; Tatiana had asked her what was wrong, and she had merely said, "Why must you be always interfering?" and rushed away. . . . Did I know if M. Strubensohn had brought any news which might have upset her?

It was an awkward question, but I was relieved from dealing with it by the appearance of Prince Borodin, who was obviously expecting luncheon, followed by his wife and sister. Later Sopojnikin dropped in with Astanovitch and one of the Kastorkin girls, who was much excited because her car had been held up the night before by communists and they had taken her handbag. "But there wasn't much more than a hundred roubles in it!" she said laughing. In her pleasure at not being reduced to my company, Tatiana seemed to forget all about her daughter and chatted happily with Mme Borodin about *The Sleeping Beauty;* never, she thought, had Smirnova danced with such spirituality, such poetic accomplishment. Borodin was saying to Astanovitch (who listened with palpable boredom) that it was not too late to save Russia. "One disciplined Army Corps, properly officered, with a trusted commander, could sweep the whole rabble from the streets of Petrograd in forty-eight hours. The next thing would be to clear all the old women out of the Tauride Palace and establish a military dictatorship to last for the duration of the war." "The war?" someone said, "is that still on?" Astanovitch put down his knife and fork to light another cigarette. "Perhaps we need just one more disciplined Army Corps," he said, "—for winning the war."

Sopojnikin took me aside after lunch and asked me if I had heard anything about Roumaniev. I said:

"No, should I have?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"It's only that the People's Party newspaper is making some pretty broad insinuations about a former Petrograd member of the Military Industrial Committee. And if Roumaniev isn't the man they mean I don't quite know who can be. But you won't, for God's sake, say anything to Tatiana Vascovna?"

§

Yelisaveta came in during the afternoon, but by then I had gone off, as I did at that time every day, to the Euphrosina Hospital. When I came home she was out again. It was late at night, I was actually asleep, when she came to see me. I woke to find her sitting on the end of my bed.

I said, "Oh, it's you!" or something like that. She didn't answer, she sat very still, blowing thick floccules from her cigarette, staring at me with a rather tigerish concentration. She was wearing an evening dress which was altogether novel for that time; by Linke, I think, a closely-fitting affair in white Japanese cut-velvet, the

bodice shaped to suggest a Hussar's uniform. (She could carry off that kind of thing very well: since our first meeting she had cut her hair short like a boy's—it was still a matter of some conversation in the clubs—her face had a certain masculinity in the drawing, her shoulders were rather broader and more square than is normal in women.) Had I been wide awake I might have thought, and even said, that she looked more than usually handsome, despite the over-brightness of her tired eyes, the faults in her facial dressing which the harsh electric light showed cruelly. But I wasn't ready to be talkative, and the smell she had brought into the room, of stale Tuberose and Greek tobacco, offended me. With my head raised just as far as courtesy demanded I stared at her with scant patience, hardly troubling to cover a yawn. She said: "Why do you look at me like that?"

"Like——?"

"As if you were calculating the price of my frock."

I said sleepily: "I am a painter, you know; a bad one, but we all look at things in much the same way. Translating them into our own terms of line and tone. Is there anything——"

"Yes, yes, I know!" she said irritably, "Dmitri Shervinski is always talking to me like that, I find that painters are the most boring people in the world. You know, in some ways you remind me of Anton. He used to look at me in just the same way—after we were married, I mean. Before that he always had an adoring expression, it was the joke of Petrograd, people used to say, 'Yelisaveta Akinievna has got herself betrothed to a moonstruck dachshund.' It wasn't very nice, I can tell you, having that sort of thing said about me. And almost as soon as we were married he began to look at me as you're doing now—only he didn't pretend to be a painter, he was just a moralist. He was saying to himself: 'Now here is a very good example of an idle, selfish and conceited young woman. How convenient that I am able to observe her closely like this, how very interesting it is to note the emptiness of her features! Why is she yawning, I wonder—is it that she has not sufficient intellect to appreciate the society of a cultured liberal like myself?' "

We had been along this road so often that I knew better than to follow her. I said curtly: "Can't we discuss the failings of Anton Antonovitch at some other time?" But she wouldn't let me off as easily as that. She went on, in a voice that was artificially hard and smooth:

"If his eyes had been properly focused when he first knew me he would have known exactly what I was like. I never tried to conceal anything, I never tried to deceive him."

"Or he you," I said brutally.

She smiled. "Ah! Then he has talked about me? He has told you all about his feelings, what a very difficult person I am to deal with. He has told you——"

"Anton has hardly said anything about you," I told her, "except that he loves you. He has always——"

Without raising her voice, she said, as one stating a proposition in geometry: "That isn't true. He never loved me, he only wanted to reform me. When he found that he couldn't——"

I said: "I'm sorry, but I prefer to believe what my friend told me. He is a very clear-sighted man, it would be a curious thing if he didn't understand his own heart. If Anton had been talking insincerely when he spoke of his love for you I should have seen his insincerity—I know him well enough for that."

She did not answer at once. She was watching me with that very curiosity which she had complained of in my own regard. I thought that a look akin to happiness showed for an instant in her eyes, but when she spoke again she was quiet and bitter.

"Then why did he never give me a child?" she said.

That question was so unexpected that I answered without thinking. I said:

"Did you want it? Did you ask him?"

"A woman should not have to ask!" she said fiercely.

She shut her eyes. Partly understanding her (for I knew Anton so closely), and ashamed that I had slipped so far into their privacy, I remained dumb and wretched. But presently she said, in her ordinary, rather exasperated voice:

"Why is it that Strubensohn does nothing for his money, nothing at all? He can't even tell me where Anton is. What is the good of his telling me that Anton is somewhere in Petrograd when he doesn't know where it is? Can't he see that it's driving me crazy, knowing that Anton's within a few versts of me and yet I can't see him? Why can't——?"

"Strubensohn's doing all he can," I said. "You must remember——"

"Why doesn't he bribe people? I've told him that he can have what money he wants for bribing. Surely, now that the country's run by the scum out of the gutters——"

"It isn't—yet——"

"—at any rate, it's run by people who don't care a bent kopek about the war, people who aren't interested in anything an obscure soldier did before the Revolution. You don't mean to tell me——"

I said, drily and incisively: "There are people still interested in

the war—Kerenski for one—and still hoping for a revival of discipline in the army. According to the ordinary, straightforward view of things, Anton was a very dangerous man. He flatly defied authority; he was a law unto himself; it's only through Strubensohn's cunning—as I see it—that he wasn't shot for treachery. And such a man is not less legally culpable because the government of his country has been re-cast. If I were a lawyer I shouldn't take the case for all the roubles in Russia—I can think of no possible defence to meet the weight of evidence against him. And Anton himself would be the first to agree with me. I'm giving you the commonsense, legal view, so that you can see just where you are. As long as there is any government at all, which can be called a government, I don't see what is to save him."

She said: "Oh . . . I see. And you—you won't do anything to help him, now?"

I had been provoked to that tirade by a sudden loss of patience; her arrogant assumption that anything she wanted must happen, joined with her wayward self-pity, had made me ready to say anything that might possibly bruise her. And now I felt like one who, losing his temper with a lazy mongrel, strikes it with all his strength, exulting in brutality, and then, seeing the frightened, astonished eyes, hearing the small whimper, feels sick with revulsive penitence. For she did not answer my bitterness with anger, she did not storm at me, as I had almost expected, or break into tears, as another woman would have done. "And you—you won't do anything to help him?" She was quiet, and pitiful, as prisoners sometimes are on hearing sentence, the eyes empty and puzzled, unbelieving. She said—I had not answered her:

"You mean—I shan't see him again? We shan't have a chance of . . . changing? When they kill him he'll still think I'm—just what he's always thought me?"

For a moment I believed she was acting; I had thought very often that more than half her life was spent in calculated postures. But she kept so still, with her white hand gripping the bedrail, her eyes were so steadfast and so lonely. I said with an awkward gentleness:

"He will die—whenever it is—loving you."

"I know, I know," she said wearily, "but what woman is it that he loves? He loved my body—they all love it, you're the only man I know who takes no notice of it. I suppose in his imagination he fitted it with some kind of soul, something he hoped to find one day. Do you call that being loved?"

No, there was no bitterness in that.

I said: "You're tired, don't let us talk any more. . . . I'll see Strubensohn again tomorrow. . . . I've had an idea, Sopojnikin might help us, he knows a great many people, I'll suggest that Strubensohn should see what he can do. I promise, Yelisaveta, I promise, I'll do anything in the world to help him."

"From Chaveschok?"

Her eyes had hardened again.

"It's not very far," I said. "A telegram would bring me back within a few hours."

"But it would not bring Vava back! . . . Alexei, why are you taking him away from me?"

I had prepared for that question days before.

"I can't stay here as your mother's guest indefinitely," I said. "Besides——"

"Do you think it makes the slightest difference to Tatiana Vascovna, your being here?" she said astringently, "—except that she likes to have somebody who will listen to her gossip when everyone else has run away screaming. If you were to go off tomorrow she wouldn't notice for a month or two, and then one day she'd say, 'Whatever has happened to that nice young soldier one always used to meet in the corridors, the lame one, I forget who he was? I thought he had come to live with us.' "

"But hasn't it occurred to you," I said, "that I may want to get back to a life of my own?"

"Do you think any of us are going to have that now?"

"After all, Vava belongs to me——"

"Yes, I understand!" she said; not sourly, but with reproachful weariness. "You want to have him to yourself, you are tired of me and Bajouska interfering."

I had to say, then, that "interfering" was a ridiculous word. "You know, Yelisaveta, how infinitely grateful I am for all you've done for him. You know I shall never forget it, I shall always thank you for your kindness. And Vava will not forget you, you will come and see us often. . . ."

"When you are living with your father-in-law?"

"Yes——"

"That is what you call 'a life of your own'?"

"That will only be for a short time. I shall find a house where we can live."

"The villa at Voepensk?"

"No, I can't go back there."

"And who will look after Vava when you live with him in a

house of your own? You will get a country girl, I suppose, someone who will wipe Vava's spoon on her apron, which she changes three times in the year? A girl who will lose her temper when he's clumsy with his food, and twist his hair. . . ."

I said: "By the time I have got my house, his mother will be well enough to look after him."

Her mouth moved for speech, and I thought she was going to contradict me sharply. But she held back the words, she turned her eyes away from me, and stood up, and went towards the door; slowly, playing with her jewellery. I thought, thankfully, that she was going away, but she turned and came back, looking this way and that as if she had lost something. In those few moments I watched her as if she were quite apart from me, on the other side of a row of footlights; and she, with her eyes wandering, seemed as if she did not know I watched her. Then she dropped on the bed again, her body resting on one arm, and gazed seriously at my face. It was curious to see her thinking out her words, she who generally spoke without the least reflection; and when they came they were like the stragglers of a broken army.

"I'm frightened," she said—how old she had become, how sober, "I'm frightened of your going all wrong, meaning to go all right—you may hurt Vava, thinking you're doing what's best for them both."

I shook my head, not understanding her.

She said, "You think—of course you think, yes of course, you believe Natalia's getting better."

"I don't only think——"

"That's wrong!" she said sharply, as one screwing himself to an act of mercy. "I see her—I've seen her with ordinary eyes, not eyes like yours. And I—I know what she's like. Alexei, she isn't getting better."

I didn't answer, and she went on, with a nervous, thrusting eagerness.

"Alexei I don't want you—you mustn't think I'm saying this just to get what I want. I'll give him up if I've got to—Vava, I mean—I'll give him up. I don't mind—yes, I do mind, but I'd let you take him away and look after him yourself. Only you mustn't let her, you mustn't let Natalia have him. You see, she'd frighten him, he doesn't remember, he doesn't know who his mother is, he'd expect her to be somebody—somebody who'd be kind and gentle with him. She can't be that, Natalia can't be that, she won't recognize him, she may be cold and distant. Think, think what it will be like, if you tell him that

a mother is a gentle person who looks after you and then he finds her —like that. Don't you see what it would be like?—you could never leave him with her, you wouldn't know what she'd do, she might desert him again. Alexei do try——"

I had heard her thus far as one listens sleepily to a funeral oration. The words "desert him" lanced my ears like flute notes emerging from a rallentando passage of second-violins. I said:

"What do you mean?—I don't understand you—what do you mean?"

Taken aback by the roughness of my voice, she said, "You don't think——"

"It is you who think!" I said. "What possible grounds have you for talking about desertion? She was ill, she was in a state of collapse——"

"—and she is still like that——"

"Be quiet, listen! What do you mean when you say you'll 'let' me take Vava away? Who gave you this ownership? What right have you——"

"You're talking nonsense!" she said rapidly. "It's not a question of right, it isn't a legal question, it's a question of what's best for Vava. Vava loves me, I know how to look after him. If you're going to talk of rights, then Vava has the right to be looked after by the woman who cares for him, whatever any pigheaded male may think about it. If you——"

"There is one woman," I said, "who has the right to look after Vava, and that is his mother. It's understandable that you don't want to see anyone taking your place——"

"Oh be quiet, be quiet!" she shouted.

Her head dropped down, she lay with her face buried in the woollen coverlet, the bed shook with her furious sobbing. Myself too angry to have any pity, and still suspecting her of histrionics, I watched her calmly, noticing how effective the dull white of her dress was against the poplar green. I said prosaically: "You must realize that things can't always be just as you want them. Other people have their lives to manage. . . ."

She could not have heard me, and she didn't move. I grew tired of waiting for her to recover, I turned over and closed my eyes.

I am not sure how long she stayed like that. I was asleep, or very nearly, when I realized that the weight had gone from the end of the bed, and then, opening my eyes, I found her leaning over me, her face close to mine. I no longer doubted the reality of her tears.

"Why is it," she asked in a whisper, passionately, "why is it that

everything I do and say is always taken wrongly. Why do you think me jealous of her, jealous of Natalia, just because I want to care for Vava? Can I never do anything that you'll think is generous!"

I moved my shoulders so as to get further away from her. I said dully: "It's no use our discussing that. . . . I've told you—I've tried to tell you—of my gratitude for your care of Vava. You've been good to him, you've been wonderfully kind. I ask you now to complete your kindness by letting me take him back, by not making it difficult."

She put her hand up to her forehead and shook her head as if she were too tired to think any more.

I said: "Listen, you will come with us to Chaveschok—my father-in-law will be glad to have you as his guest. You will stay with us until——"

Then all her weariness vanished. She stood up and folded her arms, she seemed immensely tall as she looked down at me.

"Come with you!" she said, as if the idea of it was past believing. "You mean, go away from Petrograd? Do you think I can leave Petrograd when Anton is here and may be living through his last days, his last hours?"

"You can't keep everything," I said quietly. "If you really feel it's your duty to stay in Petrograd——"

"My duty! Can you never think of anything but your suffocating moralities? Is it impossible, unthinkable, that I might love my husband? Are you just the same as all my friends, do you think——"

I said firmly: "No, I have never thought that you loved him."

Her anger, rising to its highest point, seemed to overreach itself, as a toy balloon is one moment swollen up and the next a rag of crinkled rubber. She stepped back from the bed, feeling out with her arms, till she came against a chair. Sitting there, her face hideously pale, her eyes closed, she said in a voice so quiet I could scarcely hear it, a voice without any colour at all:

"No, no one believes that I am capable of loving, and if anyone loves me he is taken away. Is it because of my body that everyone despises me? Why did God give me human feelings if I'm not fit to be loved?"

25

There seemed to be no flowers in Petrograd. Before, I had always bought them from an old man with no legs who sat at a corner in the Byelozerskaya, but he was never there now. The seller at a kiosk nearby told me what had happened: a rowdy procession of the Peo-

ple's Party, catching sight of his flowers, had started shouting that such things were a perquisite of the bourzhuis and throwing them all over the road; the old man had protested, calling God and the city police to his aid: "That means you're a bourzhui yourself!" they said, and a youth had cracked his skull in two with an upright torn from the railings of the Alexander Park. At Ringhäuser's you could get daffodils which came from Kherson, at fifty kopeks a bloom; but that was too much for me to pay when, more often than not, Natalia would thoughtlessly drop any flowers I brought her on the floor and I would find them there next day.

It was typical of the state of things in the Euphrosina Hospital, those flowers, taken from Tatiana's drawing-room, which I found tumbled and dead on the floor; for the room itself (I paid fifty roubles a week for it) was only dusted once in three days, the windows were filthy, there were sometimes three trays spread about it, all loaded with greasy crockery. I blamed Mme Ivanov, the matron, but really it was not her fault. Torklus had gone away—to prison, they said, though no one quite knew why—and Mme. Ivanov had all his work to do as well as her own, with a staff cut down to less than half-strength; on top of this, two of her wards were full of soldiers, which some official under the Provisional Government had calmly dumped on her. The outpatients department was busier than ever, for many of the deserters roaming about the town lacked face to go to the military hospitals for their dressings, and when old wounds grew septic from neglect they would crowd into the general hospitals and expect immediate treatment. I used to find them there every day, soldiers and civilians mixed up, standing about all over the vestibule and half-way up the stairs. I suppose some of them spent the whole day there, smoking and chewing, the literate reading aloud from the party newspapers, every man of them concocting his own new government and waiting his turn to press his claims on the group about him. In that game even the women joined. "We shall get cheap tea and sugar," they said, "as soon as we have got rid of those bastards Rodzianko and Gutchkov. Skobelev is the man to deal with the profiteering wholesalers. . . ." Through this crowded, smoky kingdom of misery and discontent and patience Mme Ivanov would pass back and forth on her fat, flat feet a hundred times a day, bumping and thrusting like a collier in a busy harbour, murmuring at large, "Yes yes, all right, presently, you will all be attended to. . . . I will dress your arm myself as soon as the baby in Ward Four is delivered. . . . No no, you must wait, I have a Corporal dying upstairs, as soon as he's dead I'll come down and see what's wrong with your testicle. . . ." When I met her in the corridor upstairs,

she would stop for a moment and say, always slightly out of breath, always with her little smile, "Mme Otraveskov is better today, as soon as the weather gets warmer she will improve a great deal."

But it grew no warmer; the steps outside, never properly swept, were still crusted with dirty, frozen snow. In this part of the suburbs, which had largely escaped the general turbulence, you saw no bullet marks on the houses, few broken windows, only the monotonous slogans of political aspiration plastered over every wall. There seemed to be more people in the streets, aimless loungers, sometimes truculent. The little shrubs which stood in a row outside the hospital had not been clipped lately, inside them the snow was mixed up with every kind of rubbish. On my own account I offered one of the loungers a rouble to clear the place. He said, pocketing the coin, "Thank you, comrade, that will be the first instalment of my war-pension," and strolled away.

§

In Natalia's room you could hear the sound of the chatter below, and sometimes cries from the wards. Once I found a group of men playing yarolash just outside her door; they were waiting for the Sister, they said, and nothing would move them. Always there was the sound of feet in the corridors, and the smell of the place, cooked vegetables and lysol and people who never changed their clothes, seemed to come up between the floor-boards as well as through the door. It was intolerable, I could not bear that my beloved should live in a place like that.

But she, when I talked of taking her away, would sometimes evade me, and sometimes she would say, "No, I am quite happy here, I don't want to go anywhere else, I don't want to see people." If I pressed her she often cried a little, saying, "Why do you want me to move from here? I'm not in anybody's way." I said to her once, "It's lonely for you here, Natalia. Don't you feel lonely, being by yourself all day except when I'm with you?" "No," she said simply, looking away from me, "the Blessed Virgin is with me when I want company."

A day came when she would not let me go. During the regular hour that I spent with her she had paid me no attention; she had sat near the window working on the table-cover which seemed to occupy all her time and never to be finished, she had become a little fretful when I tried to read her the newspaper, saying, "How can you think that it interests me, all that about people I have never known!" But as I was about to leave her she asked me what the time was, and

when I told her "Four o'clock," she said, "Four o'clock—six hours before I go to bed, six hours I have to sit here all by myself, listening to the noise in the street. Mme Ivanov won't stay for more than five minutes, no one will ever stay with me, I have to be all alone." Overjoyed at this, which I took to be an invitation, I pulled off my coat again and sat down beside her. She said: "You're a little too near, you get in my light there." After that I do not remember that she spoke to me that evening, even to answer my questions. I talked to her of Vava, but she made no comment, she seemed to be wholly occupied with her embroidery. When it grew dark I put on the light for her; at about eight o'clock one of the nurses brought her supper, which she ate in a dilatory fashion without putting her work aside. By then I had given up talking, for I was tired that day, and we sat in silence until the clock of a church nearby struck ten. At that she folded up her work and pushed it across to the other side of the table. "I must go to bed now," she said.

I took off her shoes, as I had always done in the days of our happiness. For that she thanked me, a little surprised, "Ah—je te remercie!" and then she made it clear that I must go away. But I waited outside the door, and presently, when she was in bed, I went back to her. The light was still on and she seemed glad that I had come back; she said, holding my hand as I sat beside the bed, "Stay with me please, stay till they come and put the light out, I don't want to be alone."

When she had grown drowsy I put the light out myself.

Feeling the sudden darkness she called out, faintly, in a rather scared voice, "Alexei! Alexei, are you there?" "It's all right!" I answered, "I'm still here."

I went back to her, treading softly so as not to rouse her further, and lay on top of the bed, and slipped my arm under her shoulders. She moved her head a little closer to mine, so that her hair was spilt over my face. She said: "Alexei, is that you? . . . Alexei. . . ."

I think she slept then, and that was as I wished, for it seemed that nothing she could say, no movement of her body, would make my happiness more perfect. And I, growing sleepy too, feeling that our closeness squeezed out the weight of time that had held us separate, spoke nothing but her name, and to call her my own, my darling. Some time in the night I woke again, her voice had woken me, and I listened without surprise, still asleep to everything but her voice. I heard her say: "Alexei, precious Alexei, when they let us go, when we can get away from here, we shall go to Italy. Vava will lie in the sun there, the sun will be good for him, that is what Dr. Can-

taculetsi said." And presently: "Vava—did you hear him? I thought I heard Vava crying. . . . Alexei, you'll leave the Dombrowa-Radzikov, you will, won't you Alexei? It was like being on a ship with a hole in it, sinking, sinking, all those days they had you at the Skoropadski Palace. Alexei, you won't let that happen again?" I had to answer her then; I said, holding her more tightly, her breast against my side, kissing her forehead, "You mustn't think like that, you mustn't think of anything that could happen, we are too close, too close, for anything to happen." For a time she seemed to be content, her breathing and the beat of her dear heart were quiet, then I felt her sobbing, and she stirred and cried out: "Alexei, Alexei!" "I'm here," I whispered, "I'm here, close to you, feel me, feel me!" She said, weeping, and as if she were out of breath, "You go too fast, too fast, I can't keep up with you. It's so steep here, I can't go fast with my feet so cold, don't go so fast, Alexei! Alexei, come back, I don't want to lose you, they'll hurt you up there, Alexei, don't go out of my sight!" By degrees I soothed her, stroking her cheek, promising not to leave her. And then, when I thought she slept again, she said distinctly: "I saw Yelisaveta Akinevna, you know, the Roumaniev girl, she told me she had seen Vava. That isn't true, is it! She couldn't have seen Vava. Vava . . . Vava . . . he went away. You won't believe what she says, Alexei, don't listen to her, don't have anything to do with her, she's a sly creature, that Yelisaveta!" I whispered, "Hush, my own, hush, my beloved, you must sleep now!" and she answered, "Sleep! . . . Sleep. . . . Perfect—so happy, so happy." In the first light I saw her face still sleeping; peaceful, peaceful and lovely, as when I had woken from our bridal night.

Perhaps I should have stayed there, still holding her; but fearing that she might be frightened at waking in my arms I slipped away in the early morning. I found a place to wash myself, and when she woke—it was eight o'clock or about that time—I was sitting in the chair again. She looked at me with bewilderment, somewhat in dismay. She said: "You shouldn't have stayed here, people aren't supposed to be here at night, only people who belong here."

She was restless, and my presence seemed to worry her. "Why are you staying here? You must have something of your own to do, your painting; and your friends, they will be wondering where you've got to." So I went away, to make my daily appearance at the Office of Personnel, and to spend an hour with Vava. I was with her again in the afternoon, but she did not seem to care for my company that day, and when I talked of remaining there through the evening she said, looking closely at her needle, "No, oh no, you can't

do that now. It isn't like the days . . . no no, we can't be so much together now."

§

Sometimes, turning quickly to face her, but without the intention of catching her unawares, I found her eyes fixed on my face. The look I saw then was one of perplexity, often a little frightened.

I used to try to remind her of little things which had happened to us. "Natalia, do you remember that night at Krasnyesk when the District Officer was drunk?—he came to see us in the middle of the night and said we had stolen some of his chickens; and you told him his chickens were underneath the bath-house, and he went off there and fell into four feet of snow. . . . Look, Natalia, I've brought you a little cabinet to keep your work in, it's exactly like the one you had in the drawing-room at Voepensk. . . ." But as a rule she paid no attention; it was as if a curtain had been dropped between her mind and hearing; or sometimes she would say, "That was a long time ago, I can't remember things that happened then, it's all quite different now."

Unexpectedly, her memory of more distant things seemed sometimes to be sharper. I was talking one day, for want of a common subject, about Anton, and she asked me with some impatience, "Anton? What Anton?" I said, "I'm speaking of a recent friend of mine, a war-friend, you wouldn't know him—Count Anton Scheffler." Without any hesitation she said, "Count Scheffler? But of course I know him, I used to see him at the Baronovikis', he was the man who defended poor Zvetzkov so badly!"

Incautiously, I said: "But the case was impossible. Anton did his best, I know he did, only——"

"His mind wasn't on it!" she said sharply, "he was thinking all the time about that ridiculous Yelisaveta Akinievna, he was quite off his head about that girl."

I said: "She is his wife now. . . ."

And she answered: "His wife? Yelisaveta? Oh no! No, she never married him, she refused him over and over again, it was the talk of all Petrograd." She laughed; but it was not her natural laughter. "Oh no," she said, "he couldn't have married her, they would never have got on together, they were not at all the same, they were quite unsuited."

On my guard now, I would not dispute with her; I tried, rather, to lead her forward from that place in her memory. "Those were a bad few days," I said, "when Zvetzkov was being tried below and I upstairs. But it ended all right, didn't it! Do you remember how we

thought they would put me in the Fortress? and when you came to see me in the hotel, and I told you it was Krasnyesk, we sent for the maître d'hôtel and told him to bring the most expensive wine in his cellar for us to drink to our exile. That evening, the relief of it, the thankfulness——"

She stopped me. "I have seen Yelisaveta Akinievna quite recently," she said, with a certain severity, as if I were wilfully contradicting her. "Yelisaveta said nothing to me about her being married."

It was no good trying to pull her away from that subject too quickly. I said:

"You like having Yelisaveta to visit you here?"

"Yelisaveta?" she said abstractedly. "She is very kind. She has taken me for drives in her motor . . . yes, very kind. But of course it's the police who send her."

"The police?",

"Oh yes," she said with a note of impatience. "I'm not a fool, I'm not too silly to see what's going on. The police send her to talk to me, to trap me, they think I'll give something away." She had paused in her work for a moment, a little flushed with excitement. But now her arm and fingers began to move again in the mechanical, remorseless way which I sometimes found so trying, as a sick man gets to hate the movements of a curtain, the creak of the jalousies. "The police know they can't get hold of me as long as I stay here, I'm safe here, they can't touch me. So they send that woman to spy on me, they think she'll tempt me to go where they want." She smiled. "Poor Yelisaveta Akinievna, she isn't quite clever enough for that, she never had very much brains. I wouldn't let her drive me into the city, I made her go in the country. You see, I knew what she wanted all the time."

I said very gently: "My dear, I don't think you're right about Yelisaveta. I'm sure you're not. You see, I knew you'd be lonely while I was away, and I asked her to go and see you."

She bit off her thread.

"Oh yes," she said; quietly, not venomously, "she always knows how to get round a man."

"But Natalia, why should you think the police are bothering about you? You know, don't you, that there's been a revolution, a new government—I was talking about that yesterday. The police are no longer—"

"The police are always the same," she said with determination. "They want——"

"But Natalia, listen! You know you can trust me, you know you can trust what I say. If I——"

"It is better not to talk about the police!" she said. "They may always be listening, the nurses here are nearly all spies."

"But why——"

"You would not understand," she broke in, with a certain superiority. "You don't understand the police as I do, you don't know what they're like, how clever they are, how they keep on to you when once they've had you in their fists. . . . No, I don't want to talk any more, I'm tired, I should like you, please, to go away now."

I drew my chair back, but I did not go right away. And soon I saw her head sink on to the arm which she had stretched out across the table.

It was a kind of pleasure, like seeing from afar the hills of your own country, to watch her as she slept. In sleep the lines of her face grew gentle again, and the troubled creases in her forehead showed less saliently. Her lips, changing to their natural shape, were firmer now, and that helped to give back her former beauty; for her mouth, as Heubner himself once said, belonged to one of Van Dyck's young noblemen. In that face, the face I had seen first in the Baronovikis' Empire drawing-room, there was pride as well as woman's tenderness, and as my eyes held it now I felt an echo of my own pride in being her partner. She had carried such dignity in the smallness of her form and features, the decisive grace in the bended curve from cheek to chin came from so resolute a spirit, that while none denied her beauty, I never heard it talked of in common terms. With those whose staple talk was matrimonial speculation she had lived, through a summer and the autumn following, untouched by gossip; within herself and yet not selfish, lonely, as it appeared, but with neither shame nor melancholy in her loneliness. Men, I think, had been frightened of her, fearing they could not take possession of a spirit so delicately tempered. Yet I, with greater cause for diffidence than they, had wholly possessed her.

My impulse was to go and put my arm about her, but I did not move, fearing that what I saw would crumple at my touch. It was better to watch her folded eyes, with the long lashes jutting from their furrows, and to draw from that image a memory of the light that had been inside: the wondering, slowly joyful look on the day I had said, stumbling through mists of confusion, "Natalia Konstantinovna . . . I wanted to ask you . . . Natalia . . ."; the radiant eyes when she said *"Krasnyesk? Krasnyesk! Then we can go together!"* A lock of her brown, fine hair had dropped across her cheek,

reminding me that once I had painted her with a tress falling loose like that; saying, against her protests, that it made me think of my Serovka farm, with the beech leaves fallen on an early covering of snow. Yes, her skin had always been white like that, though rich and warmer, and the flesh more firm; and her head had lain just thus on the evening of Vava's birth, when she had breathed as she breathed now, the lips opening a little, painfully, as the breath came in. But I had forgotten how small it was; delicately small, as if the sculptor, resolute to perfect his proportions, had graven down the forehead, then cheeks, then chin in turn till a life-size head had become the size of a child's; and I marvelled that a thing so small, taking in so much of suffering, giving out such wealth of sweetness, could have stayed so much the same.

God, my enemy, had thrust His hand between her spirit and body. I wanted to pray that He would take away the barrier, but that would have meánt humility, and I could not bend myself to any power that had treated Vava, Vava innocent and helpless, with such callous cruelty. However feeble, I had not lost the courage of rebellion; I would fight for myself, not with but against God's interference.

Vava: he was my weapon. When she saw him lying in his chair, the smile so like her own, the eyes like mine, surely the cords that bound her spirit would not be strong enough to hold her down. She had given him and me so much, keeping so little of herself, she could no longer find her life except in our lives. Surely the arms where Vava first lay would stretch of themselves to clasp him; when Vava's love and mine, flaming together as one fire, burnt close to her, surely the heart that kindled it must answer to that warmth again.

But I was frightened. Awake, she never spoke of him. Suppose that failed?

The sleeve on which her head lay was rumpled, and I feared it would mark her skin. I raised her head a little, enjoying for a moment the roughness of her hair and the cool flesh of her forehead on my hand, and pulled the sleeve straight. She did not wake, and I was able to stay there, watching her.

26

I heard indirectly—Astanovitch, I think it was, who first told me, and he seemed very much amused—that Strubensohn's beautiful house in the Levashovski Prospekt had been pillaged by a gang of hooligans belonging (or so they said) to the Labour Men; they had dragged down all his pictures—he collected Spanish masters of the

sixteenth century—and hacked them to bits, they had taken out an amphora of Xante and crashed it on to the Neva. But Strubensohn did not mention this loss of his own accord, and when I spoke about it he only said, "Yes, my wife is very much distressed, she is bedridden and very nervous," and he returned at once to business.

He had still not found out where Anton was imprisoned, but at my suggestion he had tackled Sopojnikin and he thought that some progress might be made through that channel. "I cannot pretend that the General is really interested in Count Scheffler's case; like everyone else at the present time he is entirely taken up with politics; but I am seeing him again tomorrow, and I hope to persuade him that the case can be regarded from a political point of view with which he may be sympathetic. . . . In the meantime, another line of approach has occurred to me. You have a sister, Mme Militune? Yes, Mme Scheffler told me. And I gather from *Dielo Navoda* that Mme Militune may be described as the right-hand man of Vladimir Olkha. That is so?"

I told him that I had never been in close touch with my sister's political activities; I had always believed her to be of the student-revolutionary mentality, and not be taken very seriously.

He nodded in the special way he used (as I had come to learn) when he thought I was talking nonsense. "But Olkha," he said diffidently, "we have to take him quite seriously, don't you think? At least, I imagine that M. Rodzianko would say so—Olkha succeeds in being a considerable nuisance to the Duma, I understand. . . . The thought that occurred to me is this: in politics, as you know, the sop to Cerberus is—how shall I say?—the routine practice. When you are in power you make small concessions to the opposition, the opposition magnifies these little victories for the benefit of its supporters, attention is diverted from matters of greater moment, a contentious measure can then be pushed through more easily. We find that practice obtaining in every social organization, do we not? In the army, for example. And it is like that, if I am rightly informed, with our present administration; to a man like Olkha they will give something, anything that doesn't matter to keep him quiet for a few hours." His heavy, grey eyelids fell a little lower. "Among the Maximalists," he said cautiously, "there is a great appetite for martyrs. On the streets, you see, on political platforms, it is the personal factor which carries most weight; if you put up a professor of political economy the crowd will listen to him politely, but if you want them shouting and cheering you must show them a victim of the former régime, a man imprisoned in the Fortress ten years for throwing a bomb at a tyrannical landlord, a woman whose child died

while she was in the hands of the police. And of course they can find martyrs in plenty, but the supply of really interesting ones is at present hardly equal to the demand. . . . Now Count Scheffler, his name is known, they have not forgotten his defence of political prisoners before the war, the story of his behaviour at Mariki-Matesk might be made very interesting to those of proletarian sympathies. I ask myself, is not Count Scheffler the kind of figure which might appeal to Olkha's imagination? Would not his case serve as text for a picturesque onslaught on the moderates? If you were to talk of Count Scheffler to your sister and gain her interest; stressing the revolutionary aspect of his insubordination at Mariki-Matesk; suggesting that a potential member of her party, a man of exceptional gifts, is in jeopardy; hinting that the moderates in the Duma have deliberately used their position to hush up a scandal. . . ."

§

But Katie was not easy to get hold of. The drunken and depressed old woman who had taken the dvornik's place at her flat would cackle, directly she caught sight of me: "Ah, here he is again, the lame officer, always looking for Mme Militune! Yes, my beauty, you can walk upstairs if you like, and you'll find the whole dirty scum of Petrograd lolling about in her bedroom, people such as I had no dealings with in the country where I come from, but my lady Militune, she's not there from morning till night, God preserve the whore's heart in her ladyship." At the Tauride Palace I would learn, after an hour's waiting, that Mme Militune had gone off with Comrade Olkha to the party headquarters in the Kostromskaya; and there, if she had not already departed to one of the clubs, a slovenly creature with a torn blouse and a fixed bayonet would tell me curtly that Comrade Militune was in committee and could not be disturbed.

I discovered, however, that in this building she had an office of her own; and one morning, having slipped the guard five roubles to let me through, and given another five to some female busybody upstairs, I planted myself there to await her. An office, I have called it: it was really nothing but a large cupboard under the next flight of stairs, depending for its light on an electric bulb with the flex brought in over the door. There was no formal means of ventilation; some air, I suppose, came in beneath the door and through cracks in the matchboard passage-wall, to dilute the stale cigarette-smoke which hung there like the steam in a wash-house. I could only stand upright at the extreme end of the room, and elsewhere there was hardly floorspace for standing. Its furniture was a table and a chair with

uneven legs, a hatbox used for rubbish, a bank of home-made shelves which decreased in length as they rose towards the sloping ceiling. On these shelves there were rows of dilapidated box-files interspersed with cardboard boxes such as shoes are packed in; no books—apart from paper-bound reports there was not a book in the whole rabbit-hutch; and such space of floor as the table left was piled with similar boxes. In contrast with the flyblown untidiness, I saw at one end of the table a pile of typescript portfolios, bound and ticketed with exemplary neatness; that, I guessed, was Katie's work. On the door, in the few square inches left over by lists and charts, she had fastened with four drawing-pins a single picture: it showed a little German girl in a muslin dress with a frilly petticoat jutting beneath it; the child was simpering over a woolly dog; the work was entitled "Playmates."

At about eleven o'clock I heard her voice in the passage, joined with that of the man I had known as Vladimir. "I tell you, Katia," he was saying, "Andrew will have to go. His speech last night showed him to be utterly unreliable, at the present time we can't afford to take risks with people like that." "But V'lodia," I heard Katia answer, "he's been with us so long, he's worked so hard. . . ." "That makes no difference, yes yes, I know he's worked, and I'm fond of him, I love him better than any other man in the Party, but that can't be helped. . . . Gruzdev is calling a committee for tonight, one o'clock, Dyedostin will bring forward the indictment and propose expulsion, Boltikov will second, I shall rise to oppose, putting up so weak a case that we shall get the expulsion through by at least four votes. . . . I want you, by the time I get back this afternoon, to have ready copies of all the speeches Andrey has made in the Rural Propaganda Committee since the beginning of February. That must be done by four o'clock, you understand—I shall want to make some alterations before I pass them on to Dyedostin. Oh, and Katia, listen. . . ." Lacking interest in these matters, I picked up one of the portfolios and turned the pages over. I read: "Staroi Oskol: In this division Gregory Frantsevitch Grekhovil, age 55, Roulov Avenue 43, blacksmith and ornamental ironworker, has completed a skeleton organization for the district soviet and the regional agricultural committee. Grekhovil is reliable and experienced: was responsible for successful rick-burning campaign, Tambov District, 1910. He will be responsible to Kirshon, from whom he expects orders about 18 June. Secretary of the party cell: Ignat Gurvitch Galanba, 22, cornmerchant's clerk, formerly attached to Zemla i Vola, said by Grekhovil to be inflexible promoter of the class-war. . . ." Very suddenly, as I might have expected with Katie, the

conversation outside came to an end and she marched in. She caught sight of me, gasped, stepped forward, and tore the portfolio out of my hand.

"What are you doing with that!" she barked. "What are you doing here? How did you get in here? Who——"

"It cost me ten roubles," I said. "It's a lot to pay for seeing one's sister."

"Ten roubles? You mean to say——"

"Now listen, Katie, cool down, cool down! Here, you can sit on your chair, I'll squat on the floor. What a place! Now it's quite all right, I was only looking at your work to pass the time, all I read was about a blacksmith in Staroi Oskol who is said to be reliable. If anyone——"

"You've got no right to be reading my private papers!" she snapped. "I've half a mind to tell Comrade Olkha."

"Is that the little man you call Vladimir, the one I used to see in your flat? Indeed, and do you think he'll give me a thrashing?"

Dead serious, she answered: "A thrashing? Do you know what happened to Nikolai Spasov?"

"Who is he?"

"He belonged to the Mensheviki, he made himself a nuisance to Vladimir. Last week he had an accident, he was just going into his own house when he fell down flat. One bullet in the back of his neck, two in his lungs."

I could not take this woman seriously, but it was useless to tease her. I said with some bitterness:

"Very well, if you arrange that for me too I shall merely be grateful. If you knew what my life is like at present you would threaten to keep me breathing." I opened the door and bent to get out. "Well, good-bye, Katie!"

She had started shifting the papers on the table in her restless, efficient way. She turned round then.

"But Alexei—you're not going! Why did you come?"

"I wanted to talk to you," I said, "but since you're so busy, and since my presence is apparently a danger to the whole of your party organization—well, my sweet!"

I kissed the tips of my fingers.

"Alexei, why are you cross?" she said pathetically. "Of course I'm busy, I'm always busy, but I didn't say I wouldn't talk to you. I can talk for five—ten minutes. Oh, don't stand there like that, sit down, sit on the table, give me a cigarette, I'll get you tea in a minute——"

"Poor Katie!" I said tenderly, "they work you too hard. You

know, you mustn't let that fanatic Olkha make a slave of you. Why don't you take a month's holiday?"

"A month's holiday?" she said incredulously. "Now? My dear Alexei, do you really think that affairs are in such a state that I can leave my work for a month? Do you imagine that now, of all times, we can just step aside and leave the intellectual socialists and the cultured liberals to carry out their manœuvres without interruption?"

I said: "As I see things, it would do Russia no harm if the tumult at the Tauride Palace were allowed to die down a little. At present the noise of party war-cries is so great that no business can be done. The condition of the transport services for example——"

"Exactly!" she said, quietly and rapidly, as one who knew every inch of her ground. "Yes, just so, no doubt all your friends in the Orshaskaya say the same thing; and think the same thing. Give them a little time, Rodzianko and Miliukov and all the rest of the drifters, and the people's revolutionary ardour will have evaporated, everyone will be drifting back into their former way of life, the war perhaps can be rounded off in a satisfactory manner, and then we shall have a new czarist régime without the Czar, a reactionary oligarchy speciously disguised as representational government and supporting an economic system which will stabilize the poverty of the masses for another hundred years. I tell you it is now, now, that Russia is ready for her saviour."

"But who do you mean, this saviour?" I asked prosily. "Is it Vladimir Olkha, is he to be——"

"He will be known when he comes!" she said, with religious quietude. And then, "I'm sorry, Alexei; but you are one of those who live in the past, you have no knowledge of any life except your own, you think that Russia lives round about the Alexander Park, you never go into the streets behind the Finland Station, you've never lived with a peasant family in a one-roomed isba——"

"No, Katie, but I lived in Krasnyesk for five years. And I was not sent there for complacently supporting the ancient régime——"

"I know, I know!" she said impatiently. "You are an epitome of lukewarm intellectual benevolence without direction. You considered yourself a radical, you worked without positive plans, you were just indiscreet enough to play into the hands of the Okranha. And now, when the real fight is beginning, when the misery of Russia is at last being translated into a living and disciplined force, you find that your sword has lost its point and you want to stand aside."

I said soberly: "Yes, I know I'm a very useless person. But I was trained as a soldier, you see, I don't believe in firing my rifle till I'm quite sure of the target, it's not given to all of us to put our faith

in messianic programmes. Before I take part in any more bloodshed —and your plans, I take it, mean nothing else—I want to know with reasonable certainty what kind of Russia the result will be. . . . And in the meantime I'm not quite idle, I have a little boy, you may remember him, he lies on his back all day, very patiently, he's not like other men's sons and yet I have a pride in him——"

Suddenly she started crying. Outwardly the spectacle was faintly ridiculous: a prim woman past her youth and dressed now with the subfusc severity of a draper's assistant, sobbing like a schoolgirl and rubbing her eyes with her sleeve; but to me it was pitiful, for I had seen her cry like that in the nursery at Vedenskdie, and now, with all her panoply of files and portfolios about her, she seemed like David crushed by the weight of unaccustomed armour. I said:

"Katie, Katie listen! I didn't mean to hurt you, I'm not belittling your earnestness, it's only that I hate seeing you so worn out. . . ."

"Why is it?" she gasped, still crying, "why is it that you always make me cry, Alexei? I don't—I don't feel like it except when I'm with you."

"You're tired, Kati, you try to work beyond your strength." I tried to put an arm round her shoulders, but she shook me away, she was angry with herself and with me. She said: "Don't do that, I don't want anybody petting me, I'm a fighter for the proletariat, I don't want to be petted."

It seemed hopeless now to try and talk about Anton, the only thing was to go away. But again, when I opened the door, she stopped me. "No, Alexei, no, you mustn't go away like that! Wait!" As if she must vent her temper on something, she ran a quarto sheet into her typewriter and began to thrash the keys, filling half the sheet in ninety seconds. Then she turned her chair round and sat limply with her tired eyes looking up to the level of my chin. "Well, what is it, what did you come to say?"

I had thought of a dozen ways of sliding into the subject, but now it seemed best to be straightforward.

"I want to persuade you," I said, "to use your influence in helping a friend of mine, a lawyer, who formerly devoted all his professional life to proletarian interests. You remember Zvetzkov, don't you? Well——"

"Who is this friend?" she asked abruptly. "He has a name, I suppose?"

"Yes, Count Anton Antonovitch Scheffler. He is at present——"

"Scheffler?" She got up and reached for one of the box-files. "What group? Was he a social-revolutionary, a labour man . . .?"

"I don't know, I don't know if he belonged to any group. At pres-

ent he's imprisoned somewhere in Petrograd, but I don't know where. We were prisoners together at Krozkohl, and then we worked together at Mariki-Matesk. He got into trouble for refusing to command a consignment of repatriated men who had been listed for further service. He'd have been shot for that piece of work, only——"

She had been flapping over papers all the time I talked, and now she broke in: "Yes, I've got him here. 'Scheffler, Anton Antonovitch, barrister. Counsel for defence in case of Gretchaninov (anarchist), nineteen-six, Proshkin (escaped exile), January nineteen-seven. . . .' Yes, I remember now, I believe Vladimir used him on one occasion."

"Then Vladimir would remember him? If he——"

"Oh yes, Vladimir never forgets anyone."

"—and might be willing to do something for him?"

"Not unless Scheffler can be useful."

"No, but I mean, in view of his history——"

"His history doesn't matter, except to guide us as to what we may expect from him in the future. What interests us——"

"Yes, but Katie, listen! When you think of what Scheffler's done, or tried to do, for the very people whose cause you're fighting for——"

"Petrograd," she answered swiftly, "to say nothing of the rest of Russia, is crammed, overflowing, with people who once struck a blow or made a gesture or suffered in some way for the enfranchisement of the proletariat; former exiles, released prisoners, members of student-cells, political mountebanks, common criminals; we get them in here all day long, dozens of them, whinnying for salaries. If we were to take any notice of one half——"

"But this," I interrupted, "is not a case of a man looking for a job. It's a case of a man who followed his conscience and is still suffering for it. All I'm trying to get for him——"

"If he doesn't even want a job, he's useless to us. We have no time——"

"But I'm not pretending he'd be useful. I'm simply asking whether you, as champion of the oppressed——"

"We have no time," she repeated, "we've no time to worry about individuals, we can only think of those who will be useful. Don't you see, won't your imagination grasp the fact, that in the gigantic task of creating a new order, now, at a single sweep, we can think of nothing but our machinery, men and women who are going to work as we direct them, people who will be tireless and precise and inexorable? Do you imagine that we're a kind of ambulance service for

hunting out sufferers one by one and patching them up? How can we keep our sense of direction if we keep stopping to shed tears over those who've fallen behind us?"

I said: "People will have no faith in you if you ignore your own wounded."

"Our own faith is enough," she said.

I tried once again to find my way to Katie, the Katie who had once been frightened to go along the road as far as the forge unless I went with her. I said: "Katie, I know I'm being a nuisance, I know it's interfering with the work you live for. But I'm asking you just for my own sake. I've had a bad time, you know; Natalia, she's still —far from well, it's been a lot of worry. And this man Scheffler, he's important to me, we've been very close friends, he understands me. I want him, I want him very badly. Wouldn't you, for my sake, see if you can do something for him?"

She hesitated. "You must write to me," she said, holding her forehead as if it were about to crack and spill the whole of her mind's burden. "I like to have things on paper. You must put down all the details, everything you know about him, exactly how he comes to be in prison now. And anything you know about his politics, I must have that. . . . But I don't see what I can do, Vladimir won't do anything, he hates me to be sentimental about separate people."

I was going to say, "Except himself!" but I stopped in time. "I'll write down everything I know," I told her.

She took me down to the street herself, hustling me along the corridors as if terrified that someone should see this serpent in the garden of flowers; but in truth I do not think a stranger was very noticeable, for the whole vast and shabby place seemed to be crowded now. Along the corridors I saw the people who will always be found in a public building, scared peasants gaping at everyone who passed, women in Ukrainian shawls, aged Siberians in sheepskin jackets who squatted on the floor so motionless, their narrow eyes so still, that they looked like plaster models; while here and there a blind or legless man was openly begging, as formerly they begged on the steps of Our Lady of Kazan. But besides this human furniture there were men and women who moved about with quick determination; many were very young, and most on the under side of fifty, fellows of the student type and those who might have been employed in factories rather than fields; having in common an unnatural haste in movement, a studied poverty in clothes, an asceticism of the kind one attributes to German engineers. These took no notice at all of the loungers, and very little of each other; they were in a hurry, they had their own affairs: I remember thinking that the earliest Chris-

tians may have carried just such a resolution in their faces. In the midst of so much haste and purpose the building itself seemed to be wholly neglected: the floors were covered with rubbish, the stench from the open door of a toilet proclaimed that the closet was choked, the lift was out of order. When we reached the street I bent, automatically, to kiss Katie good-bye. But she turned round and went back into the building without saying anything at all.

§

I gave Strubensohn an account of that interview which was devoid of optimism. And I think it was on the following day that he telephoned asking if I could meet him for luncheon in the Café Moskva. This was an unpretentious place in the Furshstadskaya, formerly a haunt of the smaller government officials and business men, noted for its admirable French cooking. I found it not much changed externally —a little shabbier perhaps, the table-cloths not changed so often, the waiters fewer and less assiduous—but the people were quite different. The tables nearest the back, which had always been kept for the best customers, were occupied now by soldiers, or those who must have been soldiers quite recently; some had their rifles propped against the wall behind them—everyone had a taste for arms at that time; and elsewhere the place was full of men who had the look of down-at-heel students or petty clerks in government offices, with Jews of the more flamboyant sort in plenty. Until Strubensohn arrived there was not one well-dressed man in the whole establishment.

I saw him looking anxious as he came in, but directly he caught sight of me his face formed into the habitual smile of his brief-side manner; in hell, I think, he would have moved with the same short-legged dignity, and been just as urbane in his greeting.

"I chose this place," he said apologetically, as he dusted a chair and sat down beside me, "because one can talk more freely here than in the clubs—there is so much noise, and everybody is so keen on venting his own opinions, that the fear of eavesdropping is very small. . . . My wife? Oh yes, I thank you, very much better today. . . . I have asked General Sopojnikin to join us here, and he is bringing with him a M. Gretzkov, of the General Staff secretariat, who I think may be useful to us, he is a man of considerable influence. The reason I took the liberty of asking you to join us—I really must apologize, Captain, I take up so much of your time—my idea is that you, with your personal and very intimate knowledge of Count Scheffler, may be better able to interest M. Gretzkov in his case than I can. If you, perhaps, could say something of Count Scheffler's

merits as a soldier, the ability he showed in handling men, his personal courage, all those qualities which would interest a man accustomed to thinking in military terms. . . . Ah, I see the General now!"

Sopojnikin, steering between the tables, looked jaunty and faintly amused. The man who followed him was known to me by sight, having the rather striking combination of a short, black beard and a completely bald head; he was of the kind which, shy to the point of absurdity in drawing-rooms, is found against all appearances to be important. He hardly replied when I was introduced to him, and throughout the early part of the meal he said nothing at all. Sopojnikin, however, was in good voice. He was pleased with his surroundings, he was glad, he said, to find that the Moskva at last had a clientele worthy of its special character, even the lenten simplicity of the food pleased him. It reminded him, he said, of his Voronetz boyhood, when his father had refused to eat anything but the produce of his own estates, and his mother had always engaged as cooks women who dealt with meat and vegetables in the soundest kulak tradition. He began, then, to tell us of his early life, in the key of delicate nostalgia which makes such reminiscence charming; drawing in wash the bare, blue country which lay between his home and the northern arm of the Tvarkel forest, pencilling the homely figures of Voronetz society, the aged Captain and his four plump daughters, the widow who had once been to Moscow. . . .

"Yes," he said, "in a new existence we are shaping, much will be lost that has a kind of aesthetic value: the slow rhythm of our country life; the idleness of the privileged from which we have developed a mellow philosophy; our imperial pageantry; the intimate relationship, understood so perfectly, between the man who loves his land and the men who till it. All that has to go, and for my part I shall be sorry, because these values take many generations to create, they derive their subtlety, like wine, from the time they take in maturing. Still, it is idle to regret such losses, it's like mourning for one's lost youth. My one great fear is that the Russian people will not gain enough to compensate them for their losses. . . . I'm frightened, yes, I am frightened by the very magnitude of our opportunity. The greatest of all stumbling-blocks to our development has been thrust away, so suddenly that I still find it hard to realize that it's no longer there; and I believe that we have ready to hand the means for reaping a gigantic harvest in human happiness from the freedom suddenly bestowed on us. We have, for instance, the rudiments of a system of justice which will meet the special needs of our temperament; we have in the Zemstvos the basis, the skeleton, of a local

government system which under a liberal and enlightened direction could promote our civilization further in two generations than it has advanced in the last two hundred years. More important still, we have here in Petrograd men with enough political experience and constructive imagination to get the whole machinery of progress into working order. . . . My one terror is that men of another kind, irresponsible demagogues who think of nothing but sweeping away ou entire economic and social fabric overnight, may press the more rational forces so hard as to make their work impossible. As I see it, the main weakness in the position of the moderates is that they have to cope with two gigantic tasks at the same time; while the Social-Revolutionaries are behaving as if the war were done with, the moderates see that nothing can be achieved internally till the war has been forced to a successful conclusion. Not only do we owe that to our allies; we owe it to ourselves. What is the good of building a new Russia if it's going to belong to Berlin? and does anyone in the world imagine that German ambitions, unopposed, will be satisfied by anything less than the economic control of our empire? Rodzianko realizes that. Kerenski does too. And they also realize that no army can make an advance of a hundred yards while the soldiers are able to give orders to their officers or dismiss a General they don't happen to care for. The social-democrats, on the other hand, think it makes no difference whether officers have authority or not, they are quite ready to let the war look after itself; as things go from bad to worse they feel they have a sharper whip to lay across Rodzianko's shoulders; discontent is their meat and drink, it's the air they breathe, the foundation of their political pretensions. Those people will only be discountenanced when the war has been won: a great victory will revive the patriotism that lies deep in the Russian heart, it will silence once and for all the upstart theorists who want to use the agony of Russia for trying-out their own frenzied programmes. . . . Capitulation, turmoil, anarchy: is that all we are to get in return for two million Russian lives?"

Strubensohn shifted uneasily; Sopojnikin's voice had become a little too loud for his comfort, and he glanced nervously towards the group of mechanics sitting at the next table. Sopojnikin apologized. "I'm forgetting," he said pleasantly, "—you asked me to meet you on business, I really mustn't abuse your hospitality like this. . . ."

"But no!" Strubensohn said quickly, "it is most interesting, most interesting, I am so little of a politician myself that I hear with the greatest interest the views of those who really understand what's going on. We are all so much in the dark, I am always grateful for some authoritative guidance. . . . You will drink tea, General, or

would you prefer brandy—I have no doubt the regulations are winked-at here as elsewhere. . . . Yes, I myself have always felt that no real progress can be made in our internal reorganization until the war is brought to a victorious conclusion—you, Captain, will remember that I have often expressed that view to you. But I confess myself pessimistic. I cannot see how we can look for any military success while the morale of our troops is being infected every day by the defeatist attitude which seems almost universal here. Surely the first, the most pressing task of the government, is to revive that morale?"

Sopojnikin gathered the chips he had been cutting from the peel of a lemon and sprinkled them on the surface of his tea. He said with the faintest of smiles:

"Yes, M. Strubensohn, if anyone could tell us how to do that——"

"But surely," Strubensohn pursued, "the soldier is no less prone to the influence of rhetoric than the civilian? If you were to send orators who really understood the soldier's mentality, men who had his confidence——"

Speaking for the first time, with his eyes still fixed on the table, Gretzkov said in a low, dull voice: "And where are you going to find them?"

"They are mostly under the ground," Sopojnikin added.

"But surely there are some still left!" Strubensohn said cautiously. "Officers recently retired or invalided out, convalescent officers in the Rozalion-Sochalski hospital. . . ." He turned to Sopojnikin. "The officer of whom I was speaking yesterday, Count Scheffler; he, for example, is a man of great forensic gifts and a most extraordinary influence with soldiers. At present he is under detention, I understand, owing to an inadvertent breach of regulations which occurred some time ago—that is a matter which could be settled up very quickly, I imagine——"

Gretzkov, about to drink, put down his glass.

"I imagine not!" he said.

Sopojnikin looked at me. "You know Scheffler pretty well," he said. "Do you think he is the kind of man who would do his best to inspire the troops if he were released on that condition? Do you think that anything in his record suggests that likelihood?"

I began, with hesitation: "If Scheffler were assured——" but Strubensohn would not let me go on.

"At least," he said rapidly, "Scheffler's release would, in my opinion, be a very advantageous move for the constitutionalists. It seems to be the common talk that the Left will bring up the case in the course of a day or two, depicting Scheffler as a hero of the Revolu-

tion who is being persecuted owing to the reactionary sentiments of the Cadet Party. Putting aside the actual merits of the case, that kind of accusation is one that gets votes more easily than anything else at the present time; and I foresee a danger of very strong feelings being aroused. Would you not agree, M. Gretzkov, that if, when the question is raised, the constitutionalists are able calmly to reply that Count Scheffler has already been released, and is to undertake propaganda for the prosecution of the war, the elements of the Left will be made to look uncommonly foolish?"

"Very likely, very likely!" Gretzkov answered; he spoke as if the roof were the only part of his mouth that he liked using. "It is not, however, the main business of the executive to provide the government with dialectical ammunition. The business of the executive is to maintain and operate, as far as it can, the machinery of administration." He closed his mouth sharply, as if he had delivered an exact length of common sense and was biting off the end of it. But unexpectedly, his lips opened again. "It would appear," he said, "from what information has chanced to reach me, that Count Scheffler was guilty of flagrant and persistent insubordination. Why he was not dealt with summarily at Mariki-Matesk I have not yet been able to understand."

"Which suggests," Strubensohn said modestly, "that there were features in the case which have not yet been made known to you."

Gretzkov pulled up his shoulders and started intently at an orange.

"I happen to have read the report," he said.

Strubensohn nodded. "The official report, yes! But official reports contain very little of what I may describe as the background of a case. And here, when we know that Scheffler's position was made impossible by the jealousy and venom of a superior officer, that he was given irregular orders and deliberately compromised. . . ."

"If anything of that sort occurred," Gretzkov said rather testily, "it will no doubt come to light in the course of the formal examination——"

"——when that takes place," Strubensohn agreed, monotonously stirring his tea. "And other things," he continued, still gently, "will no doubt come to light too. The fact, for example, that since being brought to Petrograd Count Scheffler has been allowed no communication with his friends; the fact that repeated requests from influential members of the government for information as to Scheffler's actual whereabouts have been completely ignored. . . . It will, I think, be suggested that the Provisional Government has, in its attitude towards the administration of justice, shown a curious affinity with the mind of the former régime. . . ."

Gretzkov blew his nose, making the operation prolonged and rather artistic.

"My dear Strubensohn," Sopojnikin said bluntly, "that is, if you will pardon me, pure nonsense. You know perfectly well that in all the confusion of the last few weeks no one in authority has had any time at all to think about one particular officer under detention for a military charge, even if that officer happens to be—in civil life—a person of some distinction. One must preserve a sense of proportion."

Strubensohn wiped his mouth. "But we are dealing," he said, "with people who have no sense of proportion at all. If, as seems to me likely, the Bolsheviki decide to press the case for purposes of political *réclame,* I doubt if it will be sufficient to say 'Come, come, gentlemen! Where is your sense of proportion?' It would be almost as effective to call out 'Tut-tut! What dirty collars you are wearing!' . . . A cigar, M. Gretzkov?—Well, yes, perhaps in this place it is better to avoid the use of cigars."

For a moment Sopojnikin made no reply; he was industriously spinning a table-knife, and I was grateful for the voices and laughter from the tables all round which swept into our silence. Then he glanced at me.

"Well, Otraveskov, what do you think about it?"

I answered: "I know that people in the Kostromsakaya are interested in the case."

"Yes yes, maybe! What I mean is: do you yourself feel that any sound case—apart from legal sophistries—could be made out in Scheffler's defence?"

"You exclude moral issues as well as legal ones?" I asked.

"Well—no."

"Then the case, as I see it, is wholly in Scheffler's favour. He was the one officer at Mariki-Matesk with any real sense of duty."

"By which you mean——?"

"I mean that the function of the Mariki clearing station, if it had any function at all, was to study and promote the welfare of repatriated prisoners. Anton Antonovitch was the only officer (unless I may include myself) who made any serious attempt to do that."

"But on what authority," Gretzkov interrupted, "do you define the function of Mariki-Matesk as the promotion of welfare?"

"Perhaps you would give me an alternative definition?" I said. He made no answer, and I went on: "If it was not the welfare of those men that the authorities had in mind when they herded us into that cattle-pen, I should be exceedingly interested to know just what in God's name they did have in mind."

"Quite so, quite so!" Gretzkov said thinly, looking at the ceiling. "But I think, Captain Otraveskov, it would be somewhat difficult to work on the principle that an officer is doing his duty when he acts according to his own individual conception of what his duty ought to be. One becomes a little confused, does one not?"

It was Sopojnikin, unexpectedly, who rescued me. "I can't help wondering," he said to Gretzkov, "what practical reason there is for keeping under detention—indefinitely, as it seems—an officer who is known to be of the highest character and who is recorded as having performed his duties with fidelity and success all the time he was on active service."

"You think, then," Gretzkov answered, "that an officer known to have been flagrantly and persistently insubordinate can be given a free pardon, and that such a practice will make no difference at all to the discipline of the army?"

"I cannot really see," Sopojnikin said drily, "that the discipline of the army, as it is today, is going to be very much affected one way or the other."

"But surely," Strubensohn put in, "if Count Scheffler's release has any effect at all on the troops it will be favourable. If it is widely published that a well-known officer, imprisoned under the old régime for his sympathy with the hardships of the ranks, has been released at the express order of the present military authority, then surely the impression will be created that the present administration is far more concerned with the soldiers' welfare than the one which preceded it. If the subject is skilfully treated in newspapers circulating among the troops——"

"I should say," Gretzkov interposed, "that the impression you describe is far too widespread already. I myself do not share the view that wars are won through the goodwill of troops."

"And you, sir?" I asked Sopojnikin.

"I don't know," he said meditatively. "Battles are won by two things, love and fear."

"And hitherto there has been insufficient love," I said.

Gretzkov put away the handkerchief which he had been using as table-napkin and got up. "I have promised," he said, "to be with the Secretary of Staff at three o'clock. M. Strubensohn, I have to thank you for a most enjoyable luncheon; and you, gentlemen, for the pleasure of your company."

§

"For M. Gretzkov I have a profound admiration," Strubensohn said when the other two had both gone. "He combines in himself

some of the best elements in your profession and in mine. Unfortunately—for our present purpose—his attitude towards the administration of justice is essentially European—or, if you prefer it, Kantian. He believes that a case should be judged according to the facts, whereas the question we Russians always ask is: 'How can the case be judged to the best advantage?' However, we have succeeded—or rather, you have succeeded—in bringing General Sopojnikin some way towards our point of view; and Gretzkov, lacking in himself the philosophical mind, has the greatest respect for the philosopher in Sopojnikin, with whom he has been intimate for many years. Moreover, we have at least sown in Gretzkov the seeds of doubt. As far as I can ascertain, the necessary witnesses from Mariki-Matesk have not yet been summoned, so we still have ample time. Our next business is to press on Gretzkov, through a quite independent party, the idea that the delay in bringing up the case has already damaged Scheffler's interests most unjustly. A man as conscientious as Gretzkov will suffer a great deal of mental pain if he can be—so to speak—inoculated with an idea of that sort. And I think he may then try to influence his colleague Neimitch, who is rather more important and a good deal more unscrupulous. . . ."

We said good-bye in the street: Strubensohn was walking to his chambers—he dared not take out his car nowadays, he told me.

"The Revolution," he said in a burst of confidence, "I find it a great nuisance. The case would have been such plain sailing in the olden days. Now, with the Pridvorni all dispersed, one simply does not know who to bribe. . . ."

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With all his penetration, Strubensohn had not discovered the place of Anton's imprisonment; and I doubt if I should by any means have found it without the aid of Yevski, my old army servant, who, in a sense, came back into my service at that time.

§

No one but myself seemed to grow tired of the processions which appeared almost hourly in those days; whatever the weather there was always a crowd to watch them. On all the kiosks there were frantic admonitions to the Russian labourer, exhorting him to take his share in building up the new Russia, the Russia of freedom, by working as never before. "The people cry for bread: you can give

it!" "The people want better homes to live in: yours the glorious task of building them!" And I cannot think of any commodity of which there was not a shortage at that time. Yet the streets were always full of men—comparatively, few women—who had time to listen to any orator until his throat went dry, who would wait at a street corner for an hour or more if any procession were expected and often walk alongside it from one end of the Nevski to the other. That, after all, was what they understood by "freedom."

Crossing over from St. Isaac's to the Admiralty I was caught in such a crowd, and when I heard someone say that the procession approaching was of war-wounded I thought it neither decent nor wise to thrust my way out. That was a bitter morning, the sun which had given us hope of winter breaking was gone already, the polar wind came harder to vindicate possession; but the people round me did not seem to mind, a man with nothing on his shoulders but a linen blouse climbed up a lamp-post to see better, two barefoot women stood sharing a threadbare shawl. The procession was not a good one, as processions went, it seemed to have no banners and no cohesion. The men who could walk marched rather sleepily and with a certain shyness, as captives must have marched in a Roman triumph; they came ten deep, but the ranks were most irregular, for a man would pause to light a cigarette and never trouble to get in his line again. The legless, or one-legged, came next behind them, carried on anything with wheels, chairs, barrows, even a perambulator. These were more cheerful than the walkers, though they must have been far colder; one that I noticed was smiling and bowing to friends he saw in the crowd, pointing in a humorous way to his knees, where his body ended. He, I remember, was wheeled by a man totally blind, and he seemed to find it enormously amusing when his chair collided at every few paces with those going along beside it. It must have taken nearly ten minutes to pass, this part of the procession; I thought, seeing the chairs right back as far as the Zhampensk, that it would never be over; but behind there was still the line of "totally disabled," nearly as long again. Of these men you saw very little—a shape on a stretcher, that was really all; and I should hardly have guessed that the shape was human had I not seen so many stretchers with that kind of burden. Among these stretchers there were walking cases which seemed to have been arranged with a certain artisty, as a stamp-collector places his specimens: a blinded man, supported on one side, came hopping on one leg; behind him, a man with no arms; next, one who turned his head from side to side as he walked and at every turn stretched his mouth wide open into a hideous smile; then a man with his head

thrown right back, a position he could not alter, and after that one whose face, black and unbandaged, showed no feature that you could label eye or nose or mouth. Last of all a cart came by, a low wagon without sides such as they use for builders' battens, and on this the cases had been posed with ingenious skill to show their mutilation: a trunk without either arms or legs but with a face alive and stretched with pain; a man with a single leg, no other limbs; a legless man with half his face burnt away, who (deliberately as it appeared) slowly opened and closed his single eye to show he was living. The crowd received this spectacle in silence. Some knelt and crossed themselves, as once they had done when the Ikons were carried. A man behind me said in a low voice, "Surely that is enough!" another answered, "No, there will have to be more like those!" and a third echoed him in a voice trembling with bitterness, "Yes, there'll be more of this kind, we shall see to that!"

One feature of the show was of interest to me: a knot of prisoners, Germans with some Hungarians among them, every one mutilated, who walked or limped by themselves with a quiet dignity, followed by a Russian soldier who carried a little placard with the words "They also." The crowd took up those words in a murmur, "They also!"

The procession had no proper tail; it ended in a confusion of men with some disablement, an arm in a sling or a bandaged foot, who had probably joined in as it went along, and a crowd of civilians mingled with them. These people marched with no great enthusiasm, but rather as if faintly hoping that a meal of sorts would be provided, like the straggling mourners at a country funeral. I saw a very small woman pushing in a chair a legless man with a child on his lap; the child was crying, but the man, who was reading *Dielo Navoda,* paid it no attention; the woman trudged resolutely, her eyes looking down, her face completely without expression. From this confused rearguard a little, elderly man with a patch over one eye detached himself and came towards me. I recognized him almost at once. I said "Hullo, Yevski, where have you come from?" or something like that, but he did not answer my greeting. Hardly glancing at my face, he took me firmly by the arm and began to drag me through the crowd to where there was more space.

"It was foolish, standing about there!" he said, as he led me towards the Moika. "Didn't you see how angry the crowd was? They'll be shooting someone before long, there's always shooting with a procession like that. You were always a fool, Vashe Blagorodie," he continued, "you could never take care of yourself. Look at that leg of yours!"

"And what about your eye?" I asked.

"Phauch! What's wrong with that, that makes no difference. Two eyes, they simply muddle you, you get on much better with one. I had an argument with a sailing-officer—that was at Kronstadt, you see, I was there one evening—he had a ring that I wanted, five diamonds, tremendous! And just when I thought he was throttled—he was puffing and screaming like when you kill an old sow—he jabbed at me with that little knife they carry, right dead in the eyeball. I didn't mind so much, being drunk you see, but it hurt, that did. It didn't take me long after that to finish off the swine. Well, one eye gone, what of that? And I've got the ring to show for it—or had, till I sold it to a Jew for ten roubles. And you, what have you got to show for that bastard leg?"

I did not press him for more details of this anecdote, which I supposed to be four-parts invented. Instead, as he looked hungry, I asked if he'd like a meal. Yes, he said, he could do with something. "Now see here, Vashe Blagorodie, I'll take you to a place I know, you wouldn't know about it. It's not a gentleman's place, you understand, but what does that matter?—we're all equal now. You shall be my guest, see, only you must do the paying, I haven't as much as a twisted kopek."

The place he spoke of was the basement of an old house which overlooked the Yekaterinski Canal and which seemed on the point of collapse. This basement, consisting of a single low room, appeared to serve now as a private residence; a huge bed of the sort you find in landowners' houses stood in one corner, a woman sat near the window sewing, there were ragged children on the floor or lounging by the stove; but two trestle-tables showed its function as a stolovya, and at these a score of men—hawkers, watermen, scavengers from all the Russias—were sitting on the long home-made forms with glasses of kvass in front of them, some arguing or playing cards, some sprawling over the tables fast asleep; while on a horsehair couch which stood against the serving-table a soldier, tunicless, and an older child lay clasped in each other's arms. I did not care for the place, with its hot smell of onions and sewage, but I was relieved to find it apparently free of firearms. With the air of an old and privileged customer, Yevski went straight up to the old man stooping over the cooking-stove and pulled his ears.

"Here, Abram, son-of-a-bitch, you've got to put up something, something you can eat, understand, and plenty, for me and my friend here. My friend here, he's been an officer, a big man in the army, he knows what's what, see! Let me present you, Comrade Otraveskov, late captain of the Russian army—Comrade Abram,

no father that anyone knows of; and those are all his brats; and see here, Comrade, if you give the Captain lousy meat he'll twist your ruddy neck."

Except for a brief glance over his shoulder, Abram paid no attention to these courtesies. He said bronchially: "You know as well as I do, Semyon Ilyitch, I've no meat in the house, no more than anyone else. That shlichi's got fresh cod in it, if your bourzhui friend doesn't like that he can try the Saspaskaya."

"Well, what are you doing now?" I asked, as we sat down at the end of one of the tables.

"Doing?" He shrugged his shoulders. "I go about, I see what's going on. At present there's not much to do, you see. Later on there'll be plenty. I'm a communist, you see, I belong to the Third Division of Revolutionary Fighters. Look!"

With immense pride he showed me a crumpled piece of pasteboard which he carried underneath his blouse. It was a party ticket of the usual kind, with a pale photograph which made him look even more devilish than the reality.

"I report every morning," he explained, "and the man says—or it's a woman sometimes—she says, 'Oh you get to hell, Comrade, there's nothing you can do.' Well, that's all right, I can find things to do. But later on, when they've got this government out of the way, there'll be plenty to do—they know that, that's why they keep me on the pay-sheet, forty kopeks a day I get just for going there in the morning and saying 'How d'you do, God rest you!' and getting told to go to hell. Oh yes, they'll have work for me later on."

"What kind of work?"

"Killing people," he said laconically.

"Who are you going to kill?"

"Why, the bourzhui, everyone."

"Do you want to do that? Do you want to kill people?"

"Why yes, of course! That's my trade, isn't it—I've been a soldier longer than you."

"But killing people who've done you no harm——?"

"Well, what harm had the Germans done me?" He became suddenly angry. "No harm? My father, do you see, they had him in prison for horse-thieving. A moth-eaten gelding that couldn't stand up without splints on him! And that was how he passed out, yes, in prison, he had—what do you call it?—pneumonia, yes, and then they flogged him. 'It's all right,' the doctor said, 'he's good enough for flogging now.' Six strokes, that was all they got on to him before he was dead. And then they took away the farm—fifty roubles, my father owed, it couldn't have been more—and my mother dropped

down in the street in Lochvitza. A child in her, too, not that anyone wanted that. And my brother—Dmitri, that was, the second one—the police shot him in the high road, coming back from the cattle-fair. He hadn't done anything—there was the corn-firing at Priluki, but he wasn't in that or he'd have told me. That's one, two, three—three of my people. So I've got to kill three, and a few more to make up for the time I've been waiting."

Abram brought the stew, as filthy a concoction as ever came under my nose.

"That's thirty-eight kopeks for the two plates," Yevski said promptly. "Don't pay him a kopek more. Cod be damned!—cods' heads, you find them in the canal out there. . . . Yes, three I shall kill to begin with, and then I shall see how I feel about the others."

"And what good will it do you, killing people?" I asked.

"Good? Do you think I won't enjoy it? Do you think I didn't enjoy throttling that sea-captain? I followed him down a little street and jumped on him from behind—a big man, he was, and down he came with a wallop, blood running out from the back of his head. I had my hands round his neck before he knew where he was—they're strong, these hands of mine, look!—and when he knew I was going to kill him, you should have seen his eyes—like a rabbit's. I did it slowly, I made it last as long as I could, me going to kill him and he knowing I was going to."

A soldier who had been sleeping beside us suddenly looked up and said, "Hold your bloody tongue, can't you! How can I sleep with you talking and talking?"

Yevski reached down and took a short knife out of his boot. "I'll put you to sleep, Comrade," he said aggressively, "if that's what you want! . . . I was telling you, Vashe Blagorodie, about the sea-captain, the one I got this knife from——"

"I'm tired of that story," I said.

He shrugged his shoulders. "As you please! Some like that kind of thing, others don't. *Abram, you lousy bastard, vodka! Oh yes you have!* Now listen, Vashe Blagorodie. You'll want a servant, now you're back at home—you live here, I suppose? all the bloody bourzhui live here—a servant for minding your house, wash your clothes, buy things for you—best market prices—clean your boots, see the dvornik doesn't steal your parcels——"

I said: "I haven't a home of my own at present, so I don't——"

Ignoring the interruption, he went on: "I can do anything—well, you know that—you know that everything'll be all right if Yevski's looking after it. I'm not busy yet, you see, I only have to report in the mornings. It's how I want things, barin, just to be looking

after you. I haven't a woman—children—nothing of that sort, I never kept a woman, I'd rather be looking after a man, when I can get a good one, a thoroughbred, you understand. And I'm a good Christian, honest, prayers, Mass every week, well in with St. Vladimir—that's my patron, I've got him tied on to me, here, just over my navel——"

"Listen, Yevski!" I said, "I'd be glad to employ you to keep you out of mischief, only——"

"I know where you can get things," he continued, "anything you like. I know a place that's full of flour, sacks and sacks of it, they let me in on the party ticket. And I can get eggs—there's a place near the Baltic Station, I won't tell you exactly—and I can get eggs half, quarter the price you'd ever find them in the Gostini dvor. Milk too, sometimes. And vodka, any amount of it, if you pay enough."

I said, "I'll give you my present address and you can come and see me in a week's time. If there's any job——"

"Listen, Comrade Barin!" he said impressively, "I can find out things for you. I stand about, I go into the cafés, I hear things: who's going to be kicked out of the Party, who'll give you a tax-certificate for the price of a wenching, who's on the list for——"

I was just going to tell him that he was not the only knave in Petrograd who spent his time scavenging for rumours, when a means for deflating him occurred to me.

"Wait a minute!" I said. "Look here, I can set you a job, but you won't be able to make anything of it. I have a friend who's in prison——"

"——like most of mine——"

"——in prison in Petrograd. He's awaiting trial for a military offence. But I don't know where they're keeping him, and I want to find out."

He grinned contemptuously. "At present there aren't more than a dozen prisons kept going in the whole place. You've only got to go round them and ask a man as he comes out——"

"It probably isn't one of the regular places," I told him.

He nodded. "Oh yes, people like yourself, I suppose they keep special prisons for them. We'll change all that. Well, what's his name, this officer you're talking about?"

"I'll write it down."

"I'll write it myself," he said with dignity; I had forgotten that he had that accomplishment.

I spelt out: "Count Scheffler—Lieutenant Anton Antonovitch Scheffler," while he pencilled it on the back of his ticket.

"I know about him," he said carelessly. "Scheffler—yes, I saw the name on a list of political victims. They keep a list, you see, in the barrack I report to—friends of the Revolution still locked up, where they are now and all about them. Scheffler, I remember; I said to myself 'That isn't a Russian name, a Jew most likely.' "

"But it didn't say on the list where he was?"

He screwed up his eye. "No," he said, "no, I'm sure it didn't. There'd be half a dozen like that, that no one knows where they are —dead, most likely. What did he do, start a riot, throw a bomb at one of the Generals? . . . Ah well, they'd keep him close, wouldn't they? A man like me, you understand, he goes into one of the ordinary prisons. 'Yevski?' they say, 'why bother about him? Lock up the bastard where there's room for him, and if someone gets him out, well, what does that matter!' But when it's a man like your friend, a show-piece, they say: 'Here's a bastard who's going to make hell for all of us if he gets the chance, lock him somewhere tight where the damned Bolsheviki won't find him, and if they want him they've got to pay for him.' That's how it is, I know about these things, I hear all about it in the soldiers' soviet."

"Yes," I said, "I expect you're very well informed. The one thing you don't seem to know is just where Count Scheffler is. That's not so easy to find out, is it?"

He frowned—the word hardly expresses the way he folded up his face as a snail folds itself into the shell. "No, not so easy!" he said, looking into his glass; then, "Still, Yevski will do it." For a moment he held that pose of resolution, and then his one narrow eye seemed to stretch out sideways until my face was within its range. "Of course, there will be expenses!" he said.

"Ten roubles," I said.

"The old sort?"

"Yes, coin."

He was about to take it, but changed his mind and became indignant. "Ten roubles, when I may have to risk my life! And after all I've done for you, all the times I've——"

"I'll give you eight now," I said, "and another eight if you get me correct information within one week."

"No, ten now!" he said stubbornly. "And ten when I tell you where it is. No? Nine, then, and twelve afterwards."

"Nine now and eleven afterwards."

He wiped his hand on the front of his blouse and patted my cheek. "Good!" he said. "Mind you, I'd do it for nothing, for an old friend like yourself." He pocketed the coins. "Only I give a lot to Christian objects—forty kopeks to the priest every week, and if

I come across young girls wandering in the streets I find a bed for them, and so on. *Abram!* Come here, you still-born brothel-spawn, wine, French wine, burgundy, go and find some, drinks for all these comrades!"

§

A week, I had given him, but it was less than that when I saw him again. He came round one afternoon to the Orshaskaya, and somehow persuaded Gobodin to bring him upstairs—I imagine the little knife had something to do with it. Yelisaveta and I were both with Vava when he was shown into the room.

"A nice place!" he said, "but you'd much better get rid of that fellow" (he jerked back his head) "and have me instead. This your child, yes? Poor little sheep, poor thing, Yevski could do a lot for him! And your lady—very nice, I like them tall like that, awkward though it makes it. Gracious Barina, I humbly present myself Semyon Ilyitch Yevski, member of the Third Division of Revolutionary Fighters, very old friend of your husband's."

He picked up her hand and kissed it.

"So you're a communist!" Yelisaveta said with interest. "It's all right, Alexei, let him stay, I never get a chance of talking to communists. Sit down, M. Yevski! Tell me, what do you have to do as a communist?"

"Nothing that we talk about to nosey bitches," he said shortly. "But I'm very useful; honest, Christian, clean boots, all cooking—French style, nice manners——"

"Have you got what I paid you for?" I said sharply.

"Paid me?" he said. "Excuse me, barin, you only paid me nine roubles, there's twelve to come."

"When you've told me what I want to know."

"I can't tell you here!" he said.

Gladly, I took him away to my own room, where he became mysterious. "I saw someone very important," he said, "—never mind who. I had to pay him four roubles and a cigar I found under a seat in the Alexander Garden. That wasn't counted in what we said, so that's four roubles more, sixteen roubles, and fifty kopeks for the cigar. Never mind, if you're pinched you can give me ten now and I'll wait for the other six, being old friends."

"You won't get one more kopek till you've given me what I want," I told him.

He looked rather hurt. "It's like this," he said, wandering about the room and fingering my small belongings, "I went to a friend of mine—never mind who—and I said 'Tell me, Comrade, who is it

you ask about an officer they've got in prison.' 'That's military-judicial,' he said, 'you want to get hold of Dolgihov, in Zaporski's cell, he's the only safe man that works in that office.' Well I didn't go to Dolgihov, I went to another man in the same cell, I said, 'Listen, Comrade, this Dolgihov—what sort of a man do you take him to be?' 'Dolgihov?' he said, 'a nice man, very affectionate.' 'Women?' I said. 'Just so!' he said, 'and it comes hard to an affectionate man when his woman tries to keep his soul locked up in the cash drawer.' So then I said, 'Do you think if I found a young lady in the Ligovskaya he'd feel affectionate about her?' Well, I could see then that he wasn't going to give me anything more buckshee——"

"Look here, Yevski, I don't want to hear all this——"

"No?" he said. "Ah well, I thought you'd like to hear about all I've done. Another time, perhaps! This little box of yours, barin, it's in shocking condition. Does no one ever clean your things in this bazaar? Why, when I had charge of you I used to rub this box till I could feel the ache going from my arm right down to my thighs——"

"Have you, or have you not, found out anything about Count Scheffler's whereabouts?" I demanded.

"I was telling you," he said patiently. "This gentleman Neimitch, that Dolgihov took me to see after I said I'd thought of going to see his wife, he was as close as a carpenter. Roubles were no good to him, I could see that to start off with. All he wanted was to get things out of me—who was kommissar of my Division, where we kept our armoury, all that sort of thing. Well of course I just scratched the back of my neck. 'I can't remember,' I kept saying, and then I said, 'Well, that's what we call a private matter, but if you took me to the gentleman who looks after the war-propaganda office I might tell him.' (That's one of our little jokes, you see—no one ever finds out who looks after the war-propaganda office.) So after a bit he said, 'Well, I might try and arrange that, if you just tell me where it is your Division goes for its meetings.' I laughed then. 'So that's all you want to know!' I said. 'Why, everyone knows that!—you ask the gaoler who looks after the officers, he can see it from his window.' 'Gaoler?' he said, 'Officers?'—making out that I was as drunk as a priest. So I looked at him in a baby way—like this, see—as if I was waiting to have my cord cut. 'Oh, I thought it was officers you kept there,' I said, 'officers that had helped the Revolution—I suppose I heard wrong. God be with you, barin, and thank you for this cigarette, I've smoked much worse.' Of course he didn't let me get any further than the door. 'Here,' he said, 'damn

your fornicating impudence! What gaoler are you talking about?' 'I forget his name,' I said, 'Corporal ——.' 'You mean Sergeant Kralitzkov?' he said. 'No,' I said, 'you're trying to make fun of poor Yevski, it isn't Kralitzkov who looks after Lieutenant Scheffler.' 'Oh,' he said, 'you're very sharp, aren't you!' . . ."

My patience was giving out. "This Kralitzkov," I interrupted, "have you found out where he lives?"

"Ah, I can't tell you what I had to do!" he said reflectively. "Three different Kralitzkovs I got on the track of, one turned out to be a lighterman who lived on the Vasilevski Ostrov, an ugly-mouthed bastard——"

"But the sergeant, did you find him?"

"I seem to have an idea," he said cautiously, "that this Sergeant Kralitzkov has his supper every night in one of those places along the Zagorooni Prospekt. About ten o'clock, that would be. You'd know him by his beard, a red beard with some grey in the middle of it."

"At any time of the day or night," I told him, "you'd meet forty men in the Zagorooni Prospekt with red beards gone grey in the middle."

"But they wouldn't all have one ear missing," he said casually.

"And after supper," I asked, "does he go back to the prison?"

"It wouldn't surprise me," he said, opening my travelling-clock and scrutinizing its works. "—But how could I tell? You don't think that Neimitch didn't put the sergeant on the lookout—'a handsome, one-eyed gentleman, you want to keep clear of him!' Do you think I can go up to this Kralitzkov and say: 'See here, Comrade, I'd like to know something about you, where you live, what your wife's like, where you go after supper?' "

"No, but you could follow him."

"People don't like being followed by one-eyed Comrades," he said shrewdly. "They sometimes carry those little Colt things to prevent it."

"Where did you say he goes for his supper?" I asked.

He shut his eye again.

"I'm not sure that I remember. . . Twelve roubles, you were going to give me, but the rouble's gone down again, you can't buy much for twelve roubles nowadays. And I've had a lot of expenses—tram tickets, presents to people, a new pair of boots for going to see M. Neimitch. . . ."

"Fifteen roubles," I said, "when you tell me where Kralitzkov goes for his supper."

"Seventeen," he said automatically.
"Sixteen."
He nodded.
"Goldammer's counter. Number twenty-eight in the Zagorooni."

28

Goldammer's was not a place to sup at alone; men went there in groups—journalists of both wings, artists, railway officials; if a fiddler came in he was thrown out at once, the patrons not caring for this obstacle to conversation. I liked the shop at first; it's underlying smell of old cask-wood brought back my student days, and here, amid the traducement of the Cadets and the apprehensive babble of expropriation, you could still watch a young man growing hot and noisy in defence of Berkeley or the heresies of Jansen. But it is melancholy always to be a listener, and when I had been there three times without seeing anyone who corresponded with Yevski's description of Kralitzkov I was almost certain that his story was pure invention. I tried once more, however; and that night, a little after half-past ten—just as I was about to leave—Kralitzkov came in.

He was alone, and there was no doubt about his identity; his beard was just as Yevski had described it, and his left ear was clean gone, as if severed by the upward stroke of a sabre; for the rest he was a short, elderly man with the bearing of a Lancer. To my great confusion he came straight to my table, where he ordered small-beer, turnip-hash and Vilna cheese.

My first thought was to get away at once, but he had hardly sat down when he spoke to me, and it was hopeless then to suppose that he would not have my picture in his mind for at least a few hours. My only course was to stay and talk as naturally as I could. I ordered coffee.

He was an agreeable creature, like so many of his kind; plainly religious, kindly, a family man I guessed. But he talked rather hesitantly (one was cautious with strangers at that time) and when I tried to lead him to say something of his present occupation he became uneasy and evasive. "I would rather be over there," he said, perking his thumb towards Poland, "but what can you do with a hole in your bowels—the size of that spoon, it is."

"Still, there's useful work for a good soldier in Petrograd at the present time," I said.

"Yes? Well, work of a sort, I suppose there is." He suddenly

took courage and leant across the table. "I tell you," he said, "a man like myself, a man who's raised himself to a good position—brought up three children, all got their letters—a man like me'd do anything to squash these dirty anarchists."

"Oh, you're working for the Cadets?"

"I obey my orders," he said, with a touch of truculence. "Czar or no Czar!"

I nodded. "Yes, if only the rest would do the same! I don't mean only men of your own rank. There are officers I could mention——"

"Indeed?" he said. "Well, I suppose so."

I dared not go any further on that route; but I said, trying a slightly different one:

"I hope they don't keep you indoors all day. To a man who's used to open-air life that's always bad."

"I suppose so," he said again.

We talked then, very comfortably, of our war experiences. He was a little jealous because I had been present at the taking of Czernovitz, "Ah, that's a memory you'll always keep—in those days we had an army"; he became bitter about the "betrayal of the soldiers." "And what is happening now, after all those marches, those months we spent in waterlogged trenches? What has become of the Cossacks, the Siberians, my own men of the Izmailovski, who stood patient for thirty-six hours while hell came down on top of them, and then went forward? What is left of it all? They tell me a pocketful of men are still fighting like soldiers somewhere down near Persia: and what is anybody doing to help them?" He was politely inquisitive about my own present position. "Of course, yes, I understand, you couldn't go on with a leg like that, any more than me with my bowels. But—you won't misunderstand me, Vashe Blagorodie, I say it with no disrespect—if only the officers had put their foot down on all this nonsense, these soldiers' soviets and such tomfoolery, we should have had the Germans on the run by now. . . . Ah yes, yes, I quite see, the position was very difficult, I don't mean any disrespect. Of course, nothing can be done till the death penalty is restored. . . . And now, I suppose, you are engaged on stag-work, perhaps?"

"That kind of thing," I said. And then, "I have some maps of the Bukovina campaign which might be of interest to you. Would you care to see them some time?"

He was much pleased and flattered.

"I'll send them to you," I said, "if you'll tell me where you live."

He would not put me to so much trouble.

"No, no, Vashe Blagorodie, if you would perhaps leave them with your door-servant I would call for them."

I said: "I have a messenger who delivers things for me all round the central part of the city. If there's anywhere that you work——"

"No no," he repeated, "I will call for them. I shall be very much obliged."

It was about half-past eleven when he drank off the last of his kvass, thanked me for allowing him to talk to me, and asked my permission to leave.

"If you're going in my direction I can give you a lift," I said.

No, he was infinitely obliged, but he preferred to walk; and I thought that there was a shadow of suspicion in the glance he gave me.

"It's not far then?" I asked.

Well—no. He had a call to make—not far away.

§

The moment he was outside I went to the serving counter, put down two-fifty, and followed him. I was just in time to see him buy the night edition of *Pravda* from a boy who stood on the other side of the street.

Keeping well back in the entrance of Goldammer's I watched him walk off slowly in the direction of the Zabalkanski. When he reached the first lamp-post he stopped and opened his paper. I crossed the road quickly, bought a *Pravda* myself, and spread it as a shield.

"You see that man along there?" I said to the boy. "Under the lamp there—yes the one who bought a paper from you a moment ago. Look here—five roubles for you if you'll follow him and come back and tell me where he goes to."

The child was not in the least surprised.

"Ten!" he said sharply, as if he did that kind of job every day.

"All right!"

With perfect composure he strolled off, stopping to sell his papers as he went along. Watching round the edge of my own copy I could just see that Kralitzkov had moved on and that the boy was a few paces behind him.

It was too cold to stand outside, I went back into Goldammer's and sat close to the window, where I tried to read my paper, keeping one eye on the street. The paper had nothing but political gossip and conjectures: Rodzianko had been hard-pressed in the Duma, the Divisions in the Northern Sector were said to have voted them-

selves an increase in pay, a man called Vladimir Ulianoff (the name was vaguely familiar) had arrived from Russia after travelling across Germany in a sealed train: and I waited for half an hour in an ague of anxious impatience. At last the boy reappeared and I went out to him. He had followed Kralitzkov, he said, as far as the Warsaw Station, where the sergeant had stopped to listen to a meeting; the meeting was apparently going on all night, Kralitzkov seemed to be much interested, he was probably there still.

"But why didn't you stay and keep your eye on him?" I demanded.

"Well, you only told me to see where he went to. In God's name, did you expect me to hang about there till the Day of Judgement? Ten roubles, you said you'd pay me——"

He looked as if he were quite ready to spring at my throat; and in any case I couldn't stop to argue. I paid him his ill-earned roubles and went off as fast as I could hobble. In the Zabalkanski I hailed a cab and drove to the canal corner.

The meeting—or a meeting—was still going on; a fat woman with a hideously strident voice was completely commanding the attention of some sixty workmen and soldiers. But at first I could not catch sight of Kralitzkov and I felt almost certain he had gone. Holding a handkerchief to cover as much of my face as possible I moved cautiously about the outskirts of the crowd, peering obliquely at the faces; but I lacked any skill in such police-work, and when someone grunted because I had trodden on his foot I turned round sharply, to see Kralitzkov's face within a few inches of my own.

I must have looked more than surprised, and when I smiled I knew that my smile was a stupid one. But when I said, without any forethought, "I didn't expect to see you here, at a meeting like this," he looked just as confused as I. "I was just going on," he murmured awkwardly, and began to edge his way out of the crowd.

When he was clear, and found that I was following him, he said, "I just wanted to see what the fat bitch was talking about. You may as well know what they're up to, those blackguards. . . . Communal land, indeed! Then how would you know who owned it?" He said the last words over the end of his shoulder and started to walk away. But as boldness was now my only recourse I caught up and walked beside him.

It remains in my memory, that walk, as a little nightmare. He went very slowly and I matched my pace to his. I chattered without a pause—of the aims of the expropriationists, of public meetings, how they might be regulated or stamped out, of the food shortage,

of the paralyzation of transport, anything that came into my mind—as we walked along the canal and through the Glavoskaya; never giving him a chance to make an excuse for leaving me. And all the time, taking no notice of what I said, he kept glancing at my face with troubled, suspicious eyes. As we approached the Nikolas Station he stopped, and at the first break in my loquacity he said shortly: "Well, sir, I will say good night now!" But I would not be turned off so easily. "I'll come a little further with you," I said. "I sleep very badly, and sometimes I get off to sleep better if I have a good walk before going to bed." We went on a little way, passing over into the Grechenski Prospekt, and then he said with a kind of clipped politeness: "But I'm taking you out of your direction—you will be wanting to go the other way."

"No, no, this is all right for me."

"But I," he said, "have to go right the other way, I've only come along here to exercise my legs."

This nonplussed me for a moment. Then I said: "It makes no difference, I can always get a cab to take me home."

"And for me," he answered brusquely, "I shall be getting on the tramway in the Nevski."

"Won't you let me take you where you want to go in a cab?"

He turned to face me squarely, one hand in his coat pocket, and I guessed that he would have an automatic there. There was plenty of people about, but in these days a private matter could be transacted without much interference.

"Why are you following me about?" he demanded.

I said quickly: "Yes, Kralitzkov, I have a little gun too. Careful, please!"

"How do you know my name?" he snapped.

My brain had been working to prepare for this question. I said, with a little smile.

"Colonel Neimitch described you to me."

"Colonel Neimitch? What do you know about him?"

"It happens that I meet him every day. . . . A report has reached Colonel Neimitch that you are not attending properly to your hours of duty. Your deputy is being left in charge for too many hours in the day. I was hoping to be able to disprove that——"

"That's not true!" he said indignantly. "Voldik is always on duty from nine till midnight, except Sundays. It's in the standing orders. If Colonel Neimitch had looked——"

I glanced at my watch.

"You will hardly be back on duty by midnight tonight."

"And who was it," he said angrily, "who gave me special instructions I was not to go back to the Palace if anyone was following, not till I'd shaken him off?"

I only just stopped myself saying "Palace? What palace?" "You were not instructed," I said, "to hang about at street-corner meetings."

"I've got every right——" he began, and stopped. He was not a quick thinker, but already he must have wondered if the explanation really fitted my behaviour. With his puzzled, anxious eyes staring at my face I already detested the part I was playing; but I had to go through with it now.

I said coldly: "Colonel Neimitch will hear any explanation you have to make tomorrow morning. He will see you at ten o'clock."

I think he was still doubtful, but the authority in my voice made him stammer: "Colonel Neimitch will see me? Where?"

"At the Palace," I said.

"At the Montresor?"

"Tomorrow at ten o'clock!" I said sternly, and turned away.

But I could afford to be merciful now, and that, indeed, seemed the best policy. I went after him once again, caught up with him and put my hand on his shoulder.

"Listen! I was only having a little joke with you! It was all rubbish about my reporting you to Colonel Neimitch. Colonel Neimitch knows that you're an admirable soldier, he wouldn't think of sending anyone to spy on you."

I don't know if he believed me then or not. When I had walked a few yards down the street I saw the honest fellow still staring after me in hopeless bewilderment.

29

Yelisaveta was still up when I got back to the Orshaskaya; Vava had been restless, with a slight temperature, she had been sitting beside him and had only just got him off to sleep. This vigil had brought on one of her headaches, and she looked dead tired. But when I said that I should take over her watch she answered rather sharply that there was no need: she would bring down some blankets and sleep on the floor beside him, she would not be happy unless she were with him herself.

"You must go to bed, Alexei, I don't want to talk now. Yes yes, tomorrow he will be all right, it's nothing serious. No, I don't feel like talking now, you must wait till tomorrow."

She went back into Vava's room, and was just closing the door, when I said:

"I only thought you'd like to know where Anton is."

She came out and stared at me incredulously.

"What do you mean? Are you joking? Where is he? How did you find out?"

Maliciously enjoying her impatience, I made her come to my own room and sit down. There, with deliberation, I told her of Yevski's manœuvres, of my encounter with Kralitzkov, and at last that Anton was confined in the Montresor.

"The Montresor Palace?" she said. "You mean that ugly house the Rzhevskis lived in before the war?"

"Apparently."

She got up and threw away a cigarette which she hadn't even lighted.

"I must go there straight away!" she said. "Go round to the coach-house, will you, and wake up Emelian, and tell him I want the car at once. I shall want you to come with me—not to go in, I mean——"

"But how do you think you're going to get in?" I asked. "Don't you realize the place is guarded?"

"I shall get in somehow——"

"Wouldn't it be better to wait till tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow?" she said impatiently. "Really, Alexei, I sometimes think you are oddly lacking in wits. Don't you realize that this man Kralitzkov will put in his report first thing tomorrow—he may even report on the telephone tonight—and do you think they'll leave Anton there for another half-hour when they know that someone's found out where he is? I should have thought that even you——"

I said: "Is it so likely that Kralitzkov will report? When a man things he's committed an indiscretion—a man of that sort, an old soldier, conscentious, proud of his record—would his first thought be to give himself away? Wouldn't he try to patch things up, be extra watchful——?"

"—What am I to do then?" she said feverishly. She had one hand on the door-handle, the other against her forehead, she was gazing vacantly about the room as one suddenly bereaved. "Why did you take all that trouble to find out where he was if you didn't mean to do anything?"

"We know," I said, "that Kralitzkov himself is normally off duty from nine till twelve every night. I can send Yevski to watch and make sure that he goes out at nine tomorrow. The man in charge then is called Voldik, and our business will be to bluff him. That's the only possibility I can think of. Of course we shan't do any good

by getting in, and the risk will be considerable. It may do harm to Anton himself. Still——"

"Risk?" she said. "Risk?" She had sat down again, she threw back her head and put her hands over her eyes. She said slowly, as if speaking into emptiness, "I haven't thought it out, I haven't had time to think. . . . I don't want to go unless he wants to see me, he may not want me, I should like to find out first. No. No, I see that isn't possible. But you see. . . ." She uncovered her eyes and stretched her hand towards me. "Listen, Alexei, come here, listen!" Her voice had become very uncertain. "There's one thing I can't do, I can't go there, taking all that trouble, the risk you talk of, I can't do that and then find that he doesn't want me. . . . Of course he'd pretend, he'd be very kind, he'd try to make me think he was glad to see me. But I'd see through all that—Anton, he's so simple, he can't act at all, I always see through him. And I might start dropping tears, as if I was asking him to pity me. I can't do that, I wasn't made for that kind of thing."

Accustomed as I was to her waywardness, I was exasperated by this new turn. For days, angry and plaintive in turn, she had badgered Strubensohn and grumbled to me because no one could find out where Anton was imprisoned. And now she had said no word of gratitude.

"Surely the only question," I said shortly, "is whether you want to see him. If you do want to, then it's worth trying."

"No," she answered, "that isn't the question at all. The only question is whether he wants to see me." She started to go away then, but she turned at the door and said soberly: "Oh yes, you are quite right, I have simply to make up my own mind. I must do that now, and I'll tell you in the morning. . . . It's nice, Alexei, to have someone who thinks of everything simply, who always gives me the sensible view. I should like to live just doing everything you tell me, forgetting my own mind, forgetting that love is something difficult and subtle, just thinking in the way you think, finding everything simple."

Without knowing if this was entirely ironical, I said bitterly: "Yes, to me everything is perfectly simple: Natalia's illness, for example."

"Or perhaps," she said quickly, "it is just in the affairs of other people that one finds simplicity. . . . No, Alexei, no, I didn't mean to hurt you! Why should I hurt you after so much kindness? It's only my jealousy, I'm jealous because Anton loves you. How did you make him love you, Alexei, how do people make others love them? How did you make Natalia love you?"

"If I knew that——" I began, but she cut across me. She said, with her eyes half-closed,

"I can't think what he looks like. It's so long, now, I can't remember the sound of his voice. . . . I've thought about this so long, our reunion, I had meant to make it so different from our parting. I thought we should be like new people, a little strange to each other, we should each discover something we had never seen before. And now I'm frightened that we shall find each other just the same, we shall just drop into our positions like actors in a play, he will look at me a little slanting, as if there's something about me he must always try not to see. And what can I do, only seeing him once, seeing him in some sort of a prison? I suppose if I do get in it may be the last time I'll ever see him. How can I make something out of a few minutes like that, something that will last for me?" She came close to me and caught hold of my hand in her artless way, searching my face with her lovely, animal eyes. "Is there any use in trying?"

She was close to tears now, and entirely humble. Feeling that I had to give some answer, I said confusedly: "I've always imagined that love is answered by its own reflection. I mean, it's like a warm body which gets back its own warmth from a bed, even if the bed was cold to start with. I don't mean that Anton's heart could be cold. I only mean that if love burns with a clear and steady flame there is surely nothing in material things, in the awkwardness of smaller feelings, that can cloak the heat of it. . . ."

I stopped, not because she wasn't listening, but because I heard my voice uttering a glib philosophy which I had proved to have no foundation.

All she answered, in her tired voice, was: "No, with me it isn't like that. I don't know if I shall try to see him."

§

But by next morning she had made up her mind. She came into my room while I was shaving, she was very pale, like one at the end of a long, fatiguing journey, she said quietly and rapidly: "I've made up my mind, I must see him of course, you must take me there this evening. I have told Emelian to be ready at a quarter to nine."

"But you realize," I said, "that the chance of getting in is extremely small? Kralitzkov will have given special instructions——"

"It must be done somehow," she said peremptorily. "If necessary I shall break in through one of the windows."

I told her as patiently as I could that the windows of buildings used as prisons were usually barred, that we should have to be a bit cleverer than that; the most useful thing she could do was to get a copy of Colonel Neimitch's signature—one or other of her friends would surely be able to give her that—preferably on official stationery, which I could have copied. If possible, I should like to have that by twelve o'clock. Then she must get her hair cut shorter than it was already and buy or borrow an officer's cap and great-coat which would fit her, also military boots. Emelian would have to be fitted up with a soldier's coat, the crest on the doors of the car must be painted over. . . . She was rather sulky at receiving these orders; she could not possibly disguise herself, she said, it would make her look ridiculous, Anton would hate to see her in a man's clothes, it was the kind of thing he couldn't bear. "Very well," I said, "you must think out some method for yourself."

When I saw her again—it was a little after twelve—she was much more docile. She had got Neimitch's signature from Astanovitch, who had it on a departmental memorandum; she had also borrowed a uniform from one of his friends, she had tried it on already and thought she looked rather charming in it. I said: "The less charming the better. We aren't engaged in theatricals, there's nothing amusing about this affair. You'll have to have more hair taken off at the back, and round your ears, and you'll have to do something to roughen the skin on your face. . . . If you can't be sensible about this business I shall give it up altogether. I'm not prepared for a frolic. . . ."

I spent a busy afternoon. Vava was rather fretful, and as Bajouska was helping her mistress I had to amuse him as best I could. The markings on my uniform had to be altered, the copying of Neimitch's signature was a delicate job, I had to get hold of Yevski and give him his instructions. Meanwhile, Yelisaveta was busy in her own room. My severity had taken effect, and when she came in to show me her disguise I saw that she had done it well. She had skilfully padded her shoulders to take a coat which was broadly cut and full enough to disguise her breast and hips; her face was rubbed with the light-brown substance (known, I think, as *poudre à muraille*) which actors use for open-air performances; I did not think that she looked more feminine than many young lieutenants of the Garde-Chevalier in pre-war days. Vava was much delighted by the spectacle. She wanted to go down and show herself to Tatiana Vascovna, but I resolutely forbade her.

Yevski came to report about twenty minutes after nine. He had hidden in a dung-cart standing on the other side of the boulevard

and had seen Kralitzkov go out at nine o'clock as usual. He was also able to tell me (from information supplied by a prostitute friend) that the guards at the Montresor numbered five, Corporal Voldik being senior under Kralitzkov. There were always two sentries mounted at the front of the building, one at the back. The girl believed, but was not quite certain, that Lieutenant Scheffler was kept on the second floor; there were several other prisoners on the first floor.

§

We went down by the servants' staircase and out through the stable yard to the Priest's Alley, where Emelian had the car. In this little street there was only one lamp, some forty yards from where the car stood, and I doubt if anyone looking out from the rear windows of the house would have noticed us. I told Emelian to go by the roundabout way along the Fontanka, to use only his side-lamps, and to drive very fast. It was raining: the montonous, icy rain of Petrograd. I would not let Yelisaveta have the roof-lamp on, but in the light from the street-lamps that we passed I caught glimpses of her face, and I could see that she was frightened. I began giving her instructions: she was to keep close to me, she was to move as smartly as she could, to avoid addressing the guards and only to say "Yes, sir" to me in their presence, using her lowest voice. All this she accepted in silence. Once she caught hold of my hand and said, "I want this to be all over, I'm afraid of him." Afraid of whom?" "Anton." Emelian, never lacking in skill, excelled himself. We got to the Lomonosov Fountain in something like twelve minutes.

The Montresor Palace stands (or stood—it was largely destroyed in the November rioting) at the eastern end of the Derzhavinski Boulevard, its rear windows looking across the Derzhavinski Park towards the Little Neva. I had dined there when the Rzhevski family had it, and had felt then that it was more like a government building than a private residence, with the long severity of its passages, the tasteless baroque of its cornice mouldings. The Rzhevskis had given it up some time before the war, I had understood that it was now used as repository for the records of some government department; and passing it once or twice on my way to the hospital, I had noticed that most of the windows were shuttered, the walls in advanced dilapidation. Tonight I could see no light in any of the windows; the rays of the street-lamps hardly reached it, and through the screen of rain I could only just distinguish its shape against the faint glow which the lights of the outer city threw into the

sky. The Fortress itself never looked more gaunt or a corpse more lifeless. In spite of the rain the street was full of people, men with a sack or a piece of carpet over their heads who walked slowly along the broad footpath with that expectancy which was the colour of these days' consciousness, who would always stop to buy a soaking newspaper. These turned their heads to stare at the car, as people did when motors were first seen in Russia; and feeling certain there would be trouble if we stopped in the roadway I told Emelian to drive straight into the carriage sweep.

The carriage gate was padlocked, but an imperious blast of our horn brought a sentry out of the darkness who, after some fumbling, unlocked and opened it. I thought he was going to let us drive on, but as Emelian was letting in his clutch he shouted to him to stop and came to my window. I let the glass down a few inches.

"Your pass?" he said.

I said sharply, "It's all right, I'm Major Runov." He hesitated, in some confusion; he was a mere boy, and had probably never challenged anyone before. I noticed that the sling of his rifle was rather loose, and I said quickly: "Come here! Do you usually carry your rifle at the slope with the sling loose? I should advise you to have that pulled up before Colonel Neimitch sees you, he'll be along here presently. . . . All right, Emelian, go on!"

There was no light in the portico. I told Emelian to sound his horn loudly, and while he did so I went up the steps, Yelisaveta following me closely, and banged the door with my stick. Nothing happened. I found the bell cord and rang strenuously, at the same time kicking the door. Even then we had to wait for nearly a minute before it was unbolted and opened, by a man who was tunicless and smoked a pipe.

"Do you usually come to the door like that?" I asked. And before he could answer I said: "Find Corporal Voldik for me, quickly!"

He went off down the servants' corridor, looking sulky and a little frightened. I told Yelisaveta to stay near the door, where it was dark, while I myself advanced into the middle of the hall, stood right under the electric chandelier, and lit a cigarette. Presently a tubby little man who looked like an army cook appeared, buttoning up his tunic as he came. Before he had time to speak I addressed him.

"Why have I been kept waiting all this time?" I demanded. "Didn't you know I was coming?"

He began: "I'm sorry, sir. I didn't—I don't——"

"Colonel Neimitch told his orderly to telephone," I said. "Didn't he do that?"

He said blankly: "But the telephone isn't in order, sir. It hasn't been used since——"

"Why isn't it in order?" I said. "Does Sergeant Kralitzkov know it isn't in order?"

"Well sir, we never——"

I said: "I'll talk to Colonel Neimitch about it. I can't waste time now. . . . I want to inspect your prisoners' quarters. They're all on the first floor, I believe."

I began moving towards the staircase, but before we reached the stairs he stopped me.

"You'll excuse me, sir," he said awkwardly. "I don't know who you are. I don't——"

"Major Runov," I said. "You must have seen me in Colonel Neimitch's office?"

"I've never been to the office, sir."

I said, "Oh? . . . Well, I've seen a man very like you there." I called to Yelisaveta: "Shervinski, you'd better come along," and continued up the stairs.

Again Voldik stopped me.

"You have a pass, sir?" he asked, nervously, but with a note of determination.

"A pass?" I said. "Do you usually ask officers of Colonel Neimitch's staff for passes?"

"It's the Colonel's own order," he said, sure of his ground now. "The gate sentry should not have admitted you without a pass. Sergeant Kralitzkov gave me special instructions, just before he went out——"

I turned to Yelisaveta, who had come up beside me.

"Did Colonel Neimitch give you any sort of pass?" I asked. "Wait! I believe he gave me something."

I took from my outer pocket the paper on which I had typed: "To Sergeant Kralitzkov, or deputy: The bearer, Major Nikolas Runov, attached Judicial Establishment, will make an inspection of the confinement quarters at the Montresor Palace in the course of Thursday the 6th instant. He will be accompanied by Lieutenant Shervinski. Major Runov is to have free access to all quarters, including the quarters occupied by the guard if he so desires, and his questions as to routine, exercise, facilities, etc., are to be accurately answered. Signed: . . ."

"Is that what you want?" I asked.

He took it to the nearest lamp, which was at the turn of the staircase and began to scrutinize it carefully. I said to Yelisaveta, just loudly enough for him to overhear: "The place ought to be kept

cleaner than this. I can't understand why Neimitch doesn't put an officer in charge, I should have thought the question of dignity demanded it. The fact is, Neimitch is so nervous about his little dovecot here, he won't trust anyone. . . ."

"That's quite in order, sir!" Voldik said, returning. "I'm sorry to have troubled you, sir, only Sergeant Kralitzkov said——"

"He was perfectly right," I said broadmindedly. "You can't be too scrupulous over orders of that kind—though I don't think M. Shervinski and I are the sort of people to run away with your guests!"

I took the paper back from him, and we went on up the stairs.

I was still very nervous. Till now Yelisaveta had behaved well, keeping close to me in the decorous, slightly aloof way that fitted her part; but a single glance at her face had told me that she was not far from hysterics, and I feared that at any moment she might lose control. Fortunately the place was sparsely lighted: there was no more than one electric bulb in each long corridor. I kept level with Voldik and occupied his attention with a stream of questions: were all the officers at the rear of the building? what precautions were taken to prevent approach from the park side? was anything done to prevent the possibility of the prisoners signalling from the windows? The high ceiling threw back the clatter of our boots, the lamp we had passed drove three monstrous shadows before us along the naked, fusty corridor, where a broken bicycle was propped against the moulded dado and a row of slop-pails stood on the polished parquet. "This way, sir!" Voldik said, and we turned to the right again, into total darkness. I thought—I was not quite sure—that I heard Yelisaveta give a nervous titter.

We stopped where a thin strip of light showed from under one of the doors. "Captain Moesturil," Voldik said softly. He slid two bolts, top and bottom, makeshift fixtures which worked stiffly; inserted a key and threw the door open. "Shervinski, you can wait outside," I said.

There were three occupied rooms in this corridor, two in the continuation on the other side. In each I adopted the same procedure. I said a polite but short "good evening" to the occupant, measured the room's area with my eye, opened the window and felt the bars outside, pulled up one side of the carpet—where there was one—and looked at the floorboards underneath. I next asked the occupant a few questions: was he getting enough to eat; was he given opportunities for exercise? when had he last been medically examined? Then I turned to Voldik: had this gentleman made any complaints? was there any particular matter in regard to this gentleman

that Voldik wished to refer to me? All this performance took up a great deal of time, and severely tried my own patience; but I felt that the more leisurely I behaved the more I should put any lingering doubts in Voldik's mind at rest, and it was essential to have his fullest confidence. Once, in our passage from one room to the next, when he was a little way ahead, Yelisaveta whispered, "Why are you wasting time like this? I can't——" I said aloud: "Your private appointments, Shervinski, must look after themselves. I'm expected to give a full report. . . ." We came to the last confinement room on this floor, and I saw with relief that the occupant was not a man I knew; he was a young Muscovite who glanced at me with stolid hostility as I moved about the room and answered my questions in brusque monosyllables over the top of a book he was reading; at each door I had been frightened lest, by one of the coincidences which in life are so commonplace, I should find myself face-to-face with an old friend. Following me out, Voldik locked the door and carefully bolted it; I was glad to see that he was taking particular trouble to impress me with his efficiency. "A difficult gentleman!" he remarked.

I stopped to light a fresh cigarette. "That, I take it, is the lot?" I said.

"No, sir, there's one more upstairs."

I looked at my watch. "I don't think I'll trouble to go up there. The window there would be about thirty feet from the ground, I take it? That should make it a good deal safer than the others, perfectly safe in fact. Who is it there, by the way?"

"Lieutenant Scheffler, sir."

I said, "Scheffler? Wait! I think Colonel Neimitch said something special about him." I took a piece of paper from my pocket—it was actually a letter I had written to amuse Vava—and pretended to read it. "Oh yes . . . Colonel Neimitch wanted me to try and get a little information out of Lieutenant Scheffler. Tell me, what sort of man is he, has he given you any trouble at all? . . ."

From the top of the stairs I could see by the slit of light which room it was, and at that moment I felt the curious agitation of the heart which always ushers an occasion. The next few seconds were to be supremely important and correspondingly difficult; and although I had mentally mapped them with the greatest care I doubted my ability to time the performance perfectly. As we went along the passage, Voldik a pace or two ahead, I turned to Yelisaveta and said: "That despatch-case, did you bring it up? What, you left it in the car! But I told you I should want it, it's got all the case records Colonel Neimitch gave me." Voldik had reached the door and un-

fastened the top bolt. I had to wait another second or two while he slid the lower one. Then, as he was fiddling with his ring of keys, I said, still addressing Yelisaveta, "You'd better go down and get it." She murmured "Yes, sir!" and started to go. Voldik was still fumbling, and she had got to the top of the stairs before he actually had the key in the lock. I called: "Shervinski, wait!" and turned to Voldik. He had already twisted the key. "One minute!" I said, "the Lieutenant will only lose himself in these passages of yours, I think you'd better get it for me. It'll be somewhere on the seat of the car, a long, brown case. The driver will find it for you."

It was so dark here that I could not see his face, but in the instant of silence that followed I was almost certain I had made him suspicious.

I said quickly: "Oh, there may be two cases there. The one I want has got Colonel Neimitch's name on it, it belongs to him. And if you see a letter in Colonel Neimitch's handwriting addressed to me you'd better bring that too, I'd like to refer to it. Oh, and when you come back I shall want to inspect the lavatories, to see if they're in proper order."

He said: "Very good sir. You'll wait here?"

"Yes, I'll wait for you here."

He locked the door again and went off along the passage. I waited till he had started down the stairs and then went after him.

"I may as well see Lieutenant Scheffler while you're getting it," I said. "If you'll give me the key——"

He said doubtfully: "If you wouldn't mind waiting till I come back, sir—I'm not supposed to give anyone the keys."

I smiled. "Yes, yes, I know, that's quite right. But I think with my authority——"

He was still doubtful. "If I were to unlock it for you——"

"Just as you like!" I said.

He came one step up the stairs, and then the irony in my smile worked as I intended. "Oh well, it makes no difference!" he said rather bashfully, and slipped off the key I wanted, and gave it to me with an apologetic smile, and went off downstairs.

I returned to the door of Anton's room, where Yelisaveta still stood, and for a few moments we waited there in silence, listening to Voldik's footsteps. I could just hear the change in sound when he reached the pavement of the hall; and then I unlocked the door.

"You first?" I said.

Drawing back, she answered quickly, firmly: "No, you are to see him first. I shall wait here. You must tell him I'm here, find out if he wants to see me—tell him I'm in these hideous clothes."

"Very well!"

I went in, closing the door behind me.

§

He sat in a corner of the big, bare room, in a canvas chair near the stove. He was wearing the old grey dressing-gown he was so fond of, he had a book on his knees and looked very comfortable. Hearing me close the door he said, without looking up, "You needn't bring any soup tonight, Voldik, I'm not hungry. What I do want is some wool. I know how to knit, I could make a cap for that boy of yours——" Then he caught sight of me. "Alexei, what the devil——?"

I said: "It's all right, it's all right, for God's sake talk quietly! I've got rid of that man Voldik for a minute but he won't be long. I'm supposed to be inspecting this place."

He came and held my hands and stared at me, dazed and smiling. "Alexei, how the devil did you manage—never mind, never mind, it doesn't matter, you always manage somehow. Come here, come and sit down—there, in my chair, it's the only one that doesn't bruise your backside. You're a good chap, Alexei, you're a dear creature, coming like this—you don't know what it's like never seeing anyone but these bumpkins. I haven't a thing to offer you, not so much as a cigarette——"

He was riotously happy, he would have gone on bubbling like that as long as I let him. I had to say firmly: "Wait a minute! Listen, Anton, listen——"

"Wait!" he said in his turn. "Listen, I must get this off my chest, I've been raging these last two days, I simply must tell you. Do you know what this creature Neimitch has had the insolence to propose to me? He wants to make me into a propagandist—a war-propagandist. Can you believe that? He came here three nights ago, very friendly—just like Vestil when he was being blatantly dishonest—he said, 'Look here, Scheffler, I've had an idea which may appeal to you.' Appeal to me! And the idea was——"

"Anton," I said, "stop a minute! There's no time to waste. Yelisaveta's here, she's waiting outside to see you."

He stared at my face as if I had expressed some extraordinary opinion.

"Yelisaveta? Here?"

I said: "She's out there in the corridor. She wanted me to see you first. She's wearing a disguise—it was the only way of getting her in—she thinks . . ."

He wasn't listening. He had moved a little way towards the door, and I thought he was going to run out to her. But he stopped dead and looked about him like a man who misses something—his hat or gloves. He said slowly, as much to himself as to me, "I never thought. . . . I wish I'd had more time. . . . It's so long since. . . ."

I asked gently: "Shall I bring her in?"

"Yes," he said. "Yes. But wait a minute. Yes, ask her to come in. But I'd rather you stayed——"

"I'll come back presently," I said; and added, "There won't be much time, you know."

He was still bewildered. "Time? Oh, I see what you mean—you mean Voldik. No, I suppose there won't. I wish—I hate being hurried: with Yelisaveta. . . ."

I did not want to hurry him, but Voldik would not be long; he would have a good hunt for the non-existent despatch-case, and I hoped that he would organize a general tidying-up of the lavatories before he came back; even so, ten minutes was the most I could hope for. I went outside, and found Yelisaveta a little way down the passage. "All right!" I said.

Instead of going in at once she beckoned me to her and whispered: "What's he like, Alexei? Is he all right—I mean, does he want to see me? You've told him what I look like?" I said, "Yes, yes, go on, you've no time to waste," and putting my hand under her elbow I led her as far as the door. There she stopped again. She was shivering. "You must come in with me," she whispered, "I don't want to go in there alone."

Anton had sat down again, on the edge of a chair, as people sit in doctors' waiting-rooms. As I pushed open the door he got up and smiled, he came towards us smiling, with his eyes a little puckered as if the light were too strong. He said, "My dear! . . ." and she ran forward and embraced him. I was going out, but Anton called to me, "No, Alexei, you mustn't go away," and she, turning round, said excitedly, "No, Alexei, you must stay with us, it's cold out there." He was holding her hands, he said, "You're cold, my dear, you must come by the stove—why you're shivering, come and sit down here.—Alexei, will you see if there's some milk in that cupboard, I've got a saucepan here, I could heat it up." She had taken off her cap and shaken out her curls. "I'm sorry, Anton," she said, "coming like this, looking so hideous. Alexei said it was the only way of getting in." He said: "It doesn't matter—it's very smart, you always manage to look nice in anything." But he wasn't looking at her carefully, he had sat down on the floor beside her and was

rubbing her hand, glancing up at her as if frightened of meeting her eyes. "It's hideous," she repeated, looking at his hair.

I said I must go and listen for Voldik, and went to the head of the stairs, not intending to go back. There was no sound from below. But presently Anton called to me, and I could not pretend not to hear him. He said, when I returned, "Yelisaveta thinks you ought to stay in here in case someone comes." "Yes," she said, "Voldik would smell a rat if he found me in here without you."

They were still sitting exactly as I had left them. But now she said the stove was too hot, and moved to another chair by the table. The milk had boiled; Anton poured it out into a potted-meat jar he found in the cupboard and put it on the table beside her. She said, "Thank you, Anton, that's very nice." He pulled up a chair and sat beside her, with his hand open on the table; and presently, with an awkwardness that was curious to see in her, she put her gloved hand in his palm. Despite his nervousness, I thought he looked happy then. He said: "I can't tell you how nice this is . . . you were sweet to come, both of you. . . . I don't like it, I don't like your having taken so much risk. You mustn't take risks, my dear."

She was sitting quite still, as if waiting for something to happen; I had never seen her sit still so long before. And now, looking at Anton's hand with a hungry curiosity, she said: "We shan't be able to see you again, not while they keep you here. But you don't think they'll keep you much longer? There's no sense, now that everyone's forgetting about the war—what does it matter what you did in Mariki-Matesk, what does it matter to anyone?"

He began slowly: "Well, I suppose it matters in this way——" but she broke in:

"At any rate Strubensohn's doing what he can. At least, I think so. He's very slow—so cautious, so hesitating—but I keep bullying him every day, I tell him he's not earning his money."

"But he is," I interrupted, "Strubensohn's worked as hard as he can."

Anton nodded. He said rather drily: "I've seen Strubensohn's hand in everything that's happened. If it hadn't been for him they'd have finished off this business at Mariki."

Yelisaveta looked at him sharply.

"Finished it off? What do you mean?"

He smiled, and made the motion of firing a rifle from the shoulder.

"But that can't happen now?" she said, as if the idea were quite new to her.

I said quickly: "No, no, that can't happen now!"

We were all silent for a moment or two, and I have a very clear memory of Anton as he looked then, sitting with his hands folded on the table and his head bent forward, his lips parted in the little smile that he wore when his thoughts drove hard and far. I remember thinking he had grown older since I had last seen him, and that the long solitude had changed his mind a little; as men who have been under shell-fire for many hours look at each other strangely, and talk in whispers, fearing to disturb the silence. Yelisaveta saw that too; I saw her watching him with a rather frightened curiosity. And then, moved I think by the loneliness in his detachment, she suddenly got up and stood behind him, and folded her arms round his throat, and pressed her chin into his hair. She said gently, a little tearfully:

"Anton you mustn't, dear one, you mustn't ever be so silly again, you mustn't get into such danger. Alexei, you must help me, you mustn't let him."

He turned his head, but not quite far enough to see her face. He took hold of her wrists and held them in a rather clumsy fashion, surprising me that he who could be so gentle in friendship had yet so little of the way to caress a woman. Murmuring some excuse, I left my chair; and as I went towards the door I heard him say: "My dear . . . my dear. . . . You must understand, it wasn't my fault, surely Alexei has explained it to you. It was an order I couldn't possibly obey, a monstrous order. . . ."

It was lucky that I moved then. I had not heard any sound outside the room, but at the very moment when I came into the corridor Voldik appeared at the head of the stairs. Not expecting to see him so suddenly I must have started; but the darkness covered me, and I had a second or two to think what to say. I called out:

"Is that you at last, Corporal? You've been the devil of a time!"

"It's not there, sir," he puffed, coming up to me. "I've looked everywhere, and your driver, too, on the floor, under the seat. I couldn't see either of the cases you spoke of, not a sign of them. Your driver says——"

"Did you look in the pockets on the doors?"

"Yes, sir. There was nothing there except a lady's bag, with a comb and mirror and one of those tins they rub their noses in."

I clicked my tongue. "I suppose they were left in Colonel Neimitch's office. That's the lieutenant's fault. It's a great nuisance, a great nuisance. I had particulars of all the officers here in that case. What particulars have you got here?"

"Particulars?"

"I mean, have you copies of the case-records? No, I suppose not.

But you would have personal particulars, a description of each prisoner, the date of his confinement here, that kind of thing?"

"I've got a list of the personal properties. There's the money that was taken over, pocket-knives, things of that sort—we had to list all those when we took them over."

"You've got two copies?"

"Oh no, sir, there's only the one copy, in the sergeant's drawer. He looks after that, you see."

"But a copy was sent to Colonel Neimitch's office, I suppose?"

"I don't think so, sir."

"Well, it certainly should have been. . . . How long do you think it would take you to make a copy for me now?"

He hesitated. "Well, not less than twenty minutes. I'm not a quick scholar, you see—I've no one on the guard here who uses a pencil quickly. But when the sergeant comes back he could make a copy and send it along first thing in the morning."

I said: "All right, that'll do. . . . Wait, though! That's the kind of thing that gets forgotten. You'd better go down and make a copy now—it needn't be tidy, as long as you give me all the details. That kind of thing is important."

I thought he was going to be rebellious. "The sergeant does that sort of thing better than me," he began, "I think you'd find it better, sir, if——"

"Do you like your job here?" I asked sharply.

"Like it, sir? Well, it's better than a great many. It keeps you in the dry——"

"I was thinking," I said, "that a man who can use a pencil properly would fit the job better. I have to report to Colonel Neimitch on personnel——"

He had been a soldier long enough to understand a hint of that kind.

"I'll do it straight away!" he said.

Again I was frightened lest I had aroused his suspicions, for a man of intelligence would have asked himself why I should trouble over details of such small importance. I went after him, and said in a low voice: "Colonel Neimitch told me he had interviewed him the night before last. No one from the Staff Office has seen him since, I take it? . . . All right, I just wanted to know that." I went back into Anton's room.

Yelisaveta had put on her cap again, and Anton had come round to the other side of the table; but as if he had forgotten the hazards of their meeting, he was kneeling on his chair, leaning over the table and holding her hands; he had pulled off one of her gloves to

stroke her fingers. I heard him saying in a patient, rather shy voice:

"I want you to understand how I feel, I know you'll understand. . . . There were two of us, you see, who wouldn't put up with this treatment of the men. The other was a man called Karamachik, not a man I really cared for personally, a dour sort of man, but honest, most strikingly honest and brave. And he got shot for it. He belonged to the ranks, you see, he was quite helpless, he had no one with influence and money to come to the rescue. In a way it was my fault, I could see clearly how things were turning out. But I never thought I should suffer less than he did. And now I feel as I'd broken faith with that man."

I was going to interrupt him, but it was Yelisaveta who spoke. Her voice was a little tired, but wholly gentle:

"But, Anton, why should you let that worry you now? Of course it grieved you—yes, yes, I understand, I know how you would be grieved by a thing like that—but surely we can't go on mourning for ever, surely the time must come when we can wrap up the past and put it away?"

He turned to me. "Alexei, do *you* understand? Do you see how it looks from the outside? Karamachik and I, we both professed to stand for the same thing. And now he, because he belonged to the bottom of life, has paid his stake in full, while I just sit on a stool of repentance—with a very good stove."

I could not help smiling at that. I said: "Yes, my dear Anton, by all the laws of chivalry you are a faithless wretch! Only it happens that we, who know you——"

Yelisaveta had drawn her hands away from his and raised them to her chin. With her eyes on the table, and as if she hadn't heard me speaking, she said slowly, perplexedly:

"Anton, dear, I don't know, I don't think I need to understand. A woman doesn't understand that sort of thing, that worship of a philosophy. But surely I don't need to, surely it's enough for you to tell me. There was something you thought worth doing, you thought it was worth throwing yourself into a bonfire to keep it alight. I can understand that much, I do understand it, surely that's enough?"

He said, touched by her humility, "My dear, of course it's enough, of course it is! I don't want you——"

"But listen," she said, looking up at him, "Anton, dear, listen! (No, Alexei, stay here, I want you to understand!) Didn't you think, when you wanted to throw yourself on a bonfire, didn't you think whether you had the right to do it, whether no one else had any say in what you did? Doesn't it make any difference, my being

. . . a part of you—at least, that's what they say——? Did you think it wouldn't matter to me, or just——"

With his eyes shut, he was feeling across the table for her hand, but he couldn't find it. He said unhappily: "You don't think of everything, at a time like that. I could only think of those men, what they'd been through.—Alexei, can't you help me, can't you explain what it was like? . . ."

But how could I help him, when I had done just what he refused to do?

I heard Yelisaveta saying: "Anton, I know it was partly my fault, it may have been all my fault, your forgetting——"

"Don't let's talk about that!" I said gently. "There's so little time. We've got to think——"

She said impatiently: "Wait, Alexei, wait a minute! . . . Anton, dear, I only want to know this, I only want to be sure that you won't be silly—I mean, you won't think about what's over now—if Strubensohn finds some way of getting you out. You see, Anton, I've been working for that, all these weeks, ever since it happened. (That's true, Alexei, isn't it?) Whatever else I've done, I've done everything I can to get you back, I made Alexei do what he could, I made Strubensohn, I've worked on General Sopojnikin. . . ."

He was deeply moved now. He said: "My dear—I didn't know. . . . Of course I shall take any chance that comes, any chance of getting back to you! As long as it's some honest way."

"Does that matter," she asked simply, "whether it's honest? Is that as important as my wanting you?"

He said slowly, with his stammer very intrusive: "There are some ways out I couldn't take—you'd understand that, wouldn't you? I've been offered one way that was insulting, it was a vile suggestion, I had to turn that down."

She was taken aback. "You've been offered a way? What do you mean?"

"Neimitch was here," he said thoughtfully, "—do you know that man, Colonel Neimitch? No, he's not the sort of man you'd know, he's not a soldier in the proper sense, he belongs to politics, shady politics. He's one of those men who shave their faces to such a shiny perfection that the common sort of decency goes sliding past them—however, I may misjudge him——"

"That doesn't matter!" she said impatiently. "What did he say, what did he offer you?"

Anton smiled. "It's almost amusing, though it made me very angry at the time. He wanted me, if you please, to make a tour of the war zone and 'put fresh courage,' as he was pleased to express

it, into the men. You see the idea? I am to be labelled a 'converted revolutionary,' a notorious anti-militarist who has at last seen the light. I am to go to those men—those half-starved, bug-ridden, shell-shattered men—and say to them, 'Look upon me, I am your friend, I am the well-known partisan of the proletarian cause, and I tell you that the war is a good thing. Go to it, boys, and when you've scraped out the bowels of a few thousand German peasants in those trenches over there you'll come back to freedom and wealth and happiness. . . .' An official tub-thumper, you see, highly recommended for rhetoric by the Bar of Petrograd, guaranteed extra-persuasive, warranted to convince any professor of astronomy that the earth is flat. And Neimitch has the impudence to inform me——"

"But Anton, you don't think it would be better if the Germans beat us? You don't think Russia's going to be happy and free under the direction of the Wilhelmstrasse? You, after what you once said about Prussian barbarity——"

"The Germans have quite enough to do in coping with the French and English," he said shortly. "If they were offered peace on the basis of 'no annexations, no indemnities'—"

"And what about our debt to those allies?"

"Debt?" he said blankly. "We've paid a million and a half lives, nearly five millions wounded—isn't that enough? And what kind of reward am I going to hold out to those soldiers for another year of being frozen and chopped and flayed? Am I to tell them, like that poor misguided Nikolas, that a Russia victorious and triumphant will care for its people as she never thought of doing before? Do you really think that victory would give anyone the reins of government except the very people who've always held and misused them? Why, the moment the war——"

"And what about Kerenski?" she said sharply. "He's a friend of yours, a man of your opinions, and he's fighting tooth-and-nail to get the war pushed forward. He believes——"

"Yes," he said, "Alexander Feodorovitch, he's honest, I respect him. But like all professional politicians he's got no real conception of what war—what this war—is like. He can measure its cost in figures, he can't measure it in terms of misery. How can you say that anything is worth such-and-such a price in a currency you don't understand? And suppose he succeeds, suppose he rouses the army to such an effort that they get a peace on their own terms: do you think the generals in the moment of their triumph are going to show their gratitude by supporting a socialist lawyer? Isn't it safe enough to prophesy they'll stand behind their own friends, that Alexander

Feodorovitch will be elbowed into the background, that the whole familiar system of autocracy and privilege and repression will come into shape again? What sort of promise——"

"Anton, stop!" she said wearily. "It's no good arguing with you, I know it isn't, you can always find something out of a book to prove whatever you want to. If Russian honour doesn't mean anything to you——"

He shook his head. "It doesn't!" he said, as if he were tone-deaf and had been asked his opinion on a piece of music. "It means nothing to me except a formula for the hobbies of the privileged——"

"By which you mean me and my friends?"

I began: "Surely we ought to be talking about some other way——"

"No," Anton said, "no, I didn't mean—my dear, I didn't mean to be rude, I didn't mean anything personal. I only meant. . . . No, don't let's talk about that, I don't want to try and force my opinions on you, truly I don't—why should I expect you to have just the same opinions as mine on everything?——"

"Yes, but Anton, if you——"

"I only want you to realize how impossible Neimitch's proposal was—for me, just for me. I may be wrong, I may be wrong altogether, it may be right to press on the war till one or other side is beaten to exhaustion. It's just that I loathe it as a woman loathes a reptile. The idea of making speeches, telling those men that God is on their side, that slaughter and still more slaughter is virtuous—it's horrible, it's obscene, I can't think about it. I'm sorry, Yelisaveta, I wish I were a different kind of person, everything would be so much easier. But if one talks of honour, where is the honesty in offering a prisoner freedom at a price like that?"

"You mean," she said slowly, "that it would be so much easier if I was different!—No, no, Anton, I see just how you look at it, I'm not a fool, you know." Then, still more quietly, "But do you think that any woman who loved you would think your opinions more important than your self? . . . Oh, why won't you understand, how can I show you what I feel?"

My ears were constantly stretched for the smallest sound outside the room, and I thought now that I heard some movement coming from below. I went out quickly to the corridor and along to the top of the stairs.

For a minute or more as I stood there, very still, I heard nothing but the little noises that are like the uneasy breathing of a sleeping house, a scratch like that of a bell-cord, a faint tapping which seemed to come from the wall, the scrape of a chair in one of the rooms be-

low. Then, somewhere at the bottom of the house, a door slammed. I heard footsteps, the steps of more than one man, on the hall paving, now on the stairs. Foolishly, I kept still, listening, for another two or three seconds. Then I heard, quite clearly, a man saying, "The Colonel never told me of any inspection, and I've certainly never heard of a Major Runov. . . ." It was not Voldik's voice; it was Kralitzkov's.

I was back at Anton's door in six strides. I called in a shuttered voice, "Yelisaveta, quick! *Quick!*"

She jumped up and ran towards me; stopped, and turned round. Glancing beyond her, I saw Anton's face, perplexed and wretched. He said, "My dear, my dear. I can't let you go like this!" "Come on!" I said, but for a moment that seemed to be ten moments she would not move. Slowly, with a gesture that looked theatrical, she raised her hand; Anton took it and kissed it, drew her towards him, would have embraced her, but she whispered, "No, there's no time!" and pulled herself free and joined me. Without even a good-bye I shut the door.

Holding her wrist, I paused for a moment to listen, and to my dismay heard nothing at all; they too must be listening. I could not calculate how far up they might have come; it was at least possible that they were standing on one of the top steps of the stairs; and the risk of passing across the stairhead to the other end of the corridor was too great to be faced. I turned to the right, and moved as quietly as I could to the far end of the passage, Yelisaveta creeping after me. Here we were in total darkness, some ten or fifteen paces from Anton's door, and a slight recess in the passage wall—the entrance to another locked room—gave us extra cover. We stood quite still and waited. Once Yelisaveta started to giggle; I seized her wrist again, sticking my nails into her flesh; that stopped her. At last I heard steps again. The two men had actually been (I judged) on the landing below, and evidently they had not heard us, for they came up boldly; but when they reached the top of the stairs they stopped again, and I heard Kralitzkov say in a low voice, "Quietly now! You go that way, I'll go this."

It was Voldik who came in our direction, on tiptoe, with his boots creaking loudly enough to be heard on the floor below. At Anton's door he paused for a moment to listen and then came on, running his right hand along the wall. I doubt if he was more than a yard away from me when he stopped dead: I could hear his breathing then, and knowing from much experience what it feels like to explore in the pitch dark, when an enemy may be close at hand, I

could tell sympathetically that he was frightened; almost as frightened as the woman trembling beside me. That pause lasted for several seconds, and I suppose he was feeling in his pockets, for he turned round then and called hoarsely, "Sergeant! Have you any matches?" There was no immediate answer, but presently I just heard, "Here, you fool!" followed by a rattle; and the box that Kralitzkov had thrown, striking the opposite wall, fell right in front of my feet. On the spur of the moment I did something so reckless that an instant's thought would have forbade it: I stooped, felt out, touched the box, picked it up and slipped it into my pocket.

Voldik went down on his knees and began to feel about on the floor. It seems in my memory that at least a minute passed while he was groping, but reason tells me that it can only have been a few seconds. Once his fingers actually touched one of my boots, and I had the impression that he drew his hand away quickly; perhaps he didn't trouble to wonder what he had touched (he was not an acute man), but I think it more likely that his nerves were playing against inquisitiveness. I know (for those moments are as fresh as when I lived them) that just after I had felt the touch he moved to the other side of the passage and went on groping there. And at last I heard Kralitzkov, coming towards us, calling out loud: "What are you doing, Stephan?"

"Can't find those matches you chucked!" Voldik called back. (His low voice, a yard from my ear, sounded like the voice of Jupiter.) ". . . But there's nothing here that I can see."

"All right, come here then, keep with me!"

Voldik got up and went back; not without giving me one more prick of alarm by brushing my chest with his elbow; and for a few moments I enjoyed a forgotten pleasure, that of taking deep and natural breaths after a spell of shallow breathing. I whispered to Yelisaveta, "Well done! You were very good."

"You keep close behind me!" I heard Kralitzkov say.

There were standing by Anton's door, expecting, I suppose, to hear some sound of conversation inside. A few seconds passed. Then, with a flourish, Kralitzkov flung open the door and both men marched inside.

That was my moment. I whispered, "Wait there a minute!" and crept along the corridor. They had left the door half open, and as I came nearer I could hear Anton speaking. "Look here, Kralitzkov, I'm going to enter a formal protest against the sort of inspection I've had tonight. I was treated with an utter lack of courtesy. . . ." Peering round the door-frame, I saw that the two guards were stand-

ing side by side with their backs towards me. The glimpse was enough. I reached cautiously for the handle, quietly closed the door, turned and pocketed the key.

I called softly to Yelisaveta, "Come!" We stole as far as the stairs and hustled down to the landing below. Here, looking over the balustrade, I saw that the man who had first admitted us into the house was standing in the hall. I murmured a caution to Yelisaveta, and we went on at a normal pace, making a pretence of conversation. I said loudly: "I shall recommend Neimitch to have two of those men moved up on to the top floor, I don't like so many being in the same corridor. And I'm far from satisfied with the heating arrangements, there's no need for such a vast consumption of fuel. . . ." The man came to meet us at the bottom of the stairs; he was very nervous. "Excuse me, Vashe Blagorodie, but the sergeant said I was not to let you—not to let anyone go before he'd seen them." "It's all right," I said, "I've seen the sergeant upstairs." "But he said——" "By the way," I added, "you're in charge of the stores-book, aren't you? Well, I want to see that, will you get it for me. Yes, I'll wait here." Rather doubtfully, he went off down the passage.

A noise of thumping from upstairs, not yet very loud, warned me that we had no time to waste, and before the janitor was out of earshot I had crept to the hall door. It creaked horribly as I opened it. But my thoughts were now on the last, most formidable obstacle to our escape, and running down the steps I shouted loudly, "Sentry! Sentry, come here!" He had been standing near the gate and he came running across the gravel. I said: "Sergeant Kratlitzkov wants you—up on the top floor—quick as you can—yes, take your rifle, go on, buck up, man!" He ran inside and I pulled the door to after him. Emelian had opened the door of the car. I told Yelisaveta to get in and ran to the gate. It was shut and fastened. Emelian, acting more smartly than I had thought him able, had already started his engine, and he had the car's bonnet pointing at the gate a moment after I reached it. I called to him to switch off his lights. The two sides of the gate were held together by a chain and padlock. The padlock was of the Swedish sort, a massive, bessemer-steel affair, and my faint hope that the key might have been left in it was disappointed; but the chain was comparatively feeble and very rusty. I hitched up the ground-bolt of the right-hand gate, took the bars, and shook with all my strength. With surprising, with exasperating tenacity, the chain held.

My recollection of the half-minute that followed is crowded and confused. From the house behind came the noise of someone shouting—I think it was Kralitzkov's voice—and of doors banging. In the

street outside the passers-by were stopping and collecting to watch my struggles, with the odd, detached curiosity of townsmen watching a house on fire. Emelian had come to help me, but the old man had not much strength, and I felt a more vicious force on the gate when Yelisaveta joined us. Still the chain held. The door of the house had opened and thence a faint light came over our shoulders on to the faces peering stupidly from outside. I caught sight of a big man who looked like a soldier, a Ukrainian from his physique, and I shouted to him, "You! barge on this gate, will you!" Then I heard someone racing towards us over the gravel, glanced over my shoulder, and saw with relief that it was the janitor. He had a rifle which he held by the sling; the fool came panting up and caught my left arm. "You're not to move till——" I turned round and struck him, without science or effort, in the pit of the stomach. As I stooped to pick up the rifle, which he dropped as he fell, I saw the Ukrainian take a short run and throw his weight against the gate. It shot open as if it had been held by a piece of string, just missing my shoulder. In a moment Emelian had swung open the other side and jumped back into the driving-seat. The Ukrainian came up to me grinning. "In a hurry?" he said. I had lost sight of Yelisaveta and now I saw her stooping over the man I had felled, in horrified curiosity; supposing, no doubt, that I had killed him. I grabbed her by the belt and almost threw her into the car. "All right Emelian!" Regardless of the crowd standing a few feet in front of the car he let in his clutch with a jerk, I was only half in and the jolt pitched me on to Yelisaveta's legs, the door swinging violently against my hip. As I scrambled up I heard a shout of "Stop!" and a man with a rifle seemed to rise out of the ground by the off-side window. That half-lit vision, which passed so quickly, remains oddly clear: the surprised, angry face with the mouth open, a short moustache such as the English wear; the rifle coming up to his shoulder and the barrel swinging round to follow us, the fore-sight so close to the window for an instant that instinctively I thrust up my hand to jerk it away, forgetting the glass between. Curiously, I cannot remember hearing any report; but a moment afterward that glass fell in splinters (later on I discovered that my hand was wet, the blood coming from two notches below the fingers) and a little hole which Emelian discovered next day, in the roof and close to the near-side window, showed how the bullet had gone. I did hear a second shot—perhaps four seconds afterwards—but I cannot say if it came from the same rifle. It was unsuccessful. With his knee held against the horn-button Emelian straightened out and gathered speed from his middle gear as he had never dreamed of doing before. The excited, staring faces that passed

the window became one blurred face, then the crowd was behind us; the head-lamps went on and I saw over Emelian's straight, calm shoulders the wet roadway, empty.

§

I switched on the roof-light and saw that Yelisaveta, lying back in a corner of the seat, was laughing. She said rather hysterically: "Oh, I wouldn't have missed that—wasn't it funny? Wasn't Emelian good, getting the gate open? I've never been in a scrap like that—oh, wasn't it funny?"

Prolonged alarm had left me unreasonably short-tempered. I said curtly: "Oh, I'm glad you found it amusing. I suppose if you'd got a bullet in the stomach it would have been funnier still."

She didn't answer, she just went on laughing. I switched the light off again.

We were nearly back in the Orshaskaya when she spoke again, and now her voice was small and short-winded like a scolded child's.

"I didn't mean the rest of it was funny, the part in Anton's room. . . . Why didn't you stop me saying the wrong things?—that was what I had you in there for. But what could I have said? He just took offence at everything, every little thing. Did he want me to say I didn't care what happened to him? . . . Or was it my fault, all my fault?"

I said—it was all I could think of to say: "You were both under a strain, it was wretched for both of you, having to meet like that, with all the risk and the time so short."

But she answered, whispering: "It will always be like that, always!"

§

There was a light in Vava's room. And when we reached the top of the stairs we found Bajouska waiting for us there, bewildered, frightened and angry.

30

The last part of that journey back is a memory which lacks the colour of sensation. I was very tired. Yelisaveta, I know, was weeping; her head was against my arm, and I could feel the shaking of her distress. I remember that I stumbled getting out of the car, the exertion and the cold having made my bad leg stiff; that Emelian saved me from falling, that he asked in his usual way, "Is there any-

thing more tonight, barina?" She, I think, ran in front of me into the house, perhaps not wanting me to see her face; and I have a faint recollection of her running up the stairs about four steps ahead —she was one who never walked upstairs slowly. Against that sequence of mere events the picture of Bajouska at the top of the stairs is sharp and concrete; detached, like the vision you see on waking when the light is suddenly turned on in a dark room; Bajouska's short, stout figure in what looked like an isvostchik's coat, with a few inches of grey, woollen night-gown showing below it and falling over her ancient sabots; a yellow shawl clutched about her shoulders, her grey hair twisted into two sparse pigtails, her eyes wild like a drunkard's, her heavy lips together and wriggling as with chorea. I see her posed above me there like Winged Victory in the Louvre, the lighted alcove with the lapis-lazuli pillars behind her; I see a spider which hung almost exactly over her head, as if designed to give the last touch of absurdity to the monstrous spectacle. And I have, joined with that vision, the sound of my mind's voice, distinct as a voice spoken aloud: "Vava is ill, Vava is dead."

But it was Yelisaveta who in face spoke first, her tone as hard and steady as if there were no long day behind her, no excitement, no fatigue:

"Bajouska, what is the matter? Is there something wrong with Vava?"

Bajouska seemed unable to answer. She turned round and stumped off towards Vava's room, her bent back showing a certain dignity like that of the aged Deacons in St. Alexander Nevski. But when Yelisaveta caught her by the arm and roughly turned her round she said fiercely: "I shall not be blamed, I shall take no blame at all, not from you, Yelisaveta Akinievna, that I've slapped on the buttocks these many times when you were a naughty, disobedient baby! How was I to know that woman was coming? And what could I do, in the name of the Holy Virgin, with the Princess and everybody nagging my heels like the Dvina wolves on St. Stepan Oserezkoi? She'll have cut the boy's throat, I tell you, the little holy child, with no Bajouska to guard him, with you at your wild pleasures and Bajouska held by the two arms by those she-wolves. . . ."

Some way down the passage a door on the right, that of a little drawing-room, was open, and I heard someone calling, "Yelisaveta! Is that you?" It was Tatiana's voice.

"Yes! Do you want me?—Bajouska, be quiet, go away, go to bed, I don't want to listen to you! . . ."

She turned into the drawing-room and I followed her, still feeling as if I had just been dragged out of sleep. In this small room, with

walls painted a staring white, the light was very brilliant; I blinked stupidly at Tatiana, who was standing near the door with an opera-cloak over her pink night-gown, her hair gathered into a silk boudoir-cap; and only after a few seconds did I realize that there was someone else in the room, a large woman, fiercely masculine in dress, who sat with stiff respectability on the French sofa by the window. Yelisaveta suffered from no such bedazzlement. She threw her cap on to a chair and unbuttoned her coat, she said, tapping the inevitable cigarette, "Mother, what in the world is wrong with Bajouska—is that the woman she's talking about? Is something wrong with Vava?"

The Princess was looking at her daughter with the moderate surprise of a sophisticated child at a conjuring entertainment. "I might ask—what is wrong with you?" she said with faint austerity. "Have you joined the Bolsheviki, or is this some new form of amusement? It doesn't appear to me very amusing or very decent."

"It's not meant to be either," Yelisaveta retorted, "Alexei and I have been breaking into a prison that is all. . . . Tell me, what is all this fuss?"

I said to Tatiana: "Perhaps I should explain, Yelisaveta Akinievna wanted to come with me on a visit to a military detention house, and I thought it advisable——"

"There is no need for anyone to try and excuse Yelisaveta's antics," she said wearily. "I never accuse anyone of trying to lead her astray. Indeed, I am very sorry that she should have been a trouble to you, as a rule she is content to plague the life of men like that young Astonovitch. . . ."

She was talking in the rather vague, fluid way of elderly women who have something important to say and must postpone the mental effort as long as possible. Yelisaveta had slipped away. Bajouska was still standing in the doorway, and I saw that she was holding the Princess remorselessly with her sullen eyes.

". . . You must realize that Yelisaveta is still quite young," Tatiana went on, "and her life has been very difficult, very difficult, with Anton away so much. Her position, as a young married woman —many dangers.—Bajouska, there's no need for you to stay here, I wish you would go away.—Bajouska is rather worried, Alexei, because she was left in charge of Vava, so it seems, and now——"

Yelisaveta had come back. "Why is Vava's door locked?" she demanded.

I saw Bajouska smile as if justice had at last been done to her. Tatiana said:

"Locked? I didn't know——"

The woman who had been sitting quietly on the sofa, partly hidden from me by Tatiana, got up; and even now I looked at her for a second or two before I recognized, in that unfamiliar framework, the features of Mme Ivanov. She seemed to have left her importance behind her with her uniform, her voice was nervous and almost humble.

"I think I must explain," she said.—"If you will allow me, Madame?—What has happened was against my strongest wishes, I should not have thought of agreeing to Mme Otraveskov's request without consulting you, M. Otraveskov, only that I feared she might do herself some injury. If I could——"

"Mme Ivanov has explained it all to me," Tatiana said placidly, "and I think she acted quite rightly. Naturally it will make things a little difficult for all of just to begin with. But I shall see Gobodin first thing tomorrow, and ask him if there are any more rooms in the house that aren't being used at present. I want you, Alexei Alexeivitch, to feel that this is your home just as long as you wish—it is such a happiness for my little girl to have Vava here. And if it means nurses and things I expect we can arrange that——"

Yelisaveta had dropped into a chair in weary exasperation. "What is it?" she said. "What is it, why can't you tell me, what are you all talking about?"

"That woman," Bajouska said shortly, "She's in Vava's room."

"What woman?"

"That woman!" Bajouska said with resolution, jerking out an elbow.

Tatiana looked at me with tearful eyes, as if I were trying to make her jump into icy water. For such an occasion her kindness had no formula. "Bajouska . . . Bajouska doesn't understand," she began, "Bajouska thinks——"

Mme Ivanov came closer to me. She said confidentially: "Mme Otraveskov has been restless today, she began this afternoon to talk of her little boy. I don't think she has spoken of him before—at least, not for a very long time. I told her that the little boy was safe and happy, but that didn't satisfy her, she wanted to know where he was, she became very angry and threatened to call for the police. I thought I had pacified her, but this evening she began again, she said I was hiding her boy, she even attacked me." Mme Ivanov pulled up her sleeve a little way and I saw a long, ugly scratch that might have been made with a penknife. "Not that I bear any ill will!" she said hastily. "Mme Otraveskov was excited—she is not yet in perfect health, it is the business of us nurses to be ready for such excitability in a patient. But I came to the conclusion that the best thing was for

her to see the boy, to see that he was happy and comfortable. Of course I telephoned first of all, but——"

"You mean that she's with Vava now, alone with him?" Yelisaveta broke out.

"Yes. It was not my intention——"

"Yelisaveta, will you keep quiet!" Tatiana turned to me. "Mme Ivanov did everything she could, she was most wise and kind. Your wife was excited—naturally, after not seeing Vava for so long——"

"Why do you all keep talking?" Yelisaveta shouted. "Don't you realize that woman may be murdering——"

"Yelisaveta!"

"Yelisaveta," I said, "I must ask you to speak of my wife with greater courtesy. It's surely natural that she should want to see Vava, I have talked to her about it myself——"

"Alexei, why must you keep up this pretence!" she said angrily. "Why do you pretend that Natalia's just like any other woman when you know she isn't? Don't you realize how helpless Vava is, more helpless than any other child? Whose duty is it to protect him if it isn't yours and mine?"

"But, Yelisaveta——" her mother began again.

"I am aware of all my responsibilities," I said coldly. "I am sorry, Mme Ivanov, that you should have had so much trouble.—And you, Tatiana Vascovna.—If you will excuse me!"

I left them, and went towards Vava's room. The four women started to follow me, but I walked quickly and at the turn of the passage they stopped, murmuring all together like market women who can make a meal by spreading out misfortune. I thought I had shaken them off altogether, but at the top of the few steps which led to Vava's room I heard Yelisaveta calling softly from behind me, and before I had reached the door she caught my arm. "Alexei! Alexei, wait a minute, come here, I must speak to you." Reluctantly, I followed her into Bajouska's sewing-room, where she pulled me into a chair and knelt down by my feet.

"Alexei, you think I'm jealous of her!" she said miserably. "That's right, you're right, it's no use pretending. I must have someone, Anton won't love me, surely I can be allowed to love that little boy. You know how I've cared for him, all the time you were away, you know how different he was when you came back. You may think it was all Bajouska, but Bajouska was ill for nearly a month, and all that time I did everything for Vava, I fed him and washed him and kept him happy. . . ."

Her voice was very quiet, tearful, but not plaintive. Looking down at her clipped head and her mournful face, missing the ear-

rings, the damp, smeared eyebrows, the tuberose, I forgot for a moment—yes, I am certain I forgot it—that this was the Yelisaveta whose outward shape I knew so well. I said, not angrily:

"Yelisaveta, you mustn't be foolish! You hurt yourself by building up top-heavy castles of affection. . . . Surely you don't mean that I'm to keep Vava's own mother away from him! I couldn't forget what you've done for Vava, or that he loves you. But now that his mother wants him, my own dear Natalia——"

"Yes," she said, still quietly, "yes, you will take him away, you will take them away together, in a few months I shall be nothing but a faded photograph in his memory, and in yours. Yes, Alexei, yes, I know that's right, I know that's how things ought to be. You have to put loyalty first, and if a woman has borne a child she has a right to him, whether she can take care of him or not. But I want you to realize what that means to me. All day I shall spend my time as I always do, moving about, wondering what is happening to Anton, seeing people, trying to forget myself. And when I come home I shall go straight to Vava's room—yes, it'll be a long time before I cure myself of that—and there will be no Vava, no Vava any more, I shall be back in my old loneliness then, the loneliness I've lived in always, like going back to prison after a few hours in the sunlight. I want you to realize that, if ever you think of me."

"But you will have your friends——"

"Yes," she said, "there will be Darlynia, and Nikolai Yurevitch, and there will be Bajouska, saying that I paint my lips too much, and my mother grumbling about the Revolution to old Mme Kotchoubey, and Gobodin following me along the damnable corridors of this overheated house and clicking his tongue over my footmarks on the parquet. . . ." She stopped, and I saw that she was crying; naturally, as a child cries. Her forehead was resting on my knee, she felt up for my hand and held it tightly. Presently, when her crying subsided, she said: "You won't forget about that, Alexei? I know it doesn't mean anything to you, you think of me only as Anton does. But I want to feel that someone knows about it, I can't keep my loneliness as a secret with no one to share it, I'm not large enough to go on holding a weight like that."

I wanted to be compassionate, but my tired mind would not move at the soft pace of compassion, its voice was repeating, "Natalia, Natalia, in there, Natalia in there with Vava." I said as gently as I could: "There's no need to settle things now, don't let us grieve ourselves with sorrows we may avoid tomorrow!" Her hand was still in mine, I bent and kissed it with so much tenderness as I could spare for her distress. That seemed in some measure to console her,

for she got up then and lightly kissed my own hand, and said, "Yes, yes—you must go to her now, yes, you must go to Natalia, I shouldn't have kept you from her."

Something made me turn at the door, to see her staring at me sorrowfully; and I said: "Yelisaveta, you have been so kind to Vava —you will have some kindness for Natalia too?"

She shook her head a little, as if she couldn't understand me. She said wearily, picking up my own words, "Tomorrow—we must settle everything tomorrow."

§

There was no light in the room. I knocked on the door several times, not too loudly, but got no answer. I heard nothing but the little singing noise which Vava's breathing sometimes made when he slept. I tried the door myself, but it was locked, as Yelisaveta had said.

There was a big French fanlight over the door; using the door-handle as a perch I climbed up, jerked the fanlight open, and looked in; but the passage itself was dark and I could see nothing inside the room. There was still no answer when I called softly, "Natalia!" and I guessed that she had fallen asleep. Very cautiously, for I was afraid of rousing and alarming her, I pulled myself up, wriggled through the aperture (a feat much less easy—with my long body and one leg unreliable—than it sounds as I record it) and dropped down inside. There I stood still for a moment, not daring to switch on the light and suffering some pain from the evening's rough usage of my body, before I felt my way across to Vava's bed.

It was curiously frightening, not to know where Natalia was in that darkness. I passed my hand along the side of the bed, and up to Vava's shoulder, which I stroked for a while, whispering, "Vava, are you comfy, Vava?" Presently he turned a little—his back wouldn't let him turn far—and said sleepily, "Who's that? Oh, it's you, batiushka! That lady, has she gone now?" I kissed him and told him to go to sleep. Then, as I stretched my hand across to tuck in the cover under his shoulders, I touched another hand, small and cold; and I heard Natalia's voice, a little scared, startlingly close to me.

"Who is that? Who is that?"

I said: "It's all right, it's Alexei!"

"Alexei? Alexei?"

"Wait a minute, I'll put on the light."

As the light came on I saw that she was sitting on the edge of a

hard chair, a position of miserable discomfort, with her arms and head resting on the end of Vava's pillow. She had on only the light woollen dress which she generally wore in her room at the hospital; she looked terribly cold and stiff. Blinking, she looked at me fearfully, and when I took a step towards her stretched her arm over Vava's body as a cat will stretch out a paw if you disturb her with her kittens. She said defensively: "I only wanted to see him, Mme Ivanov said I could see him!"

I said quietly: "You look cold, my dear!" I took off my coat and went to put it round her shoulders. But that frightened her again, and she moved to put herself between me and the bed. "I want to stay here," she said, "I haven't been here very long, surely I can stay a little while!"

Vava was awake now, and staring at us, sleepy and puzzled.

I said to him. "Vava, you would like Mother to stay here, wouldn't you? I could make a bed for her on the sofa there; Mother would be comfortable on that, with a big rug over her."

He didn't answer, I don't think he took in what I was saying. I went off to find some rugs, and when I returned he had fallen asleep again. Natalia stood just where I had left her, shivering a little, for my coat had fallen off her shoulders; and as I made the sofa ready she watched me closely, without understanding, as negroes have watched the erection of a scaffold. When I had done I moved the chair away and pushed the sofa close to her, close beside Vava's bed. I said, "You must rest, Natalia, you must sleep, beloved," and with only a little force I made her lie down there, and tucked the heaviest rug about her. All this time she had not spoken, but when I had finished she said distressfully: "If I go to sleep you'll take him away!" To answer that, I locked the door again, brought the key to her, and slipped it into her hand beneath the rug. I said, "There, no one can take him away now." When I went to put out the light she was alarmed again, crying out, "No! No!" So I left the light burning.

I kissed her hair; that much I could not deny myself, for to have her here was like standing thirstily by a lake of forbidden water; and, calmer now, she seemed surprised rather than frightened by that caress. But when I lay on the floor at the foot of the bed her eyes still followed me defensively.

It was cold, and I do not think I had an hour's unbroken sleep; for my ears, listening to hear her creep towards the door, listening for a cry from Vava, held back the weight of sleep at arm's length from me.

31

Easter had passed, a day when a cold fog hugged the city clammily, and for me no Christ had risen. From the last hours of Easter Eve I stood with my candle by a pillar in St. Sermion, hedged in by grey soldiers, by peasant pilgrims with bundles strapped on their backs, starved women faint with the exhaustion of their Holy Week observance; and tried, from the brave, intense expectancy which the candles showed on their faces, to find in my own spirit an answering devotion. Here, surely, in the eager press of souls, I could lose my separate soul and giving up the struggle let God recover it. My eyes, leaving the thousand candles, went up towards the overhanging darkness; remembering Easters gone before I know His Resurrection waited for my welcome. I knew that He could not rise in me unless I stood like Mary at the tomb awake to answer Him; but my mind, recalcitrant, would take no part in that submission, through the high darkness which the smoke of the censers thickened I saw the filthy house of Koroschik, and Vava stretched in his lice-ridden box. I shut my eyes again and stood with all my weight on my bad leg, trying if pain would humble me; when the pain had made me weak my soul cried out, praying that God would blind me to all things but the Risen Presence. For a few moments, perhaps for minutes, I stayed in that subjection, cut off from every thought but my need of God's compassion, hardly aware that I smelt the incense or heard the lovely rise and fall of the Easter Canon. Then my eyes opened of themselves, I saw an old man's set, expectant face; I thought he was superstitious, bovine, I thought that the priest sang rheumily. As I moved painfully in the slow procession thronging like Dante's souls towards the Altar, my lips shaping the Credo, I was haunted by Natalia's tearful voice: "Surely I can stay a little while!" The miracle might happen yet, it must surely happen to the old woman pressed against my elbow, who held her free hand close to the candle's flame to guard it, whose face might have belonged to her who touched His garment; these moved so patiently, despite the slow fatigue, with so much guarded eagerness, their faith could not be disappointed; but while their simple eyes looked forward, steadfast, in devotion, my own were wandering, hunting from face to face to find their secret. I came at last, at last, to the Cross, I dropped to give my kiss, I whispered, "Christ is Risen!" Surely my kiss was no less devout than the haggard soldier's before me, surely my heart stretched out as fiercely for the peace of His Resurrection: yet even as I kissed the priest's old, wrinkled fingers, I noticed the stain of nicotine upon them; glancing above the gold and vermilion

of his vestments I saw his face as that of a tired and stupid man, a little bored with so much ceremony. No, it was too stifling here, the breath of common piety blew too strongly on my own small flame. I pressed a passage through the hiving worshippers and came by slow degrees into the dank daylight; thankful to breathe cold air with the city smell in it, to have escaped from troubling music and the cataleptic darkness.

In the streets I saw again that lingering expectancy: the summer, they said, would bring salvation from all our miseries. But in May the Neva froze again, the sky was livid, the wind, gathering strength once more, cut shrunken flesh like a wet whip through tattered and threadbare coats. As if it were a promised land, this bleak and striving city, humanity still poured into it; companies of peasants who had tramped three hundred versts or more, trains choked with soldiers who had washed their hands of fighting. At night I saw them, these new pilgrims, huddled together along the English quay, and I heard that hundreds slept piled up in the ransacked houses of the Starzkaya. How they were fed, if fed at all, no one seemed certain; but I knew that armed parties tramped at night, unhindered, through the Viborg quarter, and I knew that in that part food was hidden in hollow table legs, bread nailed below the seats of chairs, sugar and cabbage stalks stuffed under floorboards. It was in the Sadovaya, close to the Museum, and in broad daylight, that I saw a woman lying on the steps of a house with head dropping sideways, defeated eyes fixed strangly on the roofs across the canal. I supposed her the victim of one of those chance affrays—a shot or two fired from a high window or a passing motor—which happened still at any hour; but while I stood there two soldiers arrived in a ramshackle cab to take her away, and they told me she was dead, so they understood, from nothing more than the sharp weather. I no longer remember clearly what her face was like—it was not much different, I suppose, from that of any old country woman—but I retain a picture of her hand and wrist, hanging loosely as they lifted her into a creaking cab; a hand that was all vein and muscle, beautiful as a workman's hand is. It was strange to see it idle. On that day—no, it was another day, I remember because it was after Natalia had come to the Orshaskaya—I went by the tramway to the Borisov market, having heard from Yevski that leather boots were being sold there at possible prices. The long, drab street between the Veki rifle works, now closed and desolate, and the Borisov Square was lined with faces peering from shawls and dirty sheepskins, people who seemed to be waiting for some spectacle; but I learnt that no procession was expected, those people were always waiting. The Square was almost

empty of its ordinary traffic; there were a few carts piled with broken picture frames, rolls of worn oilcloth, ikonstasias; at which a company of children were gazing stupidly, while the skeleton horses, their forelegs hobbled, nosed along the central gutter, seeking some fodder among the sodden straw and dirty newspapers which choked it; no fish anywhere, no vegetables. I asked a man in a soldier's coat and Tartar headdress if he knew of any boots for sale, and he took me to a back room in the Lubiskaya where he and his family were living, saying he had a pair that would just suit me. That was true, he had a fine pair of boots that must have belonged to a Prussian officer; his brother had brought them back from the war, he said. The boots and a cartful of straw, two ragged blankets and a little of paper—those were all the contents of that room, as I remember it, except for a lean boy of eleven or so who stood in dejected silence against one wall, and two more children, girls I think, asleep on the floor. The man saw the inquiring sweep of my eyes and smiled faintly, shrugging his shoulders. His farm at Poszetchon had gone to the money-lenders, he told me; he had brought his family here with a load of furniture, bed, chairs, table, all on one tarantass with the gelding Mihail pulling it. Well, the furniture was gone now; the bed had got him ten puds of potatoes, Mihail had sold for twenty roubles, and now the boots, thank to my generosity, would supply them with fuel and tea, with some soup-essence perhaps, for three weeks or so. No, he was not disposed to grumble, the people in the front room were much worse off, six of them, with the father shot in half by those Germans. Only he felt bitter about his wife: he had spent three weeks in the Krestovski prison—that was for stealing a pound of sausages in the Liteini Prospekt—and had come back to find her dead. "She was not beautiful, you understand, she was getting old, and very sallow. But to find the little ones there, whimpering like puppies do, no fire, nothing—that brought me tears and anger. You, barin, you will not understand. If you were to go to prison your wife would still have enough money till you came out, someone would look after your children. . . . Still, they say all that will be altered soon. Kerenski, he thinks of the poor people. . . ."

Kerenski: in parts of the Viborg Quarter and the streets about the Baltic Station that name seemed to echo magically. It was understood that he came from Moscow; in the Moscow Courts he had fought for the lives of rebels, just as that other lawyer Count Scheffler, killed in the war they said, had defended rebels in the old St. Petersburg. Kerenski was part of the government now, the law courts came under him; one looked to Kerenski to provide a key of his own by which the affairs of Russia would be straightened

out, the railways put in order, harvests secured, the cities properly supplied with food, the muzhik decently rewarded. Kerenski, they thought, could keep the generals in hand, check the scandalous operations of financiers, set the city's services in order, protect small shopkeepers in the Varvarinskaya from thieving soldiers, discover stores of clothes and fuel for distribution through the length and breadth of the country. . . . Others had doubts about this man: he was fond of the war, they said, and everyone else was tired of that. The war, what good had it done? The Germans were no longer hostile, the soldiers strolled across to Russian trenches to swap their cigarettes and laughter with men who longed as they did to get back to the fields. It was common knowledge that the Germans were ready to call the war done with; at a price, perhaps; they might ask for Poland and some part of the Ukraine, for the Lettish provinces. Well, what of that? The Poles, worshippers of some priest in Rome, had never been true Russians; the Baltic lands, what was the good of holding them if they had to be fought and starved for? What price was not worth paying for a Russia left in peace to wash her wounds, repopulate deserted fields, try out her muscles in the new, untested freedom? It seemed, as I made repeated journeys from the General Staff Office to the Orshaskaya, that more of the pavement orators were sounding that note each day: the war was the chief remaining cause of our distress, the first step forward to salvation was to get the war written off; as soon as that was done we could advance to further stages, expropriation. . . . From these the term "Kerenskists" came contemptuously, as meaning pre-war dreamers, radicals of the old régime, empty idealists. This Kerenski, he was sound at heart perhaps, but only a minor prophet, tainted with czarist philosophy: one greater than he was here, living now in the former home of Kchechinskaïa; a certain Ulianov, whose eyes reached further than Kerenski's, who was free from Kerenski's bourgeois scrupulosity.

From among these leaders of the blind—politicians out of place, aged peasant mystics, white-lipped Jews, flat-chested women with short hair—you could take your choice of counsel. And the common line, as I observed it, was to wander on from one to the next, sipping the wisdom of each in turn. The weather made hardly any difference. A high, ragged wind was driving the sleet almost horizontally along the Nevski on the morning when my tramcar was held up by a crowd spreading all over the Znamensk crossways; the usual crowd of beltless soldiers and ragged workmen, with a sprinkling of clerks and shivering women who seemed regardless of the plaintive children they clutched beside them. They stood quite still, these people, listen-

ing with rapt attention to a tall, thin creature, who was shouting hoarsely from a market barrow. Through the streaming sleet I could not see this woman very distinctly, but I realized for a moment the magic of her bravery: she was quite alone on her small platform, she wore no coat, nothing but a thin dress, her chin was lifted high, she took no notice of the wind pulling her greyish hair about her face. Then, as the tram thrust its way clanking through the crowd I saw that it was Katie. . . . I had thought at first it was idleness which made all Petrograd flock to these meetings; idleness, and the boredom of life, with never a good meal to look forward to, the filthy, paper-littered streets keeping all your senses prisoned, the Neva hidden under the April fog. The little troupes which had once played the balalaika in the streets had long since disappeared, fiddling gipsies had gone, the city had no music; and I thought the orators were welcome simply because they occupied that void, their rasping voices giving us the sense of deep excitement without which life was unendurable. That was a superficial view. I came to see that the prophets were half believed as well as listened to, that our very hopelessness begot credulity. The Government, as far as we knew, sat in the Marien Palace all day long; spending their time, by common report, in wrangling over jobs. Salvation would hardly come from there. But the fields waited to be tilled, the city was choked with men who could work them, there were mouths enough to swallow the corn: we were rid of the ancien régime: what was wanting to link our powers with our necessity? If Lvov and his quarrelsome platoon couldn't answer that, the orators could, and they spoke with authority. They could not all be right, but one of them might be; and the darkness of our state became less fearful when these cried out they saw the light ahead.

§

"Here in Petrograd you are comparatively all right." That was the opinion of my brother Vassili, who came to see me on his way back to the front. We went to the theatre together to see the Saxaganski Company. "In Moscow it is far, far worse, everyone is starving there, you never see a man with an unpatched overcoat or a woman in a decent pair of shoes. In Moscow, I tell you, things can't last as they are much longer. . . . Here, after all, you have the Government, such as it is, and the professional wanglers who always hang about a government. There is constant bargaining: the Government wants certain minimum amenities for its own private use; the financiers, the contractors, the independent transport operators, all the old hands, they want protection. That exchange always goes on,

and consequently the shops stay open; I've no doubt you could find a motor car for sale if you really set about it, and Mandl would get you the skin of a giraffe—at their own price, of course. Even the poor get some crumbs to pick up from this traffic. In Moscow there's only enough for the rich, the poor get nothing at all."

Boris Afanasevitch, who was with us, shrugged his shoulders.

"That's how it looks to you!" he said. "You forget that transport is now, as always, the one thing that really counts in Russia. And transport at the moment is a troika with one wheel and one horse. Just look how Moscow stands, and compare it with us. You've got Starodub, Kirsk, Voronetz, Tambov, Nijni, Vologda—all those within five hundred versts. Now think of that in terms of agricultural area——"

"Or rather, think of it in terms of agricultural workers. I suppose fifty per cent are missing—either killed, or in Germany, or playing cards along the front, or stuck somewhere on the western roads. Of the rest, a third—to put it modestly—are only producing for themselves. The others are either holding on to the stuff—packed away in pig-styes or on top of their roof joists—with the idea that prices are going up and up for ever, or else just sulking till the land's sequestrated from its owners, as your hotheads here in Petrograd tell them it will be."

"In other words," I said, "they are waiting, like the rest of us, for someone to save Russia."

Vassili squeezed out his cigarette and gazed gloomily at the Imperial Box, bereft of its insignia and graced by Dumists who, as he said, were affecting the worst possible compromise between dignity and bonhomie.

"Yes," he said pensively, "that's what they're waiting for. And in the trenches, over there, where I shall be next week, they are also waiting. I don't care two kopeks about these soldiers' soviets, all that bloody nonsense—it means nothing. They'll fight all right, the men I look after, they'll fight as only Russians can, as soon as they've got something behind them, some organization, some kind of authority. 'Who are we fighting for?'—that's what they keep asking. 'Is it the Prince Lvov they talk of, or M. Kerenski, or this Comrade Olkha who sends us endearing little notes?' And that's the question I can't answer. Very well then, they will wait and see! They're waiting for something to happen in Petrograd that'll show if the war's worth while. And here in Petrograd the politicians are all waiting with one eye on the army before they decide which way to jump. In the meantime I'm credibly informed there are eighty-five thousand Kropatchek rifles in a warehouse not far from Gorodetz, and over a

hundred thousand pairs of field-boots rotting in trucks on the line somewhere between Smolensk and Orsha, and not one of those pigeon-breasted, rusty-razored fools in that box over there is going to raise a finger to get 'em shifted. I tell you, Alexei, it makes me frightened! Those men, we've kept them going through three winters, short of artillery, short of rifles, short of food sometimes, short of tobacco and boots and even trousers. We've kept them together, we've made 'em fight against an enemy who's got everything we haven't, brains and aeroplanes and trenches lined with footboards. And we've done it just by telling them to trust us. When Nikolas went I told them it made no difference, except that Russia would be better ruled, that petty tyrannies would sink below a universal justice. I believed that, in God's name I believed it, and they believed it too. Well, they don't believe it now, they want something to show for their blood and sweat. I don't mean just the odd battalion I'm concerned with; I mean all of them. Just think of it, an army extended from the Baltic to the Black Sea, men trained to the highest point of human endurance, taught to see blood and pain with utter indifference: and between them and us—nothing! . . . I was in Vispakov last week—you remember, Amalia took us there once when we were children to see Mme Baretchni—and I found the whole town agog with a scandal. What do you think? Old Kvassin, the president of the district agricultural society, had said in a speech that a former secretary of the local police department had a German grandmother; the former secretary had replied in the local newspaper that Kvassin was a liar and the grandson of a harlot, and was taking a secret commission from a Moscow wholesaler on co-operative grain transactions; and now Kvassin was saying that the secretary's wife was not as chaste as she might be either. That was the one topic in every house I visited. I asked Dr. Trelib, an old friend of mine, what he thought the rest of the army would do if the war fizzled out altogether. He seemed quite surprised, he hadn't thought about it. He said, 'Why, I suppose the men will go back to their former work—to the fields, most of them.' He saw no difficulty, none whatever. And in Petrograd, it seems to me, they see no difficulty either. In treating the war as a side-show to their circus they forget that some time there'll be the remnants of an army to dispose of." His dark eyes were staring at my face as if it were a pane of smudged glass through which he looked towards some vision of his own; in boyhood he had often stared at me like that, making me feel inferior despite my three years' seniority and my extra four inches. "Waiting for a saviour!" he repeated. ". . . Yesterday I left Debelgoi in the early morning, I was travelling all day long, I

seemed to see nothing but fallow fields and barns with the roofs tumbling in and field tools rusting in the ditches. Whenever the train stopped, and that was once in every six or seven versts, there were people standing in the frozen fields cross-legged and gazing at us with a kind of vacant hopefulness as if the Czar or God or Satan might be on board. At Titkis the whole town seemed to be standing along the line, children and grandfathers together, lean, ragged creatures, stuck to the cobbles as if they'd grown there, gazing and gazing. It was almost dark when we got to Bui, there was no light in the train, and still I saw a row of peasants propped against the side of the engine sheds, peering at us like spirits waiting for the Judgement, oblivious of the darkness falling. I couldn't sleep, my eyes went on finding faces in the darkness, more and more faces, all the way along. I must have slept after we left Vologda, and then I dreamt most horribly. I seemed to see those faces multiplied till the whole of Russia stood like one great army in a vast arena, all their eyes fixed patiently on the horizon far behind me; and nobody but I saw the great rock hanging over them, black as night and as heavy as the world itself, slipping down, very slowly, and shaking a little as if the rope which held it up was breaking. . . ."

§

The night when Yelisaveta and I had been to the Montresor Palace was at this time only a swift smudge of fear and confusion in my mind; afterwards, when I wanted to make some record of it in my diary, I had to labour on my memory as one squeezes to get the last few grains from a tube of paste. One moment of the night stayed lively, rising of itself before my eyes when I closed them: Anton standing in his old dressing-gown, and holding my hands, looking so much smaller than I had thought him before, his face very pale, his friendly eyes moist as if from too much reading. I constantly heard his voice again, *You don't know what it's like, never seeing anyone. . . . I never thought I should suffer less than he did.* . . . That was the picture of a sailor who has set his lonely course to where no land lies: I had hailed him in the open sea, he had smiled at me as one who has said good-bye long since and cannot spare his hands from the sheets and tiller. But I would not believe that life had no more use for the mind and spirit that his spare body held so closely: I could not bear to see the sail grow small and vanish.

They had moved him from the Montresor: that I learnt from Yevski. "The young lady I told you of, she heard all about it from one of the sentries. The others are still there, Lieutenant Scheffler

is the only one they moved. The tale she got was that a gang of the Bolsheviki arrived, fifty or more, and stormed the place with guns, shouting for Comrade Scheffler. The sentry knocked down half a dozen of them with his bare fist, so he told Mera Martinovna. . . . You see, Vashe Blagorodie, you put their minds a little out of order, you and that wench of yours. . . ." I was vexed at this news, feeling that all my work in finding him had been undone. But that view was mistaken.

I had been lunching downstairs with Tatiana Vascovna, who wanted another man to complete a party of three couples. Sopojnikin was there, and after lunch he took me aside in the rather furtive way which appealed, I think, to a certain sense of theatre in his composition. "Our friend Anton Antonovitch," he said, "—his name was being thrown about in a committee I attended yesterday. I oughtn't really to mention it—I don't want to get mixed up in this, I can't be helpful and it wouldn't help me. Only I thought you'd like to know that he hasn't been forgotten. I don't know what's brought the case into view again. It may be that Olkha and his crowd have remembered him. I got the impression that Gretzkov is nervous over the business. The Petrograd Soviet want to get the direction of strategy —as they're pleased to call it—into their own hands, and they're raking up every single thing they can think of to prove the 'administrative incompetence' of the existing staff. That may be the reason why Gretzkov shudders when Scheffler is mentioned—I fancy he's not too happy about the case being left on one side so long. I did ask him some casual question about it myself, when I happened to meet him in the cloakroom; he looked rather cross, he said I didn't realize the difficulty of tackling a case when all the witnesses were a thousand versts away."

Roumaniev came over to us.

"Did I hear you talking about Anton?" he asked. "Really I cannot imagine why that pedantic fellow Gretzkov can't arrange to let him escape. Just think of all the trouble it would save for everybody—to say nothing of my own feelings. God knows, life is tiresome enough these days without having Yelisaveta going about like the ghost of a honeymoon widow. What in the world are they keeping him for, have you any idea?"

Sopojnikin scratched the end of his nose. "I suppose," he said meditatively, "there are quite enough dangerous people loose in Petrograd already. So they're not very keen to unleash another one."

Roumaniev snorted. "Dangerous? Anton? My dear Viktor——"

"The fact remains," Sopojnikin said closely, "that the Bolsheviki regard him as their man. At least, there's a story going about—I've

heard it from someone quite reliable—that they made a raid on the house where he's detained. They weren't successful, but it was a very determined affair. . . ."

It was two or three days later that Strubensohn came to see me. At last, he said, he had been able to move the matter some way forward. He had been in treaty with a certain Zimbayev, in M. Gretzkov's department, who seemed curiously willing to oblige him. "This Zimbayev—I do not care for the gentleman, he has a very old-fashioned rectitude about his manners—this Zimbayev has given me his assurance that the case will be examined by a private Court as soon as the necessary witnesses can be brought to the capital. What is more, he has already arranged for the witnesses to be summoned. The difficulty, according to him, is that the authorities at Paulskov are most unwilling to release any officers for what they regard as entirely academic duties. That is characteristic of the military mind (if you will pardon my saying so—I don't refer, of course, to soldiers of culture like yourself), they think that officers are quite properly employed as prison warders at Mariki-Matesk, they regard it as scandalous when the same officers are required to give up a fortnight to the interests of common justice. . . . I suggested to Zimbayev that the case might quite well be conducted on the evidence of sworn depositions; that would have been very convenient for me, there is nothing I find easier to pull to pieces than depositions written without competent legal guidance; but he was very insistent that the evidence be given *viva voce*—M. Zimbayev takes the case very seriously, he is most anxious to satisfy the interested parties of the opposition that the government has acted quite blamelessly. I told him that a proper consideration of the evidence would give an exact opposite result, but he refused to take me seriously; he thought, I'm afraid, that I was speaking forensically—he regards me as a very sly fellow."

He looked up cautiously to see if I appreciated this slur on his honesty; and I fear he was quick enough to see me smiling.

"Well, well," he said hastily, "I mustn't waste your time. All I want is to be sure that your plans will allow you to remain in Petrograd a week or two longer—three weeks, perhaps—so as to be available to give evidence when the time comes."

I said doubtfully: "Do you think my evidence would be any use? I can only——"

"But my dear Captain, the whole of our case depends on you! You must remember that strictly speaking—speaking, I mean, in the narrow, legal sense—there is no case for Count Scheffler at all, he's as guilty as Satan, there has never been the smallest doubt in my

mind about that. All that I can do, without your aid, is to confuse the prosecution. I rely on the witnesses having no longer memories than most men, on their being uncomfortable and alarmed by the atmosphere of a Petrograd Court—that was in my mind when I contrived to take the case away from Paulskov. Apart from that, I can introduce political confusions: I can suggest to the elements of the Left that the prosecution is a conspiracy of their opponents, and at the same time make the elements of the Right feel that the case is a stratagem devised as a test of virtue by the radical minority, which they can best defeat by presenting an acquittal. But that management may not be enough——"

"You mean," I said, "that you want me to give doctored evidence? If so——"

"No!" he said briskly. "No, I should not trust you to do that—if you won't misunderstand me. It is a great mistake, a very serious mistake indeed, to depend on perjury unless you have a witness who is either practised or has a natural flair for it. No, all I ask of you is evidence as to character of the accused—his moral rectitude, his competence as an officer, the meticulous attention he gave to his duties in the clearing establishment. If we can build up in the mind of the Court a large conception of the defendant as an upright man, who up to a certain date performed all his duties with credit, with heroism, even with brilliance; if we can then draw a picture of his sufferings since the time of the alleged offence—the privations, the indignity, the procrastination, the torture of his mind—we shall get a composite structure in which the actual offence, even if it's proved, will look like a little cairn of iniquity stuck up between two mountains. But I can't achieve that unless——"

I said: "That is precisely how it looks to me, without any supercherie at all."

§

So: I was still to be kept in Petrograd.

I was glad to have the decision made for me, for at that time my temper was to evade decisions. I should have found it hard to go away, leaving Anton lonely in the hands of capricious justice; but to stay without knowing certainly that I could help him would have had the flavour of quixotry. I longed to be rid of this place. Here, where I had found my beloved and my little one suffering, where I seemed to have spent a lifetime in the dreary round of interviews from one churlish official to another, my mind had turned in upon itself. God seemed to be pursuing me, demanding something that I could or would not give him; I thought that I might escape him if

once my senses were freed from the oppression of the city; the bleak, granite-hemmed length of the Nevski Prospekt, the gloomy breath of the river, the draughty, malodorous corridors of the Personnel Department, the noise and the crowding faces and the clop of Bajouska's slippers through the heavy warmth of Tatiana Vascovna's house. But that escape was not to be, not yet, not yet.

I half believed that Tatiana wanted to see me gone, but that was only a guess; she was always too kind to say so. Once she spoke rather crossly of Mme Arnevitch, the nurse-companion I had engaged for Natalia: "Really I do think Nurse Arnevitch might try a little harder to avoid offending Gobodin. He's complaining again that she takes the drying-cloths from his pantry, he threatens to drag her into the street and tear off her clothes. And surely there's no need for the poor woman to make noises in her stomach as she does —yesterday she went past my drawing-room when I was entertaining old Viktoria Mavrikievna and her daughters, and they all stopped to listen, really one couldn't help it, and the silly girls giggled. I had to say it was something in the hot-water system." But that was not a formal complaint. When I talked of looking for someone to replace Nurse Arnevitch, and said that I knew I had far exceeded the privilege of any guest, she was quite upset. "Dear Alexei, why should you say such things? Look at all the room there is in this stupid great house!—and you know how glad I am to think we've giving some sort of a home to your poor wife and the little boy. Do you know, I cry sometimes when I think of all you have been through, you and poor Natalia Konstantinovna. You don't know how happy it makes me—and Yelisaveta too—having you here. It is only that Gobodin is so stupid, he says that Mme Arnevitch is possessed of a devil, one that hoots and gurgles in her stomach—whenever I scold him he says that he can't do any work because he hears the gurgling of Mme Arnevitch's devil. But you mustn't worry about that, Alexei! Why should you worry?—it's not your fault, and it's my business to keep my household in order. You must believe me, you are to stay here just as long as it suits you—or as long as we still have the house."

I stretched my eyes. "As long as——"

"Yes," she said, her eyes clouding. "Didn't I tell you about that?—perhaps I didn't. It sounds so silly, but apparently the house doesn't belong to us any more. At least, that's how I think it is from what Akiniev says. Poor Akiniev, he's so clever in many ways, you know, he understands all about government, and his work for Russia has been magnificent, so Yermolay Gaevitch tells me; but about money he's always been rather stupid, and he seems to have put this house into what they call a mortgage—is that right?—so that that nice Jew

man—you know, the one with the long side-whiskers who looks after the bank in the Sadovaya, Grünauer, that's right—so that M. Grünauer can come and live in it any time he likes. Then, of course, we shall all have to go—I could never live in the same house with Mme Grünauer, she is so conceited, and always so terribly well dressed. . . ."

I was not, in fact, much surprised by the news. Tatiana was almost the only person in her circle (I almost said in Petrograd) who was not more or less conversant with her husband's affairs. "You know," Mme Kotchoubey said, talking to me in Tatiana's drawing-room, while Tatiana herself was engaged in conversation with Princess Karatchevski a few feet away, "it must be rather dreadful for Tatiana Vascovna to feel that she's so utterly at the mercy of that dear, dangerous Grünauer. They say he's got Akiniev Mihailovitch so much in the joint of his thumb that if he was to stop him in the middle of the Millionnaya and ask for his trousers Akiniev would simply have to take them off."

"It's all very well for you to talk like that, Julia Petrovna," an old woman called from the other side of the room, "but you and I are going to be in Grünauer's fingers just the same before long."

Mme Kotchoubey smiled. "Before long, yes! Yes, we shall all be in the streets, I suppose, if we're alive at all. But I have not yet mortgaged my chemise to M. Grünauer!"

A young man whose name no one seemed to know drew his chair closer to mine. "Akiniev Mihailovitch should have sold out a part of his Voronetz estates three years ago," he said, "and he could then have bought American securities. The price he got would have been contemptible, but he'd be better off now. There's been trouble on that estate ever since the emancipation. Landed estate was always risky and now it has no market value at all."

"I can't help thinking that Akiniev has always lived too extravagantly," Maria Pavlova whispered. "You know he used to have that big house in Moscow too, and that steam yacht he kept at Kronstadt must have cost him a fortune. I always wondered where all his money came from. I mean, the land in that part of Voronetz is said to be very poor——"

"Perhaps you had better go on wondering!" Mme Kotchoubey said succinctly.

I saw that her eyes met those of the young man who had spoken just before, and that he smiled.

"Of course one couldn't possibly believe it!" he said softly. "For one thing, I find it difficult to see how such a vast sum can ever have passed through the Industrial Committee's hands. But it's extraordi-

nary how many different people seem to see something in the story; and there are certain things, as Maria Pavlova says, that are very difficult to explain. . . ." He turned to Tatiana. "Julia Petrovna and I both think that your husband is looking amazingly well," he said, "in spite of all his anxieties. . . ."

§

That world, the lower half of the Roumaniev house, gave me some kind of relief from my own. I generally went there once in every day; it was the only thing I could do to repay the hospitality of Tatiana, who always seemed to welcome me; and there I could be sure of vivacious talk of one kind or another. Cadet society was there invariably; sometimes a sprinkling of intellectuals, painters to whom Tatiana had sat again and again, radical journalists who enjoyed Akiniev's hearty mockery of everything they said. Comrade Olkha was invited to luncheon—by Akiniev, I fancy—and to my surprise he found time to come. I think he enjoyed himself very much: the Roumaniev table was by no means outside the scope of his appreciation, his manners were precise and amiable, he was encouraged to talk without stopping and that delighted him. He expected the next phase in the Revolution to come into operation by late August, he told us. Comrade Ulianov would be the chief public figure, while he himself was responsible for "the mechanics of organization." All property would be taken over on systematic lines—it was essential that the co-operative economy should take the place of capitalist ownership at a given moment, to allow of no interregnum during which a new individualism might assert itself. Compensation? No, he had not come across any reference to such a thing in the textbooks of socialization. The war in the meantime would be concluded by some form of agreement, the best that could be arranged, which would suffice until the creation of a people's government in Germany gave opportunity for revision on an ideological basis. . . . Yes, some members of the old ruling caste might find employment in the service of the proletarian government, if they were proved to be capable and ideologically sound—but he could make no promises, since most of the positions were already allocated. . . . Akiniev listened attentively, nodding, and puffing a cigar. "But really, M. Olkha!" Tatiana said from time to time. "Really, you seem to have some very strange ideas, unless I misunderstand them altogether." Julia Petrovna, who was there, thought it all most interesting, in fact fascinating: Comrade Olkha was not at all what she expected, in fact he was rather a dear. . . . But Qua-

trito, the Marinettist, was even more popular: his view that the performance of trained animals in a circus was aesthetically more satisfactory than the ballet, since it was a development of natural capability and thus essentially more realist than the cogitative antics of trained humans, was considered very interesting indeed.

I could never stay downstairs long, however. If my sense of duty did not call me up again, I was always summoned by some human voice. Gobodin, leaning over my shoulder to put down a plate of fish, would shout in my ear, "You'll have to be up in a minute, Captain barin, those women again. . . ." Or Yelisaveta, throwing open the door of her mother's drawing-room and addressing me as if I were the only person present, would say wearily: "Alexei, that woman again! You'll have to come and calm her." It was Mme Arnevitch; Mme Arnevitch, so Yelisaveta seemed to think, was always in the wrong. I would find her almost in tears, she would come and take me by the hand as if I were her only friend (as perhaps, unwillingly, I was) and pour her sorrows into my ear: the woman Bajouska had been rude and violent again, she had actually slapped her on the arm, where I should see a great weal if it were not for the long sleeves of her dress. All that Mme Arnevitch had done was to move Vava's cot a little, so that he could get the light on his storybook; Bajouska had been downstairs at the time, and Mme la Comtesse was out, so that there was no one else to do it, and now Bajouska was saying that no one but herself had any right to move anything that belonged to Vava. She, Bajouska, seemed to forget that Mme Arnevitch belonged to the old nobility of Bobruisk, that her cousin Olga Dmitrievna had married a member of the Odoevski-Maslov family, that she herself was very ill and had only accepted employment because her husband had been killed in the war and all his money stolen by wicked financiers in Warsaw. . . . But sometimes Bajouska, red with anger, would come to intercept me before I got upstairs, and then I would hear that Mme Arnevitch was a meddlesome old woman who could not keep her hands to herself: it was Mme Arnevitch's duty to attend on Mme Otraveskov, she had no right to be fiddling with Vava, whose wants she did not understand at all; Mme Arnevitch seemed to be occupied in nothing else but pushing the poor little boy about, Bajouska had found her actually washing his hands with some soap of her own, French-smelling soap; it was wrong and wicked to watch a child's hands with soap like that; Vava's own soap was kept in a special drawer in the sewing-room, locked up, so that people like Mme Arnevitch would not be able to steal it.

Yelisaveta gave me very little help. Since the night of our visit to

the Montresor she had become listless, often absent-minded, she sometimes assumed an odd punctiliousness as if I were the owner of the upper floors and she a visitor. "If you like, I will send Bajouska away altogether. That is all I can do, I cannot prevent her treating Vava as her property so long as she is here—unless you think it worth while to keep Vava's door locked. I suppose Mme Arnevitch is quite capable of attending to him, she's supposed to have had a nurse's training. . . ."

I said it was ridiculous to talk of excluding Bajouska, who knew better than anyone—except perhaps Yelisaveta herself—how to look after Vava's material needs. My hope was, of course, that as Natalia grew better she would take more and more of the responsibility for his welfare. Then there would be no occasion for these squabbles. . . . She looked at me wistfully, making no answer. Feeling that some kind of apology was expected, I said: "You know, it's a great worry to me that Nurse Arnevitch is upsetting your servants like this. I feel very badly about it. I'd get rid of her at once, only it would be hard for her to find another post—she is really very unfortunate—and she suits Natalia surprisingly well. Somehow the queer thing has the right temperament for nursing a nervous subject——"

"Yes," she said absently. "Yes, oh yes, if she suits Natalia that is all that matters."

She herself seldom came to see Vava now unless she knew that Natalia was not with him; I suppose Bajouska gave her word; and if I chanced to go in at these times I found her slightly distant in her manner with him. Before, their friendship had had the shape of peculiar and intimate understanding: for him she had thrown off her Petrograd sophistication, her restlessness was quieted, giving place to an unexpected patience which made her go on playing foolish games till Vava himself grew bored with them. They had their private jokes together; he would laugh aloud if she came to him wearing an eccentric hat that was the moment's mode; he made her describe a party she had been to and jeered at her silliness at going to parties where people only sat and talked; tugging at her necklace, he would describe the parties to which he himself would take her as soon as his back was healed—the Emperor and his wife were going to be there, they would all have a pillow-fight going on till the early morning, then they would drive to the Dvortzovi Bridge in a troika, and throw off their clothes, and all dive in with one great plop from the middle of the bridge, and swim right out to the sea. She would nod gravely, and say a little anxiously, "But Vava, there's a difficulty, I've just thought of it: what if the Neva was all covered with ice?" "Ah!" he said, joyfully taking the expected cue,

"the Emperor would dive first, making an enormous hole, and we should all dive into the hole, and swim-along-under-the-ice!" . . . That was altered now. I could see, as she came into the room, that she shook herself into a special brightness. She would say unnaturally: "Well, how is Vava today? Shall I read for a little while, or is Mother coming to play with you?" And she never stayed very long, she was always peeping at her watch as if she had an appointment to keep. One morning I caught her hesitating at the door, as if invisible ropes were pulling her in both directions. When she saw me she hurried away, without saying good-bye to him.

Vava, of course, noticed the change, and in time he spoke of it.

"Why is Lisveta always busy now? And why has she got that funny laugh? Perhaps she's going to be a very old lady soon, very old ladies make that kind of joke she does, they think it's very funny to be as little as I am. But very old ladies are always very, very small themselves, aren't they? Except Tatiana Vascovna. I suppose she has to stay big so as not to be too smaller than Lisveta, because you can't have your mother a lot smaller than you are, can you? Do you think Lisveta is going to get smaller and smaller and smaller, and keep laughing like that? Do you think she'll have to have a stick to walk with, and stick it into my tummy, and say *'Plenty of flesh on the boy, anyway!'* like old Mme Kuratchevski? . . . Do you think Lisveta likes Maman being here? . . . Well, why does she always go away if Maman comes in? And why does her voice go funny when she speaks to Maman?—oh, haven't you heard that?—it's like her voice going through a sieve and coming out all soft and snowy like cotton-wool, as if Maman was very important and had to be talked to like the Tsaritsa. Haven't you heard her do that?"

I said: "Well, after all, Maman is very important. She's very important to me—and to you."

"I don't think she's a bit important," he said with calculation. "I think she's very, very ordinary."

"Ordinary?"

"Oh, I don't mean not nice. I mean just ordinary, not important. I don't talk to her in a cotton-wool voice. . . . But you do sometimes. No, not the same sort of cotton-wool voice as Lisveta's, another sort of cotton-wool voice."

"Vava," I said, "there's something one has to remember. Maman, you know, was ill for a very long time. Really ill, feeling hurts all over. When you've been ill like that it takes a terrific long time to get quite well again——"

"Years and years and years?"

"Well, weeks—months perhaps. And all the time people are get-

ting well one has to be very gentle with them. I don't mean not laughing or talking, I only mean you've got to remember they may be tired, and if they're tired you have to keep as quiet as you can, or else they get all ill again."

"Is Maman going to stay here long?" he asked.

"Oh yes, she isn't going away any more—at least, not unless we go with her."

"And then Lisveta and Bajouska would come too?"

"Perhaps. I don't know."

He screwed up his eyes in the way of a business man who is suddenly presented with a difficult proposition. Then he said: "Dr. Tsekhovoi was here this morning, I knocked off his spectacles, but he didn't mind. I asked him if I'd be able to walk about in time to fight in the war, but he didn't know. Doctors are very ignorant, aren't they? But Lisveta says they're hardly doing the war at all now—I suppose it's because most of the soldiers have got their legs all shot like yours. Lisveta says they're doing a revolution now, is that right? Yes, I thought so, Lisveta always knows about that sort of thing, she knows everybody in Russia, practically. Is it going to be like the one they had in France, do you think? I've got about that in a book Lisveta gave me, all about the guillotine, chop, chop, chop. Do you think it hurts awfully to have your head chopped like that? I mean, if they do it very-very-very-very quickly? I should think it's all right if you keep perfectly still and try to think about something else. I asked Maman, but she didn't know, she's rather ignorant—I expect that's because of being ill all that time. Maman is rather a quiet person, don't you think? But I think she's pretty, don't you? Not like Lisveta; but pretty, and softer, and she smells more ordinary. I don't mean like Bajouska, she smells too ordinary. Maman comes in between—I think that's satisfactory, don't you think so? Dr. Tsekhovoi says they have very good doctors in Moscow. That's a terrific long way, isn't it? I was only thinking, because if we could go to Moscow we might find a doctor who could make me walk quickly. Then I'd be so much more satisfactory. . . ."

I had not spoken idly when I told Yelisaveta that Natalia should be able more and more to look after Vava herself. For already she was trying to do so. Sometimes I found it curious that her instinct for the work was so slow; forgetting that he had changed so much, growing out of babyhood, since she had last cared for him. She lacked the power to concentrate; she would get the brush and comb for his hair and then forget to do it, she would take away a nightshirt to mend and leave it half-done, so that Bajouska, saying nothing, but with a look of dour triumph, would have to take it away

and finish it. Always she was uncertain in her movements, and in the way she spoke to him, which was gentle but stiff. "Tell me, Vava, is it your dinner-time? I can't remember when you have your dinner. If it's your dinner-time I will see if I can find something for you." Or she would appeal to me, rather shyly, with a look of deep anxiety. "I expect you know when Vava's dinner-time is, I can't remember. . . . Do you think he's all right like that, with that pillow under his shoulders? I don't know if it's all right, I suppose the doctor would know. . . ." If Vava himself answered she often did not seem to hear him; if she responded, it was in a distrait fashion, "Yes, Vava, yes, all right, we will talk when you've had your dinner." But in spite of that, the awkwardness of her convalescence, the pains she took gave me a certain happiness, like the spring sun promising warmth to come. At first she had been content to watch him, sitting unobtrusively like a visitor in a hospital ward while Bajouska washed him and made him comfortable. Then, at first diffidently, and glancing at the door to be sure Bajouska was not coming, she had started doing little things herself, straightening his pillow, pulling the bedclothes in order. Her way was still a little furtive, as if she had been directly forbidden to touch him; and I used to read a newspaper, pretending not to see her, so that she should work less shyly. Then I would hear Vava directing her, "No, Maman, the top blanket goes the other way. . . . No, Maman, I do my own teeth, all you have to do is to hold me up a bit so I can spit." I thought that her capability improved, though only slowly. And by degrees she became a little more assertive: "It is all right, Bajouska, I've put a new pillow-case on already. . . . No, Mme Arnevitch, I am not tired today, not tired at all. You will leave me, please, I expect you have some shopping to do, please go away!" She was seldom demonstrative. But once, when the door was open and she did not hear me coming, I found her kneeling by Vava's cot, in which he lay asleep, and clasping his legs as if someone were trying to drag him away from her.

To the fidelity of Mme Arnevitch she responded more, at present, than to our affection. I think that a certain sympathy held them together, for both had suffered and were suffering.

I do not know if Mme Arnevitch had a second dress; certainly I paid her well enough to get one; but I remember her as always in the same dress, an evening robe of dove-grey marocain, rather low in the neck, with sleeves very bulbous at the elbows and fussily embroidered; a little faded now, and going at the hems, but always carefully stitched-up, the small holes camouflaged with little pieces of silk which nearly matched, most cunningly sewn in from under-

neath. I remember her shoes, which were French in shape and had once been silver; the thin stockings covering her ankles—everything she wore looked much too thin; the queer, ugly little brooch pinned on the pink modesty-vest. She herself seemed always to be conscious of the dignity of this apparel. She walked with careful steps, as the chief modiste in a dress-shop does, the fastidious movements of her hands and arms appeared to be controlled by the knowledge that a sudden jerk would bring her sleeves away from their moorings. That carefulness reached to her facial gestures: her smiles were quick and small, not showing too much of her rather clumsy teeth; when she was anxious her forehead wrinkled, but only very slightly; as you walked across the room her eyes would follow you the limit of their swivel, as if her neck was permanently stiff and its movements had to be economized. Her speech was dainty and a trifle precious, suggesting that all the little flutters of her lips and tongue had been assiduously practised. But within the compass set by this elegance of motion she was active, thoughtful of small necessities, eager to be useful; and her devotion to Natalia was never discouraged by indifference or occasional asperity. She had the steady watchfulness of a born nurse; she would sit, quietly sewing, with her eyes apparently fixed on her needle, and then, if Natalia wriggled her shoulders, she would be up at once to shift her cushions. She seemed to know when talk was desirable, and had always something non-committal to say: Vava's cold was better this morning, the medicine of Dr. Tsekhovoi's was plainly most efficacious; the newspapers said there was sunshine in the south now, in Kaluga the flowers were showing deliciously. Mme Arnevitch had herself been in Kaluga once, and had been much impressed by the piety of the peasants there. . . . But for long periods they were silent, occasionally giving each other small shy smiles.

Their greatest bonds, I think, were a common, unspoken fear of Yelisaveta and a rebelliousness against Bajouska. Mme Arnevitch did not, indeed, shrink into a corner upon Yelisaveta's appearance: on the contrary, she came forward and launched herself into a great deal of social pleasantness, of dainty chatter, of little courtesies; but I saw that she trembled. And for a long time neither had any defence against Bajouska's rough autocracy. If they were together in Vava's room when her heavy footsteps came along the passage, Mme Arnevitch, making some excuse, would glide away to her own room. Natalia, perhaps, would stay for a little while, standing some distance back from the cot; and so long as she was there Bajouska worked noisily, thrusting chairs out of her way, banging down a basin, hurling pillows on to the sofa. It was useless for me to pro-

test—she became stone-deaf on these occasions. And soon Natalia, with a little sigh, would go away too. It was curious to see how Bajouska thawed when the ladies had disappeared. All her movements became quiet again, she found her tongue and chattered to Vava as country women chatter to their children, she sang to him, and smiled, she ran her fingers delightedly through his soft hair, she took infinite pains to collect the figures he had cut out of an old fashion-book and put them within his reach. Vava enjoyed that spoiling. And I would leave them together, and go to the ladies' room, where Natalia sometimes glanced up as I came in, and sometimes did not seem aware of my entrance; while Mme Arnevitch with many tiny smiles and tiny shakings of her head, with many knowing, sympathetic gestures, conveyed to me that Mme Otraveskov was a trifle fatigued this morning, that I must forgive what had otherwise seemed a certain coldness. . . . There was a day, however, when, just as I reached Vava's door, I heard Natalia saying gently: "I shall tidy Vava's room myself today, Bajouska." And again, after a second's silence, in her low voice, with only the smallest emphasis, "No, Bajouska, *I* shall do Vava's room today!" Presently Bajouska came out, boisterously; gave me a stony glance and clumped off down the corridor.

No, I was not without some happiness in those days. Vava's smile and his ready laughter, his calm acceptance of the women about him, these things were daily refreshment to my spirit, spoilt only by the longing to see him on his feet. And to have my beloved near me, so that at night I could steal into her room and watch her sleeping; to live within sound of her soft voice, to see constantly her small, gentle hands, that was like watching from the shadows a distant altar and feeling if only faintly the warmth of its benison. Yet often, at that time, I found my voice difficult to manage, my eyes obscured, till I had locked myself in my bedroom for a little while and wept there without restraint. I knew that my sorrow was of small foundation, when in streets a verst away children were starving, while south and westward human pain spread like a long black cloud to both the seas. But her loneliness touched me like rough clothes rubbing an old sore, her modesty was so complete and pitiful. "You and Yelisaveta"—she constantly used those words as if we belonged together to a world distinct from hers. "It is for Yelisaveta Akinievna to say, this house doesn't belong to me. . . . You will speak to Yelisaveta, perhaps, I do not know her very well, Yelisaveta will understand that if you tell her. . . ." Even in speaking of Vava she hardly claimed possession. "I should like Vava to go out today, if the fog clears away. You must ask

Yelisaveta if she minds." I told her often that as soon as I had cleared up some business in Petrograd we should go away together, to Chaveschok perhaps, where we should stay with her father until we had found a house of our own. But she would say, "I don't know if Yelisaveta would like that. You will have to get permission from the authorities, Yelisaveta would not be able to let me go unless the authorities agreed." And when I said that it was for us to decide, that no one could interfere with our lives, she answered with a kind of obstinacy, "Yelisaveta does not want Vava to go away."

To Yelisaveta herself she showed, as I observed, no hostility; only a cool acceptance, with a trace of fear. In spite of living so close together they contrived to meet very seldom; when they met it was in Vava's room, and one or other would almost instantly go away—as a rule it was Yelisaveta. She, for her part, showed my dear one no little kindness; for whenever she came into Natalia's room it was to ask about some small comfort: would she be easier in a lower chair?—Yelisaveta would try to find one; had she been disturbed by the brawl in the Priest's Alley last night?—if so, Tatiana Vascovna would probably find her a room on the floor below which faced the other way, since nothing anyone said would make the Bolsheviki quieter. And Natalia would answer very gravely, not quite looking at her face: the chair she had was very comfortable; no, she had not heard any noise. I tried sometimes to draw them together into talk: had Yelisaveta seen this dressing-gown that Natalia was making? Yes, for Vava. "Do show Yelisaveta the stuff we've got for the lining, yes, the scarlet stuff. . . . There, don't you think that's *du vrai chic?*" But they would only answer to me, as if I were a teacher and they my pupils. I recall only one occasion when Natalia opened a subject herself; she had been particularly well that morning, apparently listening a little when I read her some pieces from the newspaper; and when Yelisaveta came to ask if she would have sterlet for luncheon, a luxury that Gobodin had picked up on the Alexander Wharf, she asked spontaneously, "Your husband, Anton Antonovitch, is he still alive? I remember him quite well, I was in Court once when he was defending a political prisoner. . . ." To which Yelisaveta answered casually, "Anton? Oh yes, yes, he is still alive."

§

I was painting every day, badly but with industry. Jakob Moseievitch was willing to buy from me occasionally as he had done long before the war; chiefly, I think, from his fathomless generosity,

though he said that when things improved he might be able to dispose of small interiors in Stockholm—where, as he quite kindly expressed it, "taste remains fairly constant." The work gave me no pleasure—for the time being I had lost all grasp of colour values—and I kept it up chiefly for economic reasons; for my officer's pay, which mysteriously still continued, must surely lapse before long, and although our small town property at Zabenspov looked safer than most, that single source of income could not be relied on much longer. This occupation reduced the hours when I could be with Natalia; but of my own accord I reduced them still further. I had to be economical in the time I spent with her, for it still fatigued her to see me too much or too often; she was like a northern flower that could not tolerate the tropic sun of love I would have poured on her. I no longer talked to her of the past, for she could not seek her way to it without a troubled perplexity. I talked much of Vava, of the Dr. Mishlayevski, who might possibly make Vava well if only we could find him. Of the politics which filled our mental lives in Petrograd I spoke only as of a trouble which must be over before we started the new life in a place of our own. Once, to explain why we stayed in Petrograd so long, I spoke of my friendship with Anton and of his danger; but that displeased her; "Anton Scheffler?" she said, "I do not care for that man," and I had to turn quickly to something else. Generally, when we were alone, I talked of Natalia herself: how much stronger she seemed to be now, how much prettier she had become since she left the hospital; soon, I said, when it grew warmer, we should have some drives together, we might drive to Tsarskoe or to Ladoga; that would give her cheeks a colour. "Vava will come with us and we can prop him up to see the lake. He'll be so excited to have you with him, and I shall enjoy that more than anything for years and years. . . ." I tried to make her interested in clothes; I had a tall mirror moved from my room into hers, I got hold of an old French dressmaker who knew her job, and Tatiana, always ready to be excited over dress, got stuffs and patterns for me from a little shop in the Kamennostrovski Prospekt. When the dress was made there was a great gathering for the trying-on, and Natalia would stand looking rather wan and tired before the mirror, while Mlle Triquet, unhindered by the arsenal of pins between her teeth, discoursed pugnaciously of technicalities, and Tatiana eyed her with the glum intensity of connoisseurship, and Mme Arnevitch hopped and chirruped between them, graciously stooping to pick up the pins as Mademoiselle dropped them. Then I would coax these ladies away, and when my dear one had rested for a while I persuaded her to pose for me alone. A little awkwardly,

like a peasant boy newly arrayed in his master's livery, she stood again before the mirror. I came behind her and held her arms lightly, smiling at her reflection, telling her how beautiful she looked; and if she seemed complaisant I would venture to rub my chin against her hair.

This patience which cost me so much was not unrewarded. Although she grew fidgety if I stayed too long, she often looked pleased to see me when I gave my special knock and went into her room. She had come to accept me as her intermediary: if she thought that Vava wanted an extra blanket on his cot she asked me to beg one of Yelisaveta; if Bajouska had unwarrantably carried off some property of his it was I who had to go and deal with her. Each one of these requests gave me new pleasure, for each was fresh proof that she took me as a part of her existence; and I tried by constant usefulness to make that position firmer, till I should become a necessity instead of a mere convenience. It was not easy to play the part unobtrusively; I was as one hired to serve in a house he has once possessed, who must watch himself against joining in the conversation of the table; but I was constantly repaid for the diffidence of my approach to her. On a day when she had not greeted me, and I sat quietly by the door, she suddenly looked up and begged me to come nearer the stove. Once, when I said she looked tired and perhaps would rather be alone, she answered, "No, Alexei, your room will be cold, you must stay here." And above those great occasions, one day stands out in memory, lit with peculiar glory. I had been to Thöldte's to buy colours; the news in the town was bad, the Mensheviki had suffered another reverse and it looked as if the least scrupulous elements in the Taurida Palace were going to get more and more of their own way. I came back through streets filthy with the night's rain, where the crowds standing about the kiosks seemed more excited than usual; a cold drizzle was still falling, my leg hurt me a good deal and I was feeling much depressed. Before taking off my coat I went to Natalia's room, as I always did, but she did not seem ready to see me; she only said, "If you will shut the door, please—there is a draught from the passage," and went on talking to Mme Arnevitch about some needle problem. I went away to my own quarters, feeling regretfully that I had somehow vexed her; but as I was changing my socks there was a knock on the door rather like the one I used myself, and to my astonishment Natalia came in. She had never been in this room before. At first she hardly looked at me, but her eyes caught her own portrait standing on the table, that small photograph which I had taken with me to the trenches and which in Krozkohl

had been hardly less than an Ikon to me. This she picked up, and for a few moments scrutinized it in a puzzled way as if it showed some friend she had known long ago and whose name she had forgotten. Then, turning to me, she said, "You are very wet, Alexei, you shouldn't be out in the streets on a day like this, it's bad for your leg. You should take a cab or something." With that she went away, but presently she came again, carrying a glass of tea, which she put down on the table. "There," she said, looking at the photograph again, "that will warm you a bit."

I was so much moved by this kindness that I could hardly thank her; and she had got to the door before I collected myself. In a voice which I could not keep quite steady I said, "My dear, won't you stay here just a little while, just while I drink it?"

She stopped and stood still for what seemed a long time, her head bent and her knuckles pressing her forehead. She said at last: "I ought to go back, Mme Arnevitch will be lonely. Mme Arnevitch doesn't like to be alone when there's noise in the streets, it makes her frightened." But still she did not go at once. She wandered towards me as one walking in a dream, and quite suddenly she brought her eyes to look at my face, acutely and unhastily as she had examined the photograph. I smiled, but she did not see my smile. That scrutiny gave place to shyness, and as if my face were a light too strong for her eyes she turned them away. But, pausing again, seeming as anxious to prolong this time as I was, she bent and touched my hand, and said seriously, "I like your hands, so warm, so warm."

That moment I remember as like some moments in my work; when, seeing plainly that a tree's or a cloud's shape still needs another tone to perfect it, one dreads to lay the brush, fearing that a false stroke will tumble all the labour that has gone before. I cannot describe how cautiously I turned my hand to grasp her fingers, how patiently I held and stroked before I kissed them. But when I tried to draw her body into my arms she held away. "No," she said, "no, I can't leave Mme Arnevitch by herself, I will come here to talk another time, some time when I am not busy."

As she went out she turned to look at me again, still gravely. And she said, "You must take you tea quickly, chéri, it will be getting cold."

Like the health you find in high mountains, it stayed with me and nourished my spirit for many weeks, that day's happiness.

§

To get away, to get away from the smell of that house and the cold, dirty streets outside; to be rid of Yelisaveta's sad voice, and Bajouska's complaints, and the chatter of strangers in the entrance hall! When we were by ourselves in a small house, with carpets worn by our own feet, with pictures familiar to us as to no one else, china we had chipped, forks we had bent ourselves, then we should grow again into our partnership.

I had ceased to trouble about a formal discharge from service. Perhaps I had still some obligation towards the heterogeneous body on which the mantle of Nikolas was supposed to have fallen; but I would not stay in Petrograd to satisfy the whims of a confused bureaucracy—if they could find some service within my powers they must seek me out. That resolution made, I determined to take my family to Chaveschok on the very day that Anton's trial was over. I think Yelisaveta knew this, though I had not told her.

The time was approaching. Strubensohn came to see me and sat twisting the ring on his little finger—that was the only way he allowed himself to betray excitement. It was all arranged, he said. Zimbayev had sent him formal advice that the first hearing was to be on the 23rd, in a special chamber of the Stakelberg building, under the presidency of General Loris Velnikov. Velnikov would be hostile in sentiment to the defendant—he was of the old school, a rigid disciplinarian—but his impartiality could be relied on. It was understood that the witnesses had already started from Paulskov, though Strubensohn was not quite sure of this; in any case prosecuting counsel would have comparatively little time to sort and codify their evidence, which was all to the good; Strubensohn would struggle to prevent any further delays.

"I have actually been allowed an interview with Scheffler already," he said. "I persuaded one of the sub-editors of *Dielo Navoda* to give me a few paragraphs on the case, and that, I think, forced Zimbayev's hand to some extent—the last thing Gretzkov wants is to have the matter brought up in the Taurida. . . . Yes, he was brought to my chambers under escort, at night—really it's astonishing how carefully these people pick their steps. But I can't say the interview was very satisfactory. The escorting officer was present, of course; and Count Scheffler is really a little—well, difficult—in the rôle of defendant. It's so long, I suppose, since he was in practice that he has rather lost the legal point of view. Or perhaps I should say that he quite naturally feels the inclination to conduct his own case, and his technique differs from mine—no two of us, of course, would approach any case in quite the same way. Scheffler's greatest anxiety, as I understand it, is to emphasize in Court the scandalous

conditions prevailing at Mariki-Matesk. He speaks of having a duty in that matter; he is inclined (if I may say so without appearing unsympathetic) to regard the Court as a convenient rostrum for the propagation of military reforms. He is living mentally, you must understand, in a world that may be said to have passed away on March the twelfth—he has hardly seen any newspapers in the last three months, he cannot realize that with so many ardent reformers engaged in turning the country upside-down there is scarcely standing room for another. . . . It is my own intention, of course, to introduce the scandals of the Mariki administration as part of the evidence. But it has to be done with the greatest caution, it requires a very exact touch, otherwise there is a grave risk of prejudicing the Court in the wrong direction. The panel will consist, you see, of officers so highly experienced as to be unaware that anything could be really wrong in an establishment under military direction. It will be a great shock to those gentlemen to hear of such a scandal. And the impression I want to make is this: that Count Scheffler, holding the honour of Russian military organization as dear as they do, has taken up his present position largely in order that a certain blemish on its reputation may be noticed and rectified. Scheffler himself, on the other hand, is all ready to say that the whole organization is verminous, and that the General Staff was as much to blame for conditions at Mariki as anyone else. That would be tactically sound if the case were to be heard by a committee of the Bolsheviki, but in the present circumstances . . .? Still, I am hoping that he will take the case a little more seriously when we have a further interview tomorrow. I have not, perhaps, been altogether straightforward with him: I felt it necessary to leave him with the belief that losing the case is the same thing as losing his neck. But at present he still seems strangely indifferent. . . ."

I had dinner downstairs that evening. For once the Roumanievs were dining all together at home, Sopojnikin was there, also a friend of Akiniev's called Gabriel Torguine and one or two others I did not know.

"Strubensohn tells me the hearing is fixed for the twenty-third," Akiniev said. "I'm thankful for that, very thankful. It has been unbearable, all this delay and procrastination. Well, whatever happens I don't see that they can do much to the poor boy. I was a good deal worried at first, it looked to me like a capital charge—I mean, direct disobedience, obstinate insubordination, I don't quite see how even Strubensohn could get round it. However, the capital penalty's gone now—a great mistake to my way of thinking, from the point

of view of general expediency, I mean—however, it looks as if Anton can't come to much harm, though I suppose he'll get a terrible lecturing from that dreadful old bore Velnikov."

"On the other hand," Sopojnikin said slowly, "there's at least a chance of the death penalty coming in again, quite soon. Sochinovo and his group are pushing it for all their worth, even Olkha and his friends are beginning to see—though they won't admit it publicly—that until the war's wound up one way or another there's got to be some means of discipline."

"But could that operate retrospectively?" I asked.

Sopojnikin turned out his hands.

"The penalty was in force when the alleged misdemeanour occurred," he said quietly.

"What I think," Tatiana said from the end of the table, "is that they'd let Anton off if only he would say he's sorry. I'm sure they would. But Anton is so obstinate, it's the one bad trait in his character. . . . Gobodin, give the General some more fish."

"You saw that piece in *Dielo Navoda?*" Akiniev asked at large. "A most disreputable point of view, of course—I can't see why no one suppresses that paper—but I thought it might do Anton some good. It puts his point of view very strongly—I can't think where the fellow got all his facts——"

"No," Torguine said softly, "I doubt if any of it will do Anton Antonovitch any good—all this talk and publicity." He put down his glass of chianti and stared at it distantly as if he were a long-sighted man reading from manuscript; he was a bald, pale, shiny creature in the forties whose body seemed designed to hold his brains with no cubic centimetre of room left over for anything else. "Gretzkov, you see, is a peculiarly obstinate person. Granted, he's frightened of Olkha's bunch, and that has stirred him enough to get the hearing hurried up. But army discipline is his Old and his New Testament, and the more people talk about this as a test case the more determined he'll be to make the result demonstrate that discipline still holds good. The only hope for Anton Antonovitch, as I see it, lies in his pleading mental aberration consequent on the privations of his imprisonment in Austria. That would give Velnikov a chance to treat him gently without putting himself on the wrong side of Gretzkov—which of course he can't afford to do."

Sopojnikin nodded rather grimly.

"Yes, but is that the kind of thing Anton is in the least likely to plead?"

Akiniev turned to me.

"Well, Alexei Alex'itch, what do you think?"

"No," I said, "I'm quite sure he wouldn't, not under any persuasion."

Torguine peered into his wine as if trying to see a fish in it.

"In that case . . ." he said.

Yelisaveta had appeared to be listening to a woman talking soulfully into her left ear. Turning suddenly, she said in a voice frighteningly quiet:

"Yes, M. Torguine? In that case—what will they do to my husband?"

Torguine drew himself together as if a high wind had whipped off his clothes. "Well, really, Comtesse, it's hard to say——"

Yelisaveta smiled at him like the sun in November. "So that wriggling of your mouth and shoulders is just a nervous habit?" She turned to Sopojnikin. "Do you know what he means?"

"My dear, it's no use worrying," he answered unhappily. "What we all hope—I no less than anyone else—is that the Court will be in a broadminded mood."

"Yes, yes," she said drily, "we are all of us hoping all the time to draw the first ticket in a public lottery. Don't you see—is it impossible for any male person to see—that I'm anxious to know what will happen if the Court does *not* chance to be blind and deaf that morning? Or do you think I'm being unduly sentimental? Perhaps I ought not to be influenced by the fact that the defendant in this most interesting case happens to have married me a few years ago. . . ."

Akiniev looked at her with his underlip turned down in schoolboy alarm. "I think, my dear, you're being a little unreason——"

"Be quiet!" she said. "Viktor Sergeievitch, will you answer me, please!"

"Yes!" he said promptly. "If you really want to know, I think—supposing Anton can't clear himself—that he'll be sent to a new post chosen for its dangerous character. That happened in a similar case that Neimitch dealt with. . . . I'm sorry, my dear Yelisaveta, but you insisted on my telling you."

"Yes," she said briefly. "Yes, yes, that was what I wanted to know. . . . You were telling me, Mme Debeaufreton, about your first love-affair. . . ."

In a few moments I noticed her slipping away from the room; looking old and ill.

§

Strubensohn's friend on the *Dielo Navoda* evidently meant to earn his money. A whole column on the case appeared, headed (as

I remember it) *"The Cadets hold in a Czarist Dungeon a famous Advocate of the Workers' Rights."* On the following day *Podvig,* without acknowledgement to any contemporary, discovered the affair and treated it across four columns. It put forward the interesting theory that Count Scheffler had never been to the war at all, but had been kept secretly in the Fortress; an officer of the same name had been guilty of some peccadillo in connection with the treatment of German prisoners, and the Cadets were making this an excuse for getting the famous Workers' advocate out of their way. No fewer than four influential comrades of the Revolutionary Soldier-Pensioners' Party had stated that they were ready to swear to the difference in identity, and Gretzkov, the bourzhui military advocate, had actually admitted it in a letter which could be proved to be in his handwriting. . . . To this Prince Rozhdestniev's newspaper replied briefly: certain insinuations had been made in a popular news-sheet about the treatment of a Lieutenant Scheffler, awaiting trial for grave offences committed at Mariki-Matesk, the well-known rest-camp for invalid soldiers. They were able to state, on the authority of no smaller a personage than Prince Rozhdestniev, formerly Secretary and Chief Officer of the Central Casualty Clearing Department, Southern Area, that these insinuations were entirely unfounded. The defendant officer had already admitted his guilt without reservation, and it only remained for the Court to decide on penalties proportionate to the gravity of his subversive activities. . . . At a street meeting in the Kamennostrovski Prospekt I chanced to hear a man proclaim that Count Scheffler was actually a woman in disguise, and was being persecuted by the capitalist-liberals because she was the actual murderer of Rasputin. Yes, the case of Anton Scheffler was in the market place.

"All the same, I don't see much hope for him," Sopojnikin told me gloomily. "Gretzkov regards him as the archetype of those who've disgraced Russia to the whole world by poisoning the army's morale. And he won't forgive him for that."

§

"You will stay till the trial is over, I can count on that?" Yelisaveta asked me, with a touch of her fierceness, as if I had threatened to desert her. We were standing at the top of the stairs; most of our conversations seemed to take place there. "Yes, I know I've no claim on you to stay, you can get on perfectly well without me now. But Strubensohn can't do anything without your evidence, he says so himself. If you were to go away now——"

I said, "I've promised already——"

"Yes, yes, you are a dear!" she said. "In a way I am very fond of you, Alexei, I wish—no, I won't say that, I won't say that now. And will you, if you can, try to keep Tatiana away from the newspapers. Gobodin is such a fool, he finds them for her whatever I say to him. . . ."

In truth, it was chiefly Yelisaveta's own fault. She bought every newspaper of any importance each day, she left them all over the house, in the lavatories, half way up the stairs, whence Gobodin carefully collected them; he liked Tatiana to read him bits that he thought might be interesting. Hitherto, Tatiana had hardly read the papers herself at all. Those of the Left she regarded as mere incomprehensible childishness, and *Novoye Vremya* had become impossibly dull, with no court news, no handsome victories, hardly anything in which a cultivated person could be expected to find interest. But now, increasingly concerned about her daughter's queer humours, she began searching the sheets for any news about her son-in-law and read these pieces with growing bewilderment. How could they possibly say that Anton had never been to the war, when she herself had seen him in uniform and he had sent Yelisaveta the photograph of a ruined village where he was staying? As for Anton being a woman, as it said in the Journal of the City Transport Workers' Soviet—well certainly he and Yelisaveta had had no children, but surely in these days of horrible frankness between the sexes Yelisaveta would have found out. Her eyes wandered to other parts of the paper, she grew increasingly perplexed. These people talked as if the war was already over, as if Russia had passed into the hands of people such as Gobodin and operatives from the factories. But if that were so, who would put an end to all this turbulence, this constant shouting and letting off of rifles, which went on in the streets? No doubt Akiniev would have some simple answer to these perplexities, but Akiniev had gone off in a great hurry to Moscow; on private business, he had told her.

I found her one evening all alone and in some distress. She had come across an article in a paper called *Pravda* about the work of the Petrograd Military Industrial Committee. She could not make head or tail of it, it seemed to be mostly about money and about "secret commissions," but she knew that Akiniev had been a member of that Committee up to the beginning of the year, and the writer of the article had expressed himself in such a way as to suggest that Akiniev had behaved dishonourably over the money which had passed through his hands. Did I think that she ought to write to Akiniev about it? He had forgotten to leave an address, but a letter

sent to the Swiatoslaw Club always reached him. Or did I think she should only be worrying him unnecessarily?

I said that I could see no harm in her writing, but that she mustn't pay too much attention to anything the newspapers said—there was a great deal of irresponsible journalism at the present time.

"Yes," she said meditatively, "yes, I think I'll send the paper on to him, then he'll know just what he ought to do about it. Dear Alexei, it's so nice to have you here to advise me, everyone else talks to me as if I was a fool, they hide things from me, even Akiniev does. It makes it all so difficult for me, when I do try to be a good wife and mother. . . . No, I'm sure Akiniev won't let himself be worried, he's such a wonderfully good-tempered man, he never worries."

I said: "Certainly he wouldn't trouble too much about anything in *Pravda.*"

She nodded. "No, of course not!" But her eyes had wandered from mine and I saw that her thoughts had moved on. "But there's an odd paragraph in Prince Rozhdestniev's paper that I don't understand either," she said suddenly. And now she was looking at my face again. "It says that the Duma has called for a formal report on Prince Roumaniev's transactions, as a preliminary to further action. I asked Yelisaveta what that meant, and she only said I shouldn't bother my head with newspapers. Do you know what it means?"

I had no reply in ready shape, and while I hesitated she astonished me by saying:

"It means, I suppose, that Akiniev is supposed to have stolen some money belonging to the Industrial Committee?"

"Stolen money? Oh, it couldn't possibly. . . . There may be some irresponsible suggestion that he used money passing through his hands in a way that is not considered—correct."

"I know what you mean," she said quickly. "I know the word—what is it? I've heard Akiniev use it himself—embezzlement."

"That's a word," I said, "that no newspaper would dare to use, even in these days, in connection with a man like——"

"No," she answered, "no, I haven't seen the word used in any of the papers." She was still regarding my face intently. "But you've heard it used? I mean, in connection with Akiniev?"

I replied: "Yes, it has been used. . . . You must remember that Petrograd is full of malicious gossip at the present time, and no one who held any position under the former régime is exempt from attack of one kind or another."

"Yes," she said calmly, "I quite understand that." Then, "And

I understand your anxiety to save my feelings, you have always been very sweet to me, Alexei. . . . Akiniev, you know, is rather boyish in some of his ways. He does things without thinking. I've known him in very mischievous moods, he sometimes plays practical jokes on people. Once he told Gobodin that the Okranha was going to arrest him; poor Gobodin, he got quite ill with worrying. So I suppose if he had a lot of money given him to spend on guns and things he may have been thoughtless about it—I've known him to spend some of my money on a new yacht—M. Grünauer gave it to him for a paper he'd got me to sign. Of course it was just thoughtlessness, he gave it all back to me—at least, as far as I can remember. . . ."

Rather to my relief I did not see her again for several days. She was visiting a good deal. I heard, indirectly, that she had been insulted by Mme Scrydlski at a party given by the Pobiedspovs, and had taken it very well. It was on the following Tuesday (I have it in my diary) that she came upstairs to see me again. Natalia and I were together in Vava's room, watching while Bajouska bathed him. She came in very quietly and for a few moments I did not notice her. When I turned round she looked shy, as I had not thought possible in one so practised socially. She said "No, I don't want to disturb you, no no, don't pay any attention to me! Good morning, Natalia Konstantinova, how fine your boy looks without any clothes on! But you should be sitting down—Alexei, why do you let her stand like that, it's not good for convalescents to stand! Good morning, Vava, how are you today?" She was gathering us all into the arc of her eyes, which were smiling, but not without the moisture of pity. She said, "It's so nice—so nice to see you all together!" Vava, wriggling and yelping with excitement as Bajouska sponged him, grinned back at her and shouted, "There's an old witch, there's an old witch looking for her broom!" and she laughed and shook her fist at him, and even Natalia faintly smiled. But I knew that some anxiety must have brought her up here, for she was always nervous of Yelisaveta's territory; and presently I took her away to my own room.

She sat on the sofa and loosened the neck of the coat she was wearing. "I shouldn't be disturbing you like this," she said, "only I haven't seen you for such ages. I've been trying to have a little excitement, just to take my mind off—well, worries and things. But it's no good, Petrograd is uniformly dull, everybody's wearing their last year's clothes and they talk of nothing but politics, even the nicest people. There is no culture left. I went to the Derzhavin Theatre and they were doing something by that educated peasant man—

what is his name?—M. Tchekov. Really I've never witnessed anything so desperately provincial, except perhaps the people sitting in the boxes. . . ."

But I knew that this was not what she had come to talk about, and I asked her boldly, "Have you heard from Akiniev Mihailovitch yet?"

"No," she said, looking at her rings, "no, not directly. I mean, no, I haven't heard from him at all. But I've had a visit from M. Grünauer which has worried me rather. Of course he was very sweet —dear M. Grünauer, I am so fond of him—though I detest his wife—he is always so helpful over banking-papers, which I'm so stupid at. But it's like this. Akiniev promised he would let him have some money, towards what he's borrowed, by about a week ago. And he asked me very nicely if I could give him Akiniev's address so that he could write about it. And of course I couldn't. I had to say that if he wrote to the Swiatoslaw Club the letter might reach him, but I couldn't be certain. I asked him if he really wanted the money very badly, and he went on to a long explanation that I couldn't follow, all about banking. He doesn't seem to want it for himself, only for other people he's borrowed from. You see, a lot of people who are rather thoughtless like Akiniev have borrowed some of M. Grünauer's money, and if none of them pay him he'll have to go to prison. I said that of course Akiniev would get him out, but he seemed to think you couldn't be quite certain how they managed the prisons under this new government."

"Do you know what the amount in question is?" I asked.

"The amount? I think he said forty thousand roubles. Of course I said, 'Surely you can just take the money out of my account and pay it into Akiniev's and then take it out of Akiniev's into your own —whatever-it-is.' But he says there isn't any money in my account either, or nothing to speak of, because of the peasants not paying rents now. . . . Alexei, is it boring you terribly, all this?"

I said, "No. Wait, let me think! Forty thousand. . . . You know I got rid of my villa at Voepensk last month? It didn't fetch much of a price, there's no market for what they call the bourzhui house at present, but it's given me a little to fall back on. As a matter of temporary convenience, will you let me——"

"No," she said decisively. "Thank you, Alexei, thank you very much, but I don't see it's any good going on borrowing. I mean, whatever you borrow——"

I said: "But after all you've done for me, letting me use your house as if it were my own——"

"No," she repeated, "I wouldn't think of that, really I couldn't

possibly think of it. But thank you, it was very kind of you. . . . If only Akiniev was here he would think of something quite simple, he's never been at a loss to find anything like forty thousand roubles from somewhere. . . . I thought Yelisaveta might help me, but she seems to have spent nearly all her money on this case of Anton's. . . . But it's all right, I only wanted to tell you because I knew you'd be sympathetic. I've thought it all out, and it's going to be quite all right. I bought a new evening dress yesterday, and that always seems to give me inspiration. I'm going to sell some things. There's lots of furniture and pictures and things, and my jewellery and so on, that we don't really need. One ought to get quite a lot for that, don't you think so?"

I said, "The market for articles of luxury isn't very good at present——"

"Oh well, Grünauer will know where to sell the things, he knows all that sort of thing. And I might have some of my friends here, to some sort of party, and see if they would buy some of the carpets. After all, one can live without carpets, can't one?"

§

I do not know what had actually passed between her and Yelisaveta. But Yelisaveta that evening, breaking off in the middle of a conversation about Vava's meals, said suddenly: "I suppose you've heard about Mother's money difficulties? She seems to confide in you over everything."

I said I knew there was some difficulty over a loan.

"Yes," she said thoughtfully. ". . . It's rather stupid of me, I suppose, but I always imagined Tatiana's money was all right, I hadn't bothered to inquire about it. And for that reason I always thought there was that for me to fall back on. It's unfortunate, things being like this just when I want to fall back. . . . Well, as I was saying, I think Vava ought to have something more at night before he's put to sleep. Some sort of gruel or something."

"Listen!" I said. "It's quite impossible for me to go on staying here as your mother's guest with things as they are. No, I'm not going to run away from Petrograd. I shall find some kind of lodging—there are places in the Petersburg quarter—I shall only want four rooms, Vava and I can sleep together——"

"What is the good?" she said. "We have a roof here, why give it up? Grünauer won't turn us out, he's much too kind-hearted, and in any case he couldn't dispose of a great place like this with the estate market like it is, you know that as well as I do. Besides, it's

only a few days now. Directly Anton's free I shall be making new plans myself." I suppose she saw a look of doubt in my eyes, for she said hastily: "Oh yes, I am quite hopeful. Kahn Abramovitch says that if things don't go as he wants them to begin with—that's to say, if he can't frighten Velnikov with political innuendoes—he will still be able to plead mental aberration. He's going to read extracts from Anton's letters to me—yes, I know it's a filthy and detestable business, but the law puts everyone into a cesspool, it can't be helped, and if Anton won't make a single movement in his own defence we've got to do something. . . . There's no need to worry about Tatiana, she'll find a way out somehow. . . ."

§

In talking to me, Strubensohn was not so optimistic. He still feared that the hearing would be postponed at the last moment; Zimbayev continued to be evasive about the witnesses for the prosecution, he hinted that they were in Petrograd already but Strubensohn did not believe that. Zimbayev was being discreet to the point of rudeness, Strubensohn did not care for the man's behaviour at all. "And this other case," he said dejectedly, "the Princess insists that I am to handle that too, she says that no one else is competent to deal with it. It's very flattering—I am always charmed by the way Mme Roumaniev treats me—but I simply can't see how I'm to undertake the vast work involved. And though I don't like to mention this—it is known, of course, that Mme Roumaniev has no money at all, so the work can hardly be remunerative."

"But what case?" I asked. "I haven't heard of anything——"

"But you know, surely, that a writ has been served to Prince Roumaniev's solicitors?"

§

I wanted to spend quietly the last evening before the trial. Strubensohn had said that he was coming to see me again in the course of the evening; in the meantime I had correspondence to attend to, plans to make, and I had to go through my notes on everything which had occurred at Mariki so that I should give my evidence clearly and confidently. A note had reached me through Strubensohn from Anton himself. "Dearest Alexei," he wrote, "Just one thing: don't let yourself get involved over this business. Strubensohn is a good fellow, but he will try to get more (or less) out of his witnesses than they have any right to give him. Except for Yelisaveta's sake I don't care in the least what happens. The world seems to have

changed in such a way that I should no longer understand it if I were free; the idea of freedom puzzles me, I can't remember what it was like. I still think I acted as a Christian was bound to (though God knows I don't think I'm less fallible in my judgements than anyone else). Anyway, I am quite content." I wanted to think over that.

Tatiana was giving a party. I had begged her to excuse me. But Yelisaveta, wandering forlornly about the house in a décolleté evening dress, interrupted me again and again: Bajouska had heard that I meant to take Vava away soon, she was in a great state, would I go and say something nice to her. . . . Did I think that Yelisaveta ought to be in Court herself, if Kahn Abramovitch could arrange it? She wanted to go, but thought it might make Anton nervous. . . .

In Vava's room Natalia was sitting by herself. Tatiana, out of her kindness, had invited Mme Arnevitch to join the merrymaking downstairs, and Mme Arnevitch, after hunting out an Indian shawl to go over her grey dress, had eagerly accepted, radiant at her social triumph. It was none too warm in Vava's room at night, but Natalia, in the quiet, shy way that broke down all opposition, insisted that she must be there because Vava had been over-excited and restless. I lit a candle for her to sit by, and set a screen to keep its light from Vava's eyes. I asked, would she like something to read, or her sewing to do. No, she was too tired, she would just sit and watch Vava. "You wouldn't like me to stay with you?" "No, Alexei, I am quite all right by myself." As I was leaving her Vava woke up and called to me, begging me to stay in the room; it frightened him to see Maman's shadow so big and sprawling on the wall. But he was very sleepy, and while Natalia sat quite still I soothed him, telling him that the shadow was funny, that I would draw him some more funny shadows tomorrow if he would go to sleep now .I turned his pillow over, and tucked him in again, and though he cried a little he presently slept.

I went back to my own room, but I could not be at peace. While the papers spread out on my table threw words and sentences on the skin of my mind, its eye sought for Anton's shape, which it saw in shadow like the portrait of a friend long dead, and wandered back to Vava's room, to Natalia's small, pale face which the candle showed in high relief, to her eyes quiet and steadfast and a little forlorn. Why, when the steady burning of my heart offered them such warmth, should they both be lonely?

People used their motors now as soon as the streets were dark, but still a little furtively. I heard the susurrus of tyres on the wet

road and the whimper of brakes, the noise of car-doors slamming, voices laughing and chattering on the steps. I went to the window and caught a brief glimpse of something I had almost forgotten, women in sables, a man in the full dress-uniform of a Colonel of the Preobrazhenski. As in the old days, a crowd had gathered to watch these arrivals, and long after the noise of the cars had ceased I saw them waiting in the rain, hoping for something more; from my high window I could see no faces, only the clustered shapes against the faint shimmer of wet pavements, like a black shawl dropped in a basin. I shut the window and drew the curtains again. But now the voices were inside the house, and through the waving drone of violins I caught the high Petersburg laughter. All the lights in the house were on, people were tramping up and down the stairs and gossiping along the passages; even here the sweet, thick odour of Greek tobacco reached me. "I hope you will not be dismayed by Natalia's looks or the fatigue that shows in her behaviour; she has not yet travelled far on the road of convalescence." I had got so far in a letter to her father, but even this task was too much for my concentration. My mind went forward to tomorrow's scene, the figure of Velnikov took monstrous shape, posing relentless questions: Was the defendant accustomed to speak respectfully of his superior officers? Could I say how many chances had been given the defendant to recover his position? . . . The floor was shaking as if the city was under bombardment, I went outside and found the boy Pikita dragging a railway trunk towards the stairs. I called out, what was he doing? but he pretended not to hear. I went to Vava's door and listened for a time, but all was quiet there.

"One of the effects still lasting from her grave illness is a weakening of memory. For the time, she has become confused about things that happened before her breakdown, and I find it better not to try stirring her recollections, however much I am sometimes tempted to do so. I know that you and Ludmilla, with your constant gentleness, will not be too much troubled if I suggest your taking the same precaution. And I know you will not be hurt by her showing you, perhaps, a less warm affection than you would expect if she were in her normal health. . . ."

But I wrote with only half my mind at the pen's point. We are troubled when our desires remain ambiguous, and I could not be certain what I most hoped for from tomorrow's struggle. In the Montresor it had made me sad and bitter to see a man of such sweetness so adust by the pain of solitude, it haunted me that a spring of so much kindness should be battened down in a land so

thirsty. I wanted him free: but I wanted to possess his freedom, feeling the warm stream of his love where the other flowed so tardily. And I was not sure if he would take with happiness a gift procured by artifice, offered reluctantly. *Freedom, I can't remember what it's like.* Was he too tired: would the spirit that had burnt so long untended have still the fire in it to kindle at the draught? I knew he could not live for himself, or even for a few that loved him. How could so wide a passion find direction in a day when all our loyalties were crossed and shifting? He had marched across us at Mariki with his own torn flag: the mob had got it now, and carried it with hideous cries: where in that scuffle would he find a place?

By midnight I had somehow got through my letters, Strubensohn still hadn't come, and I started on accounts, with the anxious hesitance of a man whose fortune is dwindling. Unless Yelisaveta lent me her motor—and I hardly cared to ask her—I should have to hire one for the journey to Chaveschok, since Natalia, let alone Vava, could not possibly make the journey by slow, uncertain trains crowded with deserters. Mme Arnevitch would have to come, as I could not attend to both of them myself, and it would be wise to take an extra man as escort—Yevski, perhaps—since cars were being held up and plundered in lonely villages every day. That meant a very large car, and it would be a costly business. . . . Looking up, I saw that Yelisaveta had come in again; she could be surprisingly quiet in her movements when she wished; and she stood very tall with her knuckles on her hips, rather as I had first seen her at the Café St. Vaudrin, looking down at me with a faint smile.

"You are happy?" she said.

"Why should I be happy?"

"In a few days the hearing will be over. Whatever happens you'll be free to take Vava away. And Natalia is getting better—yes, only a little, but a little better, I can see that myself. When one has a private happiness like that one forgets everything else."

"Do you think I've forgotten Anton? Do you think I no longer love him?"

Her eyes fell shut for a moment, and looking more closely at her face I saw how tired she was, as if she had not slept for many days. "I don't know," she said wearily, "I don't understand what love is. To me it only means offering something that nobody will take." She bent over the table to examine with candid curiosity the papers on which I was writing, and stayed like that for a while, with the whole of her breast displayed to me; then, shaking her head is if she had forgotten what was in her mind, she said:

"I only came to tell you, Tatiana wants to see you. She wants to ask you the value of a picture."

"The value——?"

"Yes, you'd better come."

"But I can't in these clothes."

"Oh yes, there are plenty of people there looking like tramps."

It seemed that I might as well be in the party, since the noise of it made thought impossible. I followed her to the floor below, where an old man with rather fine, Jewish features came towards us.

"Madame," he said, taking Yelisaveta's arm, "I implore you once again——"

She turned to me. "Do you know M. Grünauer? He is the man who more-or-less owns us now. . . . This is Captain Otraveskov, the one that Tatiana Vascovna always confides in."

M. Grünauer bowed. He said: "If you, Captain, have any influence with the Princess I do beg you to try and stop this folly! The Princess knows perfectly well that I shouldn't think of pressing for any settlement, with her husband's affairs in their present confusion. I have begged her to let me manage things for her as best I can. If she——"

"But what folly?" I asked.

It was Yelisaveta who answered. "Mother is selling everything in the house," she said tersely. "That's what the party's for—didn't you know?"

I had heard Tatiana's voice from the library, and now she broke through the crowd of women chattering in the doorway and came towards us, carrying a framed picture under her arm. She was looking her most handsome, her colour high with excitement, she smiled joyfully when she saw me.

"Oh, Alexei, there you are at last! I want you to tell me what this picture's worth, just roughly. Yes, I'm having an auction—a Dutch auction, I thought that would be easiest. No, don't listen to anything M. Grünauer says, he's just a grumpy old man, all bankers are grumpy old men. Look, tell me, what do you think it's worth? It's only very tiny, but the colouring's nice."

"Madame, you are not to sell that picture, I say no!" Grünauer interrupted.

"Leave her alone," Yelisaveta said. "If she wants to sell it, she can."

I had examined the picture before. It had been "restored" in the bad period, and the tones of the foreground had been hideously overweighted, but the treatment of the sky where the autumn foliage broke it had been left alone, and despite the grubbiness I was fairly

certain that only Vermeer could have got that light in it. I said: "I don't really know. In London, before the war, you might have got twenty thousand roubles, possibly more——"

"But that's ridiculous," she said, "for such a tiny picture. I'll start it at five thousand."

She ran a few steps up the stairs, turned, and called down: "Come here, all of you! Picture going! Captain Otraveskov says it's very good—he knows all about pictures. Starting at five thousand, who'll give me five thousand for this nice picture? (Who did you say the painter was?) By Vermeer. (What?) Possibly Vermeer. . . . Well, two thousand then, two thousand, fifteen hundred—Alexei, what comes next after fifteen hundred, going downwards?——"

Grünauer leaned forward. "Tatiana Vascovna!" he called. "Don't —no—you cannot sell a possible Vermeer at that price. I will give you two thousand myself."

Tatiana beamed at him. "How sweet of you!" she said. "Gobodin! Where is he?—find him, Yelisaveta! Oh, there he is!—Gobodin, put the picture down to M. Grünauer—two hundred roubles. What? Oh, he says two thousand, put another nought on. Now come along, all of you, to the music-room!"

Following the crowd, I saw that Astanovitch was among them, and Mme Kotchoubey. For the rest they were mostly strangers who hardly looked as if they belonged to Tatiana's society, but they were very much at home. Chachobel, the cook, had donned an old livery for the occasion (it did not fit him very well) and was hard at work charging glasses; there were glasses standing all over the tables, along the dados, on the floor; Chachobel filled everything that caught his eye from one of a dozen bottles which he carried on a tray. As we crushed through the doorway of the music-room I found Sopojnikin pressed against me. He said, "Did you know this was going to happen? Do you think she really means to part with the things? Because I've seen people putting miniatures in their pockets." But before I could answer we were driven apart by a little mob of girls who thrust themselves forward like a wedge, screaming all together that they wanted the piano. I heard Tatiana calling, "This handsome bookcase with all the books—music-books I think they are —going for five hundred roubles—four—three—Julia Petrovna, how sweet of you! Write it down, Gobodin, the bookcase to Mme Kotchoubey. And now the piano! Gobodin, get me something to drink."

The piano was a concert Blüthner in Jamaica rosewood. Sitting on top of it, holding up her glass with one hand and her reticule with the other, Tatiana started at five thousand roubles.

". . . four, then—two—one thousand roubles. Look, it's a nice-looking piano—used to belong to Rubinstein—surely someone will give me a thousand roubles for this dear old piano!" A little, dark man raised his hand. Yelisaveta squeezed through the crowd to join me. "I know it's not worth less than a hundred thousand," she whispered. "Akiniev paid twice that. Still, no one in Petrograd's got any money. . . ."

A girl I did not know smiled up into my face. "Don't you think Tatiana Vascovna's doing it awfully well? You'd think she was a professional auctioneer, wouldn't you! But I'm so cross, I was going to have the piano when it got down to five hundred, and now that nasty little Fichtner man has got it."

"Fichtner's got no right to be here," someone said, "he's a dealer." "Yes, Tatiana said it was only going to be a little party of friends." "Who do we pay the money to?" "You may as well give it to Grünauer, he gets it anyway." "Grünauer's terribly cross——" Someone was shouting that he wanted the Muskabads in the Persian room, and Tatiana, alacritous to please, was setting off there. By unscrupulous struggling I managed to reach her and pulled her aside into Akiniev's study.

"What is it, Alexei?" she asked brightly. "Do you want me to reserve something for you? If it's that thing by Ingres downstairs I've marked it for you already—a parting present."

I said: "Listen, Tatiana Vascovna! Do you realize what you're doing? Do you realize——"

"But dear Alexei, of course I do! I've got to get some money, so I'm selling everything that people will buy. After all, I might just as well, since we can't go on living here. And it's going terribly well, I've sold ever so much already."

"Naturally, at the prices you're letting things go at——"

"But you can't ask people for more—no one has any money nowadays, with this revolution——"

"You could send things abroad—Grünauer would arrange it——"

"Yes, but I want the money now. And I want to show Grünauer I'm trying to do what I can for him. I do think Akiniev's treated him terribly badly—not meaning to, of course. Dear Alexei, don't *you* be cross with me, I'm only trying to do what's right, and I'm enjoying it so much, it's such ages since I had any fun——"

The door was flung open and Astanovitch stumbled in. "Oh, do I interrupt? Listen, Tatiana Vascovna, Darlynia wants those Muskabads and I promised I'd get them. Will you take five hundred straight away and book them to me? Otherwise it only means the dealers will get them——" A girl pushed him aside. "No, that's not

fair!" she shouted. "No private bargaining, it's against the rules—don't let him, Tatiana!" "Irina, be quiet!" "Where's Tatiana Vascovna, we're all waiting, bring her along somebody!" Astanovitch had her by one arm, the girl, laughing, took the other, they pulled her away from me and she was lost in the crowd again. Presently I heard her voice again, high and clear, "All the Muskabads in one lot, four hundred roubles. Four hundred—three-fifty . . . "

I looked for Sopojnikin, but he and Yelisaveta had both disappeared in the throng. Thinking they might be somewhere on the floor below I made my way down to the hall, but there I saw only visitors' servants, who had made themselves as comfortable as they could on the settees or lay full length along the floor; some were still chewing and drinking but most of them had fallen asleep. The great door was wide open; as I looked, two hirsute men who had the appearance of Circassian stevedores came boldly in and marched past me up the stairs. I called after them and they came back, but when I asked what they were about they seemed too ignorant of Russian to understand me. One of them pointed to the street, I went outside and found the man who had bought the piano standing on the steps.

"Are those your men?" I demanded.

"Yes."

"What are they doing, may I ask?"

"Doing? Why, carrying the things. (Go on, Jedespis, get on with it!) You don't expect me to carry things down myself, do you?"

"You mean—you're taking away things you've bought?"

"Naturally."

"But have you paid for them?"

"Paid for them. How do you think I do my business? And who are you, by the way? Well, if you want to know, I shall send my cheque to Grünauer tomorrow, and he'll credit the account. And I can tell you the Princess will be lucky if she gets her money as quickly from anyone else."

Two more men thrust past us, one with a couple of caffieri chairs on each arm, the other hugging a pile of linen—quilts, cushions, Italian damask table-cloths.

"Are those your men too?"

"No. I fancy they belong to Danilyitch. He's bought most of the bedding."

I followed the men outside and saw that several vans were drawn up in the street, with sledges, handcarts, barrows squeezed into the odd spaces; an old woman was methodically lashing a toilet-table and an assortment of kitchen utensils on to a perambulator, using twisted sheets; no one was in any hurry. The crowd I had seen

from my window seemed to have increased, made impervious to the cold by the interest of these proceedings, the inevitable children were under your feet wherever you moved. The most inquisitive were straying into the hall now. "Why do they waste their money?" I heard someone say. "We'll have it all for nothing before long."

Returning upstairs, I came upon Yelisaveta again. She was laughing and chattering with Astanovitch, and a man I recognized as Shunkrin, editor of one of the Terrorist Party papers. I hauled her away from them. I said:

"Do you realize we shall have the whole town inside the house before long? Don't you think it would be sensible to have the door bolted and put a guard of some sort there?"

"But why?" she said. "Everything of any value's been sold already, there's no harm in their stealing a few trifles. I've locked my own rooms, and Bajouska's about up there—I don't think anyone'll try a passage-at-arms with her. Oh, for God's sake stop worrying about the wretched furniture! Come on, come and dance with me!"

"But how can I with——"

"Of course you can!"

The drawing-room assigned to dancing had already been fairly stripped; the chairs and card-tables which had stood along one side were gone, all the pictures had disappeared, the cabinets in the two alcoves were empty. Only a dozen couples were dancing now; but the orchestra continued lively, the aged leader in the brilliant peasant costume of Dobrudja stood astride with his mighty chest pushed out and rataplanned his fiddle as fierily as if he had only just begun. With the heat of the room after the cold outside, the dancers' breath and the matted smoke of innumerable cigarettes, I was faint and rather giddy; but to dance with her was easy, for she moved like mercury as my awkward steps required, unconscious of the art she used. "Why have you kept me waiting half the night for this?" she said. The smoke of her cigarette made my eyes smart, it was hard to keep her clear of the couples twisting past us. Astanovitch, bright with his wine, threw laughing insults as he capered by, but she took no notice. I caught sight of Mme Arnevitch, mute with glory in the arms of an ancient general, placing her toes with all the winsome variations which the Koski school had taught her half a century before. As if some devil waited for their silence the fiddlers hardly paused between the dances, the room itself seemed to rise and sway with the warm current of melody, only when the domri dropped away, leaving the viola to spin a single thread, you could hear faintly the tired, eager voice of Tatiana calling "Fifty—forty—twenty-five——"

"I have quite decided now," Yelisaveta said, "I shall attend the Court tomorrow. Yes, I shall get in somehow, even if it means offering myself to old Velnikov. No, it won't be a very nice experience, but at least better than hanging about and waiting for news, I can't do that any longer, there's some limit to what anyone can put up with. . . . I shall sit where Anton can see me, I shall smile at him. . . . At any rate I know he won't stammer, he never stammers in Court—at least, he never did when he was conducting someone else's case." We turned again and slid through a cumulus of dancers to where the floor was freer; my leg was giving me pain, but she, unwearied, held my fingers tightly against escape. "No," she said, as we travelled once more past the alcoves, "no, I am still not certain. To be so near him, and with all those people in between, I can't bear to think of that. Listen, Alexei—are you listening? Will it hurt him to see me, will it make him nervous, will he think he mustn't say the sort of things that makes me so angry?"

I said: "Surely it will only make him happy to see you there, to see you sharing his ordeal——"

"No," she answered quickly, "we have never been close enough for that. He will only be puzzled, he'll be wondering what my thoughts are. If I smile he'll think I'm triumphant because his stupidity has got him into this trouble; if I look sad he'll only think I'm angry with his obstinacy. Why is it we never see each other except in courts and prisons, why do I never get a chance to make him understand me?"

"Perhaps you have not very long to wait."

"No," she said absently, "perhaps not, perhaps not. Tell me, do you think he looked ill when we saw him? I mean, really ill?"

"Well, you could hardly expect——"

"No, that isn't what I mean. I mean he looked to me like Ivan Korfdil when he came back from Galicia. No, of course, you never knew him. He had a wound in the shoulder, but it seemed to get all right. He went about, he came and dined with me once or twice, but he always looked yellow and sleepy. And then all of a sudden he just died."

I said: "But surely there's no need to think of things like that. Isn't it enough to think and hope about tomorrow?"

"It's tomorrow I don't want to think of," she said. "No, I'd rather think only of tonight. . . . But I can't do that, I can never think of the present moment. If I'm having dinner, and the food is good, and someone nice is talking to me, I only think, 'What is going to happen next, where am I going after dinner, will there be anyone nice to dance with?' I look forward to getting a dress that's

being made for me, and when it comes I can't be happy till someone special has seen it. The times comes, he sees it, he admires it; and then I find myself thinking, 'It is only the dress he admires, he regards me as a vain, silly creature. Tomorrow, tomorrow perhaps, I shall hit on something to show him that I'm not vain or silly.' But of course by tomorrow I've lost all interest in that and I'm impatient for something else. It's like sitting in a train; you catch an entrancing view with the tail of your eye, you turn your eyes forward, expecting that something like that will come again, but somehow you never see it, it is always coming or past. And now it's like moving into twilight, nothing ahead is clear any more, there's nothing to see but the moment that's lost before I focus it. If only I could think—'I am dancing with Alexei, the music is good, he dances nicely, he is strong and kind and he understands me. . . .' But all I can think is, 'Tomorrow, or a few days after, he will be gone too.' I used to believe contentment reached you if you were patient and watchful, I thought it came as a reward for bearing loneliness and boredom. Now I see that that was stupid optimism. You look inside yourself, as if you gazed at a flower in a ditch, expecting it to open; your eyes get watery, and your own shadow is keeping out the sun."

As the players stopped for a moment we halted near the door and Shunkrin caught me by the elbow. "You can't keep her to yourself all night," he said. "And you, Yelisaveta Akinievna, you heartless creature, you're wearing the poor man out." Almost instantly the music started again, she turned to face him, laughing, and he steered her away. A girl called to me, "Alexei Alex'itch, my turn, my turn!" but I took no notice, I could not stand the heat of that room any longer, I went upstairs again.

My forecast had been right, the crowd from the street was filtering into the house now; I saw an old man in high boots and ill-cured sheepskin with a soldier's képi plodding along the Zouinski gallery, men in greasy blouses were jostling with the guests all up the stairs, a pale boy with dreamy eyes whose torn jersey showed nearly all his stomach limped slowly down the ladies' passage, dragging a sackful of ornaments behind him. Emelian, wearing an inside livery, caught sight of me and came to my side. "It isn't right, all this," he said anxiously, "all these paupers coming in here! They're taking everything away, things they haven't even paid for." I said, "I know, Emelian, but no one else seems to mind, so it's no good our worrying." Julia Petrovna, scampering past me, called, "Isn't it an amusing party—come along to the library, Tatiana Vascovna's selling all the books!" And above the voices and the laughter I

still caught the lingering gaiety of Tatiana's voice, "Forty-eight, forty-seven, forty-five. . . ." The noise and the hot smell of high festivity pursued me to my room.

§

Strubensohn was there. He had been hunting for me everywhere, he said—no, he was not complaining; you could hardly expect to find anyone, with the house in this condition.

But for once he had lost all his composure, even the high finish of his politeness. He was imperfectly shaved, the knot of his tie had dropped, the wings of his collar failed to point symmetrically. With his shuba thrown open he walked backwards and forwards across the room as he talked, somehow reminding me of a caged hawk, with his right hand he clutched the fingers of his left and shook them brutally.

"What am I to do?" he said. "The Princess tells me she is leaving Petrograd tomorrow—yes, by an early train, a very early train, she says, and will I be so kind as to look after Akiniev Mihailovitch's business for her. Where is she going? She cannot tell me, she does not know. Will letters be forwarded? 'But my dear M. Strubensohn, how can they be, when I haven't an address to leave?' But she trusts me implicitly. Yes, she has complete faith in me! For the past six months a committee has been at work collecting evidence to prove beyond all shadow of doubt that Prince Roumaniev appropriated some half a million roubles from the funds of the Military Industrial Committee; and the Princess trusts me implicitly to produce—to drag from the Neva perhaps or to draw down from the wide heavens—the evidence that he did not. Yes, it's most flattering, I assure you, it makes me very proud and happy indeed!"

He turned and stared angrily at my chin, as if he must find some target for his exasperation. Then, suddenly, he sat down, put his hands to his face and closed his eyes.

"I am sorry," he said, "I was forgetting—I am not quite myself. My wife does not sleep very well, she is still in constant fear of the revolutionaries, though I've paid all the important ones to keep their men away from my house. . . . No, no, I didn't come to bother you about the affairs of the Roumanievs—why should you be troubled about that? I only came about Anton Antonovitch—the news isn't good, I'm afraid."

"You mean——?"

"Zimbayev sent me a note this morning: it was to say he was

considering a postponement of the hearing. He says that Count Scheffler's health has taken a turn for the worse, he doubts if he will be fit to stand the strain of being brought into Court."

"Do you think that's the real reason?"

"No!" he said, with a certain vehemence. "It is not on record that Zimbayev has ever told the truth in his life; and he would be the last person in the world to consider the health of a man he was prosecuting. No, I think it more likely that this is the reason —I found it in one of the papers this afternoon."

He gave me a piece of card on which a newspaper cutting had been neatly pasted, and watched me as I read it.

> "A report has reached Moscow of organized ethical action taking place early this month at Mariki-Matesk, the notorious concentration-dépôt for repatriated Russians awaiting transfer. Conditions in this establishment (specifically directed against soldier-class interests) being no longer tolerable, a demonstration was arranged by Comrades of the Z.Z.V. Group, and was loyally and satisfactorily performed. Among the names of the czarist officers who were required to pay the full penalty for resistance to the Soldiers' Will are: former-Colonel Vestil, former-Captain Grassogi, former-Lieutenant Virchov. Former-Captain Bestushev is reported to have escaped with wounds."

I gave the card back to Strubensohn and he daintily replaced it in his gold-mounted note-case. Then he shrugged his shoulders, pulled a noisy breath into his nostrils and stared at his fingers.

"There will be no trial," he said. "The case of Count Scheffler will be suspended *sine die*—that is to say, until the end of the world."

§

I found Vava awake again. He said he was frightened, but he would not tell me what he was frightened of. And Natalia was weeping.

I remember feeling a kind of pleasure that she wept without restraint, for that had not happened since her illness, and her tears gave me more boldness than I had found before. I drew her on to the foot of Vava's bed, and put my arm about her shoulders, and though she did not soften to that endearment she was not impatient or resisting. At this early hour the room was cold, and her hands were cold. I held them both in one of mine. In time her sobbing

weakened, and at last her breath was even; while Vava, comforted perhaps by the feel of our closeness, had fallen into quiet, steady sleep.

I thought that she slept too; her dear eyes were shut, her body grew warm against mine, she breathed deeply now and soundlessly. But a little afterwards, when the noise of the house had dropped to a few high voices and the thump of servants' feet as they carried trunks downstairs, when the first meagre daylight showed through cracks in the shutters, I heard her sleepily talking.

"It is the noise," she said, "it's the noise that frightens him. In this place there's always a noise, there are too many people. . . . For you it's all right, for you and Yelisaveta Akinievna, you belong here, you are part of it all. It's different for Vava and me, we are always frightened, I'm frightened of their taking him away." Suddenly her eyes opened, and peering as far up as my shoulder she said, "Who is it, who is it holding me?"

I whispered, "It's all right, it's only me—Alexei."

She shut her eyes again, tightly, and shook her head as if there was a die inside and she were trying to throw a special number.

"Alexei, why don't you send me away?" she said pitifully. "Me and Vava, why won't you send us where we can be safe and happy?"

PART V

32

IT was July, and I was at Chaveschok, when I got definite news of Anton again: he wrote himself, in a very shaky hand, and to my great surprise his letter came from Moscow.

"I expect you have heard about Vestil being lynched—at least, that is what I've been told, but no news I get is ever quite reliable. I hope it's not true, but I fear it's likely, and that troubles me a good deal. The man was a bully, and a blind, lazy bully, which is the worst type; but he could sometimes be patient and even kind—at least in dealing with me—and he had a sort of honesty, narrow, to fit the shape of his own mind. I feel that if we could ever have met and talked together unsurrounded by that monstrous apparatus of formalities and verbots which the military life connotes we might have cleared up the personal side of our quarrel. It hurts me that he should have gone, with that enmity still between us. . . .

"You will perhaps wonder about my present situation. But I can't explain it, it is altogether too abstruse for a mere legal mind to follow. About the time when I heard of Vestil's death I was told that the case had been finally decided 'by Committee' —against me, *i.e.* that the Mariki verdict had been upheld and that I should follow in Karamachik's footsteps. Two days later I was formally offered release, on condition that I should sign a rather wordy document promising to give 'full and unqualified and active support to the Established Government.' To this I replied that I had yet to see proof that the government was established, and that in any case I did not altogether like the smell of it. As a concession, I asked for an interview with Alexander Kerenski, to whom I wrote a personal letter. I am quite sure the letter never reached him—I doubt if he knows anything about this business. Another fortnight went by, and then I heard authoritatively that I was to be 'released on parole.'

"By this time I was conspicuously unwell. It seems that prison life doesn't agree with my constitution, and I fancy that some of the bacilli which populated Mariki may have remained inside me. I therefore asked to be taken on my release to the Catholic

Hospital on Vasilevski Ostrov. But apparently one is not allowed such choice when one is on parole. Without any warning I was removed under guard to Moscow, travelling on a litter in the ordinary train—not a pleasant journey, but not so bad as the first that you and I had together. So now, here I am in what is called the Hospital of the Patriarchate, in a special ward of which the window is strongly barred and the door fitted with two bolts on the outside in addition to the lock; and here, very honourably, I remain, attended with much kindness by the Orthodox Sisters. (One of them is going to post this for me; she will have to confess the deed to her Father afterwards, and heaven knows what penance she will incur.) I suppose that if I get better I shall cease to be on parole and they will clap me into prison again.

"You must forgive me for a badly-written letter. I seem to stay rather weak, my stomach acts badly, and I put up a ridiculous temperature every evening. So my hand works rather unreliably. . . . I wish I could have some news of you, but letters, visits, newspapers are not, apparently, included among the gracious mercies of this parole system. One is allowed to live—nature endorsing the permission—and that is about all.

"Do I sound very grumpy? Well, you mustn't blame me too hardly. It frets a man to be tethered, to be ill and useless, when he has always fancied that his heart and brain might serve some purpose in the world. From the whisperings of the Sisters, from evasive answers which a young doctor gives to my questions, I get the idea that the present quiet in Moscow is only superficial. That is as it must be. The Russia we have dreamed of, the Russia so much nearer to the Kingdom of Christ, is not yet in being—that much I know. But the time for it must be very close, I can feel that even in this small, stuffy room where the noise of the streets is only a muffled confusion. The autocracy is gone already, and surely the tortures we saw in Poland were the last agony of Russia in slavery. It is coming, Alexei, the Russia of freedom, and if only the best we have can be used to make it, the finest of our intelligence, the broadest and most Christlike of our sympathy, I see no limit to its splendour. But can you realize what it means to me, with all my heart in the coming battle, to lie here on a bed stinking of antiseptics, to hear the key turned firmly each time the Sister leaves the room, to watch the minutes passing and to feel so helpless, so feeble? . . ."

That was followed, a few days later, by a note from Strubensohn. It simply read:

"I have at last ascertained that Count Scheffler has been removed to a hospital in Moscow. I shall be going there as soon as I have cleared up the present stage in Prince Roumaniev's affairs. May I count on you, my dear Alexei Alexeivitch, of your continuing kindness, to join me there if and when I need your help?"

§

I had already thought, remotely and reluctantly, of making a trip to Moscow. It was at Moscow that the spinal specialist, Mishlayevski, had practised before the war; there was at least the possibility that a search there would give me some trace of him, and the smallest chance of getting something done for Vava was worth pursuing. But I could not go yet. Natalia was not fit for another journey, I wanted her to be undisturbed for a while in the calm of Chaveschok; and I could not take Vava to Moscow without her, for she would not understand my explanation, she would be puzzled and frightened.

"If you want to visit Moscow," Deschubenov had said to me in June, "you had better go now. At present things are relatively quiet there, the trams are running, most of the good hotels have opened again. If you wait till autumn you'll find the food shortage much more acute again, and that will mean Maxim bullets flying in the Lubyanski. . . ."

That might be sound advice, but in July we felt a good deal easier about the future. The sinister Ulianov had taken to his heels, and in Petrograd the cognoscenti were saying that as long as he remained in Finland we need fear no violent movements. Now that Kerenski had triumphed there was good hope that the country would settle into its new shape by reasonable, progressive stages. No one quite understood what new shape was intended; we realized that our private heritage was vanishing, we could see no easy way to a general prosperity, much less to our own; but the darkest of the clouds had blown across, and I myself had faith in Kerenski's genius. That man's magnitude seemed almost to match the infinite greatness of his opportunity. The fire in him that had burnt so patiently in the Moscow courts of astigmatic justice burnt fiercer now, and every opposition seemed to fuel it. He was ill, they said, he could not stand the pace much longer, the battle following battle, the huge complexity of problems pressing in against him. But behind the white, drawn face that the news-sheets gave I saw a man whose passion for humanity could not be exhausted, and though we, the affluent, might be squeezed to poverty, I believed that our common rights were safe with him.

Konstantin Viktorovitch shared my opinion. Walking through his fields beside me he said gravely, "Yes, Alexei, we shall lose much, we are bound to lose much, if this Kerenski carries out his promises. Everything I have made here—the little school, the co-operative benefit system—even that may have to give way to a large organization that I don't understand. But I am ready to face that, if only it can be done without the use of those terrible quick-firing guns in Moscow. A man like Krunovitch, whose whole philosophy is hatred, who thinks of nothing but destroying all opinions opposed to his own—how can men like that create a new and better country, how will they achieve happiness for anyone? . . . Yes, this Kerenski, he seems to be a peculiar man, but I remember hearing of him before the war as a champion of liberty. I hope, I pray that he may be the man Russia wants. . . ."

Holding my arm firmly he crossed the little bridge spanning a dyke that marked the boundary of the barley area. When we had climbed a little way up the hill he turned round, and looked across his country with the rather awkward concentration of a young father admiring his first-born. "You see," he said, in a shy voice, "you can count thirty men—more, perhaps, with your eyes—working over there. And not one of those has ever been hungry." Then we went on towards the new shippen. "You must see Versuika's bull-calf," he said, "she is vastly proud of him."

§

In the same week I had another letter from Moscow. Bajouska was evidently the author, Emelian had done some of the actual writing, and some of it was in a more skilfull hand. It was addressed to "The Honourable Captain, Captain Otraveskov, Alexei Alexeivitch, Captain of the Army."

"It is Bajouska that writes to tell you that we are in Moscow in a bloody hotel and that the poor Princess, her beloved Yelisaveta Akinievna, is crying in grief and sorrow. They will not give the little Princess her husband, I say that he was never any good, but there, how will you, these ladies that have got a husband must have them in their beds, or else they cry and weep with sorrow. But Bajouska knows well enough, and you know, Barin Captain, whatever you may say, that who she really weeps for is the little Vava that you stole away from her and Bajouska. Bajouska says, she is from the country, Vashe Blagorodie, and doesn't know proper manners of gentlefolk in the City, Bajouska

says the Honourable Captain doesn't know how to look after Vava. She says that if Vava's motions are all yellow it means he isn't getting enough green food. She says the under-blanket goes all into a furrow in the night, Bajouska's dear darling little boy ought to be lifted up in the middle of the night and the under-blanket pulled out straight and kissed on the forehead and and lied down again. Bajouska and Yelisaveta will never forgive the Honourable Captain for stealing the little Vava away, this isn't true, Vashe Blagorodie, a woman of her sort has got no right to talk like that, she doesn't mean what she's saying, after all the Captain did try and get the Countess's poor husband out of prison, because Emelian was there waiting in the motor outside and I know. Bajouska tells me to kindly say that her life has got all bloody and crying now that Vava has gone, but God is more great and just than wicked men, and he will punish the wicked Madame Arnevitch, and the Blessed Virgin will look after Vava in spite of having nobody to put on a new pillow-slip when he spills his kasha all over the old one. Bajouska asks kindly to give her humble and dutiful respect and all God's blessings to the Honourable Captain, with which Emelian who dearly loves the Honourable Captain and has great sorrow joins in. The Countess as well gives you her honourable regards and says to hope you will visit her when you are at Moscow, as she would please to have the visit from the little Vava."

§

I wrote to Strubensohn, saying that I would come to Moscow when he thought there was anything I could do there in Anton's interest. But I begged him not to summon me until it was essential. "I want, more for the benefit of my family than for myself, to enjoy for a while the peace which our country life gives us."

33

We had reached that calm through a journey which at least served to make us relish it. By Yelisaveta's kindness—how kind she was on that last, confused day in the Orshaskaya, how quietly, nervously kind I cannot describe—Emelian drove us as far as Systchestroma. He would have gone the whole way, but in the hundred verts between Systchestroma and Niskava both the roads were under flood, the floods being late that year. From that point two courses were open: to go back on our tracks, take train to Mos-

cow, then by rail again on the other long leg of the triangle; or to go north by Z.P. steamer to Tetisoye, then on to Ossupova by the old metre-gauge timber-line, striking south from there by the best means that offered. Stupidly, I suppose, I rejected the first course, frightened of overcrowded trains and reluctant to go so far out of my way.

Many times I regretted the choice. The boat supposed to leave Systchestroma on Monday did not actually start till the following Thursday, when Yevski, having found that the master was still in a drinking bout, bribed the engineer and the foreman deck-hand to leave him behind. Our quarters, which we shared with a numerous family of Abakan Tartars and their attendant fleas, were cramped and filthy. The trip should have taken some thirty hours, but after some seven hours a piston-rod broke, the Polish engineer spliced it with wood and copper-wire, it gave way again at intervals of twenty versts, we reached Tetisoye late on the Sunday night. Delay again: a section of the track had not yet been repaired since the annual frost-displacement, and the journeymen who were usually hired for that job refused to stir; led by one Vargasov, who described himself as Kommissar for the Tetisoye communist party, they had proclaimed a strike in sympathy with the Moscow transport workers, who were understood to be demanding an increase of five kopeks; more reasonably, they argued that the line was bankrupt and it was doubtful if they would get paid at all. Again it was Yevski who got things right for us. At the cost of three Kerenski roubles (spent, I fancy, on bark-alcohol) he removed Vargasov from the scene of action; for a rouble apiece, with two for the foreman, he collected a team of sixteen men and got them to work. After two days the section was pronounced passable, though extremely dangerous, and on each of the three succeeding days a train went off. I secured a carriage on the third, and settled my party in it during the previous night, no one knowing quite when it would start. The seat on one side had to be given up to Vava, while Mme Arnevitch, in very poor case from what she called "boat-sickness," took up most of the other. With some sacks that Yevski found and two horse-blankets I made a bed on the floor for my beloved, who was silent and distraite, never complaining; and Yevski went to another part of the train, where he found some material to become very drunk. The train actually started at four o'clock next day, broke down only once, and reached Ossupova at midday on Monday. There our troubles began.

I remembered Ossupova, before the war, as quite a prosperous little town; I had forgotten that its prosperity sprang from the horse-fairs, famous all over North Russia, which were formerly held three

times a year. The horses had gone to the remount depôts; the smiths, the vets, the copers, had gone as well; houses were shut and rotting, the Gostinni Dvor hardly functioned at all, the old posting-house (the one stone building) had, for some vague political reason, been burnt to a hollow shell. There was no motor in the town to be hired at any price, nothing in the shape of an inn. There was a telegraph line back to Tetisoye: it was out of order. I asked the stationmaster if there were any gentleman living in the neighbourhood, who might give us hospitality. No, he thought not: there was an old navy captain who lived at Kita Gotoe, some seventeen versts from the town, but he was dead: the great house at Pekriki was practically a ruin; it belonged, like all this district, to one Prince Roumaniev, whom no one had ever seen and who was believed to live in Petrograd. . . . That conversation with the stationmaster, which took place beside the line, is still vivid in my recollection. It was raining, and the wooden roof designed for our protection was letting most of it through. Vava, the most contented of the party, lay on the folding invalid chair which we dragged about with us, with sacks strewn over him to keep him dry, while Natalia, famished and exhausted, sat on a crate near by and watched us listlessly. Mme Arnevitch was stretched on the ground covered with a rick-cloth which Yevski had found for her; she was very feverish now, she thought she was going to die and chattered incessantly about the disposal of her remains: she did not want to give anyone any trouble, her only request was that the body should be sent to Rielchitsa, where a place had been reserved for her between her mother and her uncle, Gregori Stepanovitch, who had fought at the battle of Karakai. "There was old Mera Yurevna," the stationmaster said again and again, "she used to keep beds for travellers, but she's dead now, she ate something that didn't agree with her. And Tossa Petrovna, she's dead too, she couldn't get any work and that was how it was. And that old woman at the counting-office, the one who married twice, she's dead—oh, dead these ten winters. . . ." Our fellow travelers, as if they had come to Ossupova with no particular intention, stood in a circle watching us with a rather vacant curiosity.

In fact, we spent that night in the cottage of the bath-house keeper; for one rouble a night (I actually gave her five) she was willing to take her four children, aged three to twelve, into her own bed, and leave the other free for Mme Arnevitch. Vava slept in the chair, Natalia on the floor (as she had been accustomed in the course of our Siberian journeys), while I did as well for myself as I could in the wood-shed at the back, where the rats were troublesome. The next day I hired a horse from the priest and rode to Kita Gotoe, where

a doctor was said to live. I found him, but he was too old to come back with me; he said that Mme Arnevitch should be cupped twice daily till the fever abated, and wanted ten roubles for this information. In the meantime Glafeera, our hostess, was administering a physic which she concocted from pimento and dandelions; curiously, it seemed to do the patient some good. But I had decided now that the only course was to push on towards Chaveschok by whatever means were offered; Glafeera and at least one of her children were consumptive, and whatever the rigours of the journey forward they could do us no more harm than to stay, on the meagrest rations, in that narrow lodging. After endless inquiries I found a kulak's travelling-carriage of the Kotlas type, side-seated, with a canvas roof; it was rotting in a cow-house, and Yevski bought it outright for me for sixty roubles. Another trip on horseback took me to a peasant-holder who had a pair of Bashkiri cobs, thin and blear-eyed creatures, which he said would be right enough as soon as their muscles were loosened. This man agreed to drive my carriage as far as Gevolsk, if the road would take the wheels. He demanded payment in advance. And we set off, in mild weather, as soon as he was sober again.

As far as Gevolsk things went pretty well. The road, which twisted through the western thumb of the Vengeris forest, was mostly firm enough beneath the two-three inches of surface slime; the cobs, harnessed in tandem, were inclined to pull against each other laterally but they kept a better pace than I had expected. Vava and Mme Arnevitch lay on the two side seats, Vava extraordinarily good considering the pain that the jolting must have given him; sometimes he cried a little, but for the most part he talked in a dreamy way, of the horses he would ride, the wolves he would hunt, as soon as the doctors had made his back right; and slept a good deal, peacefully, as if in his own bed. Mme Arnevitch was very quiet; occasionally she took to moaning, and when I offered her water she would whisper, "You do understand, don't you, it's the white taffeta dress I want to be buried in, it's in the brown valise? I don't want to give any trouble. . . ." But for hours she lay quite silent, with her eyes closed. It was Yevski, sitting beside the driver, who never stopped talking. He was a personal friend of Comrade Olkha, he said—yes, Comrade Olkha in Petrograd, and when the real Revolution started he was going to be a very important man; as one of extensive military experience he would probably be placed in command of the communist army. . . . My beloved, who had only one of our trunks and a folded blanket to sit on, never once grumbled. Clumsily, but with something of her old solicitude, she shifted

Vava's pillows from time to time, attended to the samovar we carried, replaced a rug that had slipped from Mme Arnevitch's shoulder; she even, most movingly, showed care for my comfort. "You must put your coat on again, Alexei, I don't need it now, I'm quite warm. . . . There's no need for you to walk here, it's only a small hill, you mustn't do any more walking with that leg. . . ." We spent a night at a village the name of which I have forgotten, the priest giving us hospitality; and on the next day, travelling more slowly through drizzling rain, we came into open country. By nightfall we were only fourteen versts short of Gevolsk, we pushed on in the darkness and by midnight reached the inn there.

Our driver would come no further; his horses didn't care to be so far south, he said, they would presently fall into a dropsy; also he had seen a hunchback carrying a bag of oats, and that was unlucky. So the hunt began again, and the best beasts I could get for the next stage were an aged saddle-horse and a roan gelding accustomed to farm-work. Their owner was a woman called Ottita, vast in bosom and ankles; she would drive us to Pnelm, she said, if the mare survived so far.

All the country that we passed through then—I can no longer say exactly how many days the journey lasted—belonged to the Schurbin family; I believe it was part of the dowry given to Alexandra Korostova on her marriage to the younger Andrei Schurbin in the '50's. Princess Antonia Schurbin, in her *Lettres de Perpignan,* says, "I sometimes long for my own beautiful country, the country of the Steja. . . ." Beautiful it may be in certain lights, though it is unlikely that the Princess ever saw it; but the roads were, and always had been, uniformly and execrably bad. I doubt if the whole region ever boasted an inn fit for kalmuks; I saw where hundreds of dessiatines of woodland had been cut down, but no signs of new plantations; and the whole valley of the Steja, which any Dutch engineer could have made into first-class wheatland, was nothing but a vast and reeking bog. Through this region, with constant changes of horses, we progressed at an average of twenty versts a day; and in my recollection it seems that the whole of that time was spent in laying boards for the wheels, thrusting, tugging and levering the wheels out of eighteen-inch troughs, dragging away boughs and even sawing trunks which had fallen across the chaussée. By the time we got to Pnelm the food I had collected with so much pains at Ossupova was exhausted, and from that point on we had to depend on what the inhabitants would sell us. Once or twice I was treated with that generosity which I was used to in my own country: an old man killed a skinny chicken for us and charged twenty kopeks, a woman

gave us a pannikin of milk and refused to accept anything at all. But elsewhere the people denied that they had anything in the house; they may have spoken the truth, and in any case I hardly blamed them. You found a family of eleven souls in a one-roomed isba—father, mother, five children, two grandparents, an odd relation or two who could not be exactly placed. There would be one cow or goat tethered in the roadway, a dozen mangy hens scrabbling in the mud or searching inside the cabin for crumbs that they could never have found; a schlichi which stank indescribably simmered on the stove; and apart from these, you saw no sign of any food within the house or any means of obtaining it outside. These people spoke a Russian that was barely recognizable; it was rare to find one of them neither deaf nor short-sighted; many of the children, half-naked and filthy beyond description, stared at you with the loose mouth and watery eyes of congenital insanity. It would take me half an hour to get the smallest piece of information out of them. How far to the next village? They couldn't say, it might be ten versts, it might be twenty. Was there a priest there? Well, yes, they believed so, but he might be dead now, he was always very ill from his vodka. Surely there must be a big farm hereabouts, where they worked, and where I could buy sukhari and vegetables? Well, there was a farm that way (they would point vaguely towards the Arctic Ocean) last summer, but probably the owner had gone now, he was very much in debt. . . . Yes, they expected to get some work in the hay season, there was generally some work to be had then; but what was the good of it, when of every fifty kopeks you earned the tax-agent took twenty and the rent-advancer twenty-five? . . . We spent a night in one such cabin, where Yevski ruthlessly turned half the family squatting in a row, gazing at us with the grey curiosity of a get clean straw for us to lie on. I remember how, when Mme. Arnevitch's moaning woke me early in the morning, I saw the whole family squatting in a row, gazing at us with the grey curiosity of a Moscow crowd at a street-smash; and how, when Natalia gave some beads to the children, the mother wept, and knelt in the mud, and kissed her feet, crying on the Mother of God to bless her. That house was fifteen versts or more from the next we came to; and I wondered what it was like to live there in twelve degrees Réaumur of frost, through the months when the road was covered by four-foot drifts of snow, through the lingering marsh-mists of autumn.

Semenza, where we had promised ourselves hot food and mattresses to lie on, was no village at all. There was a cabin with an iron roof and a Swedish chimney which had once served as court-house and meeting-room for the Mir; but the door and windows had

long since been carried off; inside there were pigs and a chicken or two wading in a slough of manure. The next cabin was ten minutes walk away, the next a hundred paces; from its first to its last habitation the hamlet must have spread over three or four versts. Some of these cabins stood right against the track, some a little way off it and facing the shrub-woods at the back. All of them looked deserted. At one or two I pushed open the door and peered at the darkness within, slowly descrying a man who lay asleep by the stove, a woman nursing. I asked, had they any food they could sell me? No, none! That was all the answer they gave and they did not even come to the door; while some were more positively hostile, shouting, "Out! Be gone! We don't want traders here!" I saw a woman dragging a sledge-load of brush, I stopped her and asked if there were any house where we could sleep or at least get food, any sort of food. For a long time she stared at me with a sulky, frightened look, making no answer. Then she said there was no one in the Mir house, we could sleep there if we wished; as to food, how could there be food when it all went to the cities and the soldiers?

"But if you, or one of your neighbours, could let us have a little kasha, with perhaps a tin of milk? I have a lady in my carriage who is very ill and a little boy with a broken back——"

"Your carriage will take you where there's food," she said sharply, "and St. Mihail, I suppose, will look after the bowels of your bolshukha."

And the next place, Greja, was much the same. The light was fading when we reached it, and the one sorry horse I had taken over at Pnelm was utterly beaten, after toiling since morning through such mud that Yevski and I had to walk on either side scraping the wheels. Here the road did broaden to three cart-widths, and had a wooden causeway against the houses on one side, where the men of the place were listlessly sprawling; there was a wooden church, besides; but the pope was dead, they told me—he had lost his wits and hanged himself; and the only answer to my other questions was that in Greja they did not care for city people, it was an unwise place for city people to stay in. An old man with the most surprising beard I ever saw—it curved out to the points of his shoulders—caught hold of me by the arms and addressed me hoarsely with his nose almost touching mine.

"The cities," he said, "they take everything and they give nothing. It was always like that. We have had enough of your sort. Enough, I tell you! Enough, enough!"

It was a woman, once more, who helped us here; she was touched, I think, by the sight of Vava, who, very white from hunger, was still

faintly singing as he lay in the kotlas. Her isba was only a small one, she said, but the two eldest boys could be sent out, and that would make room for the two barinas and the little sick boy. She had some soup of dried beans and winter-rape, she might get a crock of milk from the schoolmaster's wife at the other end of the village and stir that in. . . . As, together, we were carrying Mme Arnevitch into the house, she talked in a jerky monotone about herself. Her husband and eldest son were at the war, she said; she didn't suppose they would come back now; she herself did odd work on Semion Urvitch's holding in the summer, he paid her miserably, but she had to do something till the boys were old enough for man's work. They had told her that now there had been a revolution in St. Petersburg everyone would have land of their own, and a cow besides, given by this Alexander Feodorovitch Kerenski, who was the new Emperor. But it didn't seem to be like that, so far. . . . Following us into the hut, hardly looking about her and apparently oblivious to the smell and confusion of the place, Natalia set about to make a bed for Vava.

The goal I looked to was Ovrakubno: I knew there was a decent road from there. By the eastern track I was advised to take it was some fifty versts from Greja, and I thought we might make the distance in two days. That was too sanguine.

A dozen versts from Greja the near-front wheel came off; the rear horse was slightly damaged in the quarters by the fall of the driver's board, we took both horses out of the shafts, and while Yevski and I were engaged in the awkward business of getting the wheel on again the driver galloped them away. I remember that the incident appealed very much to Yevski's humour. "Crazy!" he said delightedly, "crazy! To go off like that before we had paid him a single kopek! And likely the wolves'll have him before he gets back to Greja—at Greja they told me there are wolves in this part." And he went forward in high good humour to seek fresh horses, returning in six hours with one aged percheron only fit for the knacker. From that point my memory is not so much of travelling as of enduring time's laggard passage with the hopeless impotence of a prisoner in chains. There was no longer the smallest of hope of forcing the pace. Most of the way I walked to lighten a little the wretched mare's burden, and I can see now the long, mud-caked side-board of the kotlas with the clumsy patches I had nailed on it, the big hind wheel turning as slowly as a water-drum, the sheaf of ruts which formed the roadway coming towards me endlessly from the dun, mist-framed horizon. I see the shape of Yevski's crooked back as he trudged con-

tentedly at the mare's head, and the odd, ungainly movement of the mare's near-foreleg. I hear the broken plod of her hooves in the mud, the sad, continuous whine of the rusted axle-seatings. We stopped, I suppose, not less often than once in every hour. Natalia would call to me, "Alexei, are you there? Alexei, one minute!" I would shout to Yevski to pull up, and would climb inside, to find as a rule that the trouble was with poor Mme Arnevitch; she could stand the jolting no longer, it went through every vein in her head; she would like to be left behind, yes, she only wanted me to put her down by the roadside, with a little message tied to her wrist that the body was to be sent to Rielchitsa. ". . . I don't want to be any trouble. . . ." Or sometimes it was Vava, who was thirsty. "Surely we must come to a house soon," Natalia said in her puzzled way, "some place where you can get some milk for him. . . . Do we have to go by this lonely road, isn't there a better one?" Tomorrow, I said, tomorrow we should find the road less lonely, and better to ride on; nearer to Ovrakubno there would be more cabins, the land was planted there and people would give us food. But I knew, as the light began to go, as Yevski's figure became a silhouette shuffling before me, that we should never gain ground enough this side of darkness for the land to change. Two nights—was it three? I am not quite certain—we spent at the side of the track, the women and Vava staying in the kotlas, Yevski and I underneath it. We made a fire close by of brush and turf—Yevski was skilful at this—and it gave us, beside its smoke, a little comfort. But we woke early, with the dizzy weakness of those who have supped on nothing but small-beer and a morsel of sukhari; with a new and desperate impatience I dragged the mare from her browsing and hustled her back into harness; when the light was only a dwindling of the darkness my wretched passengers felt the familiar jolting once again, and the sun rising tardily in a moist sky showed us the same bare country, the brown plain rising in lazy slopes, ragged bushes wandering by the rush-choked streams, no trees above an isba's height, no cattle, no signs of habitation.

§

Of the arrival at Ovrakubno I have only an unsubstantial memory. I was, I suppose, a little light-headed; things close to me seemed oddly clear and slightly out of proportion, like a theatre-scene viewed from the stage itself, while the houses standing beside the road had the phantasmal quality of castles seen in sleep; I could not judge their distance, and the pace of things came to me awkwardly, so that, run-

ning forward to speak to Yevski, I found myself going past him. In the early days of the war I once spent four nights practically without rations in open, frost-forged country near the Bzura, with Hindenburg's patrols sometimes visible in the ground's next crease; and I remember how, for many hours after we were relieved, all the movements of the men about me seemed to be large and deliberate, a little frightening, like the drive of pistons in a huge machinery. Ovrakubno was rather like that; and as I try to recall those hours I see myself as it were from the outside, a long, lame creature, sleepy-eyed and with a week's beard, shambling rather foolishly about his caravan, arguing in a small, strained voice with lodging-keepers and cattle-hands who smilingly refused to understand him.

But I think gratefully of that place, with its shop, its telegraph-office, and specially of its priest, a big, dirty man of Kazak origin who gave us much kindness. In his small, bare house we sat to a table and ate a hot meal, schlichi with fish in it. And there, in the upper room with the Father's wife and mother-in-law, Natalia slept on an iron bedstead again, with Vava in his chair beside her. It was the priest, too, who arranged for Mme Arnevitch's lodging in a cottage nearby; with three old women, said to be devoutly religious, who dosed her systematically with nettle-oil, with syrup of beet-root, with a potation of garlic and cloves, fermented cowslips, stewed liquorice, St. Basil's berries, and the crushed shells of river snails. At Ovrakubno Natalia was kind to me, she would let me take her arm as we went along to visit Mme Arnevitch, and she would smile a little, pleased with the sunshine which had come to bless our safety, with the lively voices of children tussling at the water-trough. She asked me repeatedly, "Where are we going next? . . . Will there be a doctor there, a doctor who can do something for Vava?" but that anxiety was hardly touched with discontent. She bade me take her into the wooden church when Father Bogolubov was saying Mass, and though she stayed a very little time her face, I thought, showed a certain happiness from that devotion.

There is a street in Montmartre—the rue Pone-Audemer—which sometimes gives you the smell of that village, perhaps because of a Vologdan restaurant in one of its basements; and curiously, it has a little crazy house set cornerwise which is not unlike Father Bogolubov's. Passing that way I have had a momentary pleasure, seeing in a flick of memory the sun shining against the windows of the Ovrakubno post-house; a smart troika rolling importantly into the village, bringing the small, grey-coated, smiling old man who was Natalia's father, and with him so much that I came to count as happiness.

34

I still have a few sketches that I made in Chaveschok and the country round about. They suffice to start the flow of my own memory. But some lack of inspiration, and perhaps a too great objective fidelity, makes them meaningless to the chance spectator. Chaveschok itself has no distinction in form, little intrinsic beauty: I can think of twenty overgrown villages with a half-paved market place of the same rhomboidal shape, the squat houses flung about it with their faces turned against each other or to the meadows beyond; villages with the same crude wooden tracery above the colonnade of the Gostinni Dvor, with one square house pretending to a wooden storey above the stone one, the church's green cupola strangely outlined by the glaring red wall of a flour-mill behind it. The only unique feature that I remember is the wooden scaffolding outside the Court House, where it had once been planned to erect a little monument to Alexander III; the project had been dropped for lack of funds, but the builder Tosvig, grandson of a former Selski starotsa, still kept the scaffolding in splendid order, charging the Commune. The largest part of the population lived on the south side: the road to Lopentchok started in this direction, squeezing out through one of the narrower spaces between two houses and splaying by degrees to a width of fifty metres; here, from time to time, a few loads of rubble and cinders were thrown into the mire, so that even in the spring floods a cart could get along; and to profit from that advantage houses swarmed thickly against its banks, even thrusting beyond them, while behind these favoured ones the smaller cottages huddled closely, only a net of yards and narrow ways dividing them. Further, where the road became a strip of mud, impassable in winter, the forlorn, wooden cabins were more freely spaced, and their owners, a clan of taciturn, spare-witted people, prone to consumption, spoke of "going into the town."

That was the urban side of the village; the workers in the flour-mill lived there, there you found the saddlers, the smiths, and—if you knew your way—the secret stills. There was even a posting-house of sorts, where a trader from Nijni-Novgorod, who didn't mind rats and fleas, could find the comfort of a roof and a dish of piroghi. On the other, the northern side, the ground rose enough for its green to show about the priest-house roof in the market square. A decent road went out this way, sheltered by limes for a verst or so, and serving a few small villas where the affluent lived; Tosvig, and the veterinarian, one or two military pensioners. My father-in-law's house stood a little off this road, perhaps two versts

from the village; from its upper windows on the south side you could see the whole extent of jumbled roofs, while those on the north looked across his orchards into open country. If I had spent an hour or two in the "lower town," finding and talking to damaged soldiers, it was pleasant to come back into the square, where the shabby houses gave me for a moment the Russia of my boyhood, and where a patch of red in an old woman's kirtle would flame into brilliance as she crossed from the area of shadow into sunlight; pleasant to climb the little hill, with my leg only moderately painful, to feel the strong sun on my back, to smell the dust that a squeaking cart had raised and the dry dung and then, faintly, the fresh, sweet odour of trees. I would be hot when I reached home, but it was cool in the long and wide verandah where Vava lay most of the day. In the late afternoon, if my leg was in fair order, I would set off again, down through the orchards, past the stacking and the jobbing sheds, and along a narrow path that led through the barley. You crossed the Sheeka, which was narrow and swift here, by a pair of birch trunks thrown between the banks and crudely flattened on the top, then you had to follow the stream some way, with marshy ground on your left, until the horse path turned abruptly and mounted through a birch-copse to the hillock they called St. Mihail's Horn. Here you lost the scent of river-weeds and garlic, the hare-cropped turf was soft and cool to lie on, if the breeze was south you had a fragrance from the spruce plantations draping the rise behind. It was quiet, you heard the chatter of grasshoppers, the hiss of leaves and the thrushes' treble in the wood below, sometimes distantly the siren of cattle. I can remember only one time when a human being disturbed me; that was a very old man, leading a goat in the vague and purposeless way of aged muzhiks, who came to a halt as he was passing me, stared at me quietly for some time, and asked if it were true the Emperor had quitted work; when I replied: I understood so, he nodded gravely, as one who has long been familiar with man's inconstancy, jerked the goat viciously from the tuft she was eating and plodded on.

The view that perch gave was restful to the spirit, as only the scene of my own country, soft and mournful, can be. In Europe they look for comfort in high mountains, in waterfalls gushing from steep crags, in everlasting contrasts that keep the senses stirred like a meal of many plates; there is no peace in those pictures, only a small and transitory quietness. Here your eyes were disposed by no painter's grouping, foreground cattle, shaped fields, trees of heavy foliage clustered to weight the middle plane; the rich gold-yellow of maize and sunflowers passed with no border-line into the under-

green of alfalfa, the vivid bog-grass, the gentler colour of esparto. Further, where last month disgruntled townsmen had fired the shallow corn, you saw the black earth only softened by sparse new shoots among the charred stubble; but even there the sombre shade spilt easily into the ochre and the clover mauve beyond. Far over, northward, you saw an elbow of spruce, the blue-green dulled by distance as if it were a wash of colour laid on the moist bistre behind; there were points of water flashing like glass filings; sometimes you were shown a chain of herons drawn slowly towards the eastern plateau; but no tree standing singly, no stack or isba, and your eye cast easily across those interruptions, taking the whole extent as if it were your apron. That vision had no boundary. Somewhere at the limit of view there was charcoal burning, and the smoke, spreading in quiet air, thickened the haze along a span of the horizon; outside that floating screen the land's colour sobered, the green failing away, mauve and sepia merging into constant grey, till it matched and met the liquid grey of the lowest sky. Such country, with colours always tempered by the marish vapours, seemed to reflect the sky's tones as a lake does. Sometimes I stayed till sunset, to watch the greening of the sky answered by a pallor in all the shades below, and then, as the green grew lucid, passing to rich and richer rose; to see the streaks of flame where the diamond points had been, the last heavy blue of the horizon melting in the fiery glow above. I would start for home then, delighting in the coolness, catching strange shadows and queer whispers in the darkening copse. When I had passed the barns I saw the house again, oddly large on the deep sky, with the windows lighted; presently I heard the dogs barking, then the moist odours of the garden gave place to the house's comfortable smell, old limewood, fading calicoes, and a borsch cooking.

If Natalia went to bed early, as she often did, we would sit down after supper for a game of Spanish whist. Actually, I do not remember that we ever played; but Dromelin would always put up the card-table at a convenient distance from the window and set the lamp on it; he would get a pack of soiled and dog-eared cards from the cabinet where they were always kept and place it with a certain precision opposite his master's chair. We took our places, Ludmilla Vassilievna opposite to me, with the pinafore she was smocking spread over her knees, Mme Arnevitch in the folding chair with a shirt of Vava's which had torn at the shoulder. Konstantin Viktorovitch watched these preparations from the other side of the room. He gave us his smile, which was not so much a movement of his features as a lighting of his whole face from within, he said, "Ah, Madame, we shall give them a beating tonight!" Then he sat down on the

nearest chair to take off his boots, which Ludmilla would unlace for him. When he had put on his slippers, slippers of carpet-cloth with complicated flaps like the cap of a motorist, he asked the ladies' permission to smoke his pipe; Dromelin brought the meerschaum, the tobacco jar, and a paper disc which Konstantin rolled into a poke for the fine tobacco; this he pressed carefully into the bowl, as one who tucks up a child in bed, passed a lighted match backwards and forwards across the surface till it burnt his fingers, replaced the storm cap. At last he came to the table, made a little bow to each of us in turn, sat down and picked up the pack.

"So," he would say thoughtfully, fingering the cards, while Ludmilla arranged a shawl over her shoulders, "we are to take the offensive in Galicia. (Thank you, my dear, thank you!) Or so my newspaper seems to think, though you can't trust anything they say nowadays. Ah, I hope so, I hope so! Nobody wants the war over more than I do, but so long as we have an army in the field I pray to see it advancing. All these weeks, nothing but retreats, nothing but failures!"

"I suppose the best generals have all been wounded!" Mme Arnevitch would say gently, taking her eyes off her needle for an instant to give me an appreciative glance.

"I suppose so, I suppose so!" he answered politely, hardly hearing her. ". . . One cannot deny to the Prussians a strategical competence of the highest order. Where we have the advantage, where we shall always have it, is that the Russian fights with his heart. He believes—I don't say rightly, for I can judge these things only humanly—that God fights with him and for him. No temporary reverse will shake that faith." Then, still idly shuffling the cards, he would slide into the days of his own soldiering, and tell us how, in the Schipka Pass, on that terrible twenty-fifth of August, he had seen men lying on the rocks with half their entrails spread on the ground before them, still stolidly firing. Ludmilla interrupted then: "Tell us, Konstantin Viktorovitch, about the letter you had from France." "From France?" Then he smiled and nodded. "Oh yes! I meant to tell you, Alexei, about that letter. That little pamphlet I had printed in Moscow—you know, I gave you a copy! yes, about the new conception of land-ownership—I sent a copy to M. Raulain in Paris. He contributes, you know, to the *Revue Sociologique du Nouveau Siècle,* I find his articles wonderfully interesting. I asked him to accept a copy as a mark of my esteem—not to read it, you understand, merely to put it away in some cupboard he might keep for such trifles. And I had a most courteous reply, a most interesting letter, he had read my little book right through, he said it was

specially instructive to compare the account of my work with that of similar experiments which were being made in the Department of Orne. Yes, I will show you the letter sometime, at present I have mislaid it. He went on to say he thought my conclusions might perhaps be misused by economists of the Left; but that was not so much a criticism as an expression of his interest. Yes, I was a good deal flattered, I had hardly hoped that my little book would have anything to claim the attention of a European scientist. . . . You, Ludmilla Vassilievna, have you had time to read the little book? I gave you a copy, I think. But no, ladies are not interested in such things, I shouldn't dream of asking you to pucker your pretty forehead over such stuff!"

"But indeed I read it!" she answered. "I started as soon as you gave it to me, I read one section each night for five nights—it meant cutting short my devotions, I'm afraid."

He nodded approvingly and began to shuffle the cards once again. Then, watching her face aslant, he said: "But you, of course, would not agree! You, my dear, like all women, whose evolutionary function demands acceptance of the *status quo,* you are an incorrigible reactionary!"

"On the contrary, Konstantin Viktorovitch, I regard your conclusions as far too conservative. The logic of your thesis leads to cooperative ownership, as M. Raulain hinted in his letter. You maintain that the chief organizer of your ideal agricultural community must still be the paymaster. I say that the community should be his employer."

He was a little taken aback, but perhaps much less than he pretended, since Ludmilla had been his companion for five years now. "But really, my dear lady, that sounds to me like the views of those Bolsheviki one reads about!"

She smiled, still sewing steadily. "If you went visiting the women in the Lower Town, as I do, you might become a Bolshevik yourself. It wouldn't surprise me at all. Those people live like cattle——"

"I know, I know!" he said. "It's a great distress to me. I've had many talks with Krunovitch at the mill, I've told him that I'm quite out of sympathy with Muraviov on the wages question. But of course Krunovitch is a man of extreme views—he doesn't like my book at all, I may say—and when he maintains that I ought to stop selling corn to Muraviov altogether I can only reply that it would put my own men out of work. . . . Still, you find yourself sympathetic with my attitude as a whole?"

She said earnestly: "I don't know. It means turning your lands into nothing but a vast corn and cattle factory, your harvesters and

herdsmen into operatives. You will have huge American machines grinding over the fields, pouring smoke and smell into the clean air. What will happen to our beauty when you've put all the streams into iron pipes and all the tarns into great square reservoirs? Do you think our people will really enjoy living in little stone villas with a tramway to connect them? Do you think——"

"My dear Ludmilla," he protested, "really, you are letting your imagination sweep you along like an April wind! Tramway, indeed! Detestable things!" He put down the cards and stared at her sternly, trying to see if she were laughing at him; but her face only showed the conscientious needlewoman. "In any case," he said, "you can't have it both ways! Yes, yes, you have a woman's mind, my dear, and a woman's heart. You want to improve the condition of all the miserable people you see about you, and when anyone suggests a rational method of doing it——"

"No, no, I'm not objecting to any of your suggestions!" she said pleasantly, in her soft, pretty voice. "I'm only pointing out that you yourself can't have it both ways. So long as you are prepared to see beauty vanishing under the advance of efficient organization, so long as you don't mind the painters having nothing to paint, our Russian culture disappearing beneath the huge façade of electric wires and concrete poles——"

Konstantin took his pipe, spread his vast eyebrows, gathered a lipful of wind and popped it. "Ludmilla Vassilievna, really! To say that, to say that I care nothing for painting, nothing for our culture! The pictures on these walls, do you really think they're quite worthless, do you think I picked them up as a job lot at a country sale? My books on Flemish art and tapestry, do you think I never read them? Have I done nothing, since I've lived here, to encourage peasant handicrafts? Do you think——"

"Konstantin, she's teasing you!" I said. And she, letting her work fall at last to stretch and pat his shaggy hand, said, "Your heart is too big, Konstantin, it would be better if you had no taste for the best things. You want to give happiness to everyone, and you want to give them the best kind of happiness you know. Darling, it's too big a task, even for you!"

"Art and agriculture are both most interesting," Mme Arnevitch interposed kindly.

Konstantin looked at Ludmilla with softening severity, as if she were a child who had played him a trick he did not quite understand. "I only want to share the best things I've got in a sensible way," he said doubtfully. "I want to give my fellow men the benefit of God's

special gifts to me, such brains as I have, my larger views of life, my delight in lovely things."

"I know, Konstantin, I know!"

"—But listen!" he pursued, "I've just remembered, something I haven't told you. You remember the engraving I bought at Kostroma—yes, when I went there for Ukrainian tups—you remember I always thought it was Altdorfer's work, and you wouldn't believe me? Oh no, you wouldn't, you said it was done by some Petersburg hack or something like that, you thought sixty roubles was far too much to give for it! Well, my dear, listen!—I sent it to Troubienstzev at Kharkov—he is the best authority on German engraving I know—and he has written to say that it's almost certainly by one of the Behams. So at least I was right as to period. And he also thinks that the price I paid was ridiculously low, judging by what the Behams' work was fetching in Amsterdam just before the War. So you see, if I were to send it to Europe for sale I should probably be a hundred roubles in pocket—not that I mean to—I like it far too well. You must remind me, Alexei, to show it to you. I think you'll agree with me that the way the artist has represented the texture of the curtains is exquisite; I get a fresh delight each time I look at it. . . ."

At half-past ten every night Dromelin came in and firmly, though without rudeness, took the pack of cards and put it away. Konstantin would eye him sternly and then look at his own watch. "What? Why yes, Dromelin is right, Dromelin is always right, it's exactly half-past. We have been talking too much, I'm afraid. Well, tomorrow night we must have our game.—You, Mme Arnevitch, will perhaps do me the favour to be my partner again, and we shall do our best to give this lady and this young man a thorough beating."

We said good-night then, and the ladies went upstairs. But if it was a still, warm evening, Konstantin sometimes took my arm and walked up and down the verandah with me for a little while, or even to the end of the terrace; chuckling a little, for he knew that Ludmilla would see him from her window and would scold him next day for going out in his slippers. Then he would pursue some topic of the evening:

"I confess I am a good deal worried by Krunovitch's attitude to my little book. He asked me for a number of copies to send to friends of his in Moscow, he seemed to think they would be interested. And now he comes and talks to me in a sulky way, he argues till my ears ache, telling me that my outlook is reactionary, that I ought to alter the last sections to bring it into line with his point of view. Of course it's an impudent suggestion. I should take no notice, but the man's

hostility may be very awkward for me. You see, this workmen's organization of his—I forget what he calls it—this organization has agents among my own people; Krunovitch admits it; and though I trust my people, though they have always been the most contented of any in the province, you can't be certain that propaganda of that sort won't affect them. I tell you, Alexei, it not only worries me, it makes me angry. What right have they to put unfriendly thoughts into the minds of people like that, people I've cared for, built their houses, given them a school, a doctor! Why, if they must make trouble, in this underhand way, why can't they go to the Biviskin estate, where everything's under callous bailiffs and the people are wickedly neglected! . . ."

Or sometimes, hesitantly, he would talk of Natalia. "She is better," he would say, "yes, she is much better since she came here, the sunshine is giving her a colour. Everyone ought to live in the country, in the towns your skin never feels clean air and your mind is open to all the poisons exhaled by other minds growing too close together. All the world's evils come out of the towns—that Rasputin, he was nothing but a harmless visionary till they brought him to Petersburg." Then, putting his arm right round my waist, squeezing me tenderly, "Alexei, you mustn't think badly of me! I was ill, you see, all those months I was ill, I could hardly read and I couldn't write at all. Poor Ludmilla Vassilievna had to do all my business, besides nursing me. . . . Alexei, my darling, you have had so much grief, it wounds my mind to think of it. But now you can look forward, she is getting better now, her mind is better, she is beginning to smile when I play with the puppies as I used to in her childhood. All her sweetness will come back to her soon, it is not very far away. And the little one, so cheerful, so brave! God has something in store for you, Alexei, something to wash out all those bitter memories. . . . Come, we must go in now! Dromelin won't go to bed till he sees us indoors, and I think he ought to have eight hours' sleep."

And there, indeed, was Dromelin's shadow across the verandah. We went in rather guiltily, and he watched us with long-suffering eyes; he picked up the lamp and followed us upstairs as if we might yet escape from him. At the top of the stairs Konstantin would turn and give him a blessing, "God watch you, Dromelin, Jesus guard your soul in sleep." Dromelin would nod then, as if he found that satisfactory, and presently, from my bedroom, I heard him sliding all the bolts. After that there was perfect silence. Sometimes, when I had seen that my dear ones were sleeping quietly, I sat by my open window for a time, enjoying the night's coolness, the brilliance of

the close and lively stars, the sweet, moist breath of the earth sleeping. But I was always ready for sleep myself, not with that dull fatigue which comes from anxious work and noisy streets, but with all the senses suddenly reposing, overfull from the day's richness."

They were short, those evenings, like all experience enjoyed intensely. It was the climax of a quiet day, to which the whole day mounted: to sit in that comfortable, cane-backed chair, my leg sleepily painful as with the mildest rheumatism; to smell Konstantin's tobacco and to hear his voice, deep, with the Tchernigov roughness, with no trace of the Petersburg pretensions; to watch Ludmilla's slow, faint smile as she gently teased him, to see the last daylight fading on the mellow walls, the dark pictures, as if the shaded table-lamp was bearing us to emptiness on a tiny island of light. Sometimes, when Konstantin had other guests, we enjoyed some music. Fyodor Deschubenov came from Moscow to spend a week with us; his nerves were out of order, he said, for he was constantly shot at in the streets; and he played Beethoven's violin concerto with finer understanding than I ever heard in the Conservatory. Marie Vesilinievski, widow of the martyred hero of 1905, would sometimes be persuaded to sing to us, when she came on her long annual visit; she said that her singing had left her for ever on the day when Nikolai Lyubovitch was hanged, but to me the very smallness of her voice made its maîtrise more delicious, as I would always be ready to change a Rubens or two for one of Isabey's miniatures. It was Konstantin who coaxed her to the piano—only he could do it—and I would set the lamp there, so that we were in semi-darkness and she alone, with the white, soft light on her slender wrists and the single domanitoid of her necklace flashing. She would never begin at once, she sat with her eyes half-closed and her lips curiously sorrowful, as if some pain must pass before she could command herself. Then she would talk a little, as one quite alone. "Vladimir Frénaux told me once, in the days when I was happy, that he could only make his poems when a great wind was blowing. I used to laugh at him, I said it was only a pose, like that beard of his that he never trimmed. But now I think he was right, it's only a strong, continuous sound that will give you an inward silence where your thoughts can weep or dance. . . . Edward Grieg was like that too, he could not work with the core of his spirit except at Bergen, and when I stayed with him there I do not remember that his house was ever silent from the Atlantic wind. . . . Do you remember him, the splendid mane he had, do you remember the wonderful forehead and his fierce, kind eyes? . . ." Then she fell silent again, till at last her fingers stretched to the keys like a swan's beak dipping into water, and her voice would

come as if she began somewhere in the fields and moved slowly towards us.

Die Wipfel des Waldes umflimmert
Ein schmerzlicher Sonnenschein.

If the verandah door was open her voice drew people from the garden as the lamp drew moths. They managed their heavy boots so quietly that only their smell told us they had come; and suddenly, feeling a hand on the back of my chair, I would turn my head to see Tornik the herdsman standing behind me, with two of the ditchers beside him, and the doorway filled with labourers. There they would stand, a living, motionless curtain to our stage, till at the end of her last song Marie let her hands fall gently to her sides. Then, almost as quietly as they had come, and ignoring Konstantin's offer to give them tea, they would creep away. We never talked much after that, fearing that other tastes would spoil the one we had kept; but were content with our quiet pattern in the lamplight, Ludmilla's pretty movements as she sewed, the beauty of Marie sitting with her hands folded and her head bowed, Konstantin's huge, friendly shadow on the wall; while somewhere in the house a clock was chattering.

35

I was perhaps extravagant in keeping Yevski in my service all through the summer; but he seemed happy to stay, his keep cost me practically nothing—since he lived in the outside-servants' quarters and shared their perquisites—and I found him useful in many ways. He was tireless in pushing Vava's chair, anywhere, everywhere Vava wanted to go; and he did many small services for Natalia, to whom, like all male-kind, he had a special devotion.

Once a week, occasionally twice, he went into the Lower Town, got very drunk, and came back with more local gossip than Ludmilla could gather in a fortnight. He professed (perhaps with some foundation) that he was deeply intimate with the communist Krunovitch and had been given a special part to play in Chaveschok in "the revolution of next month"—it was always to be next month. And from Krunovitch, or perhaps from the extraordinary newspapers he somehow got hold of, he had inside information about affairs in Petrograd and Moscow which was often surprisingly accurate. From him I heard of Braunstein's imprisonment long before my own newspapers published it. Quite early he gave me a very precise picture of Kornilov:

"This Kornilov, barin, you think he is the great man that will save Russia—he will beat back all those Austrians and people we used to deal with, you and I, then he will let this Kerenski go on as he likes with this provisional government. Yes, that's what you think, eh? Well, barin, you're just one of the muddleheads that don't know anything. Here, let me tell you! Do you know what Kornilov thinks about Kerenski? He thinks *Poof!* He says, 'There's going to be one man who counts in Petrograd—that's Kornilov: Kerenski—he can go and chew sunflower seeds.' And after Kornilov—what? Nikolas, I shouldn't wonder. But not if Comrade Ulianov comes back from Finland, oh no! No Kornilov then. Kornilov—fwypp!—out like that!"

And again, it was he who told me of the fall of Riga before it happened.

"Riga? Oh yes, the Germans'll have that before long. You don't think, barin—and you a soldier, supposed to understand these things—you don't think that Kornilov or anyone else'll keep the Germans out with the sort of army we have nowadays? And the sooner the better, as I see it! When that Kerenski sees Germans drinking their beer in Riga, why, he'll wet himself with fright. And that'll do for Comrade Kerenski, he's nothing but a bloody bourzhui, the sooner he trots off the better for all and sundry . . ."

He treated Konstantin's servants with a good-humoured and contemptuous tolerance. "Fat cows," he said to me laconically, "all these people here! Give a cow enough hay to keep her alive and plump, and she'll give you all the milk she has, and no questions asked. That's how it is with this crowd!" Dromelin he specially despised. "That Dromelin—nothing underneath his hair! They get like that if you put them to carrying dishes and emptying chamber-pots. He's like the dolls they used to show you in the Gostinni Dvor at Nijni. They used to jump about like this—see, barin?—and when the bastard behind the curtain let go the strings—ploy!—all in a heap! That's what Dromelin is like."

"Dromelin," I told him, "has had a peculiar life, a very wretched one. If you knew——"

"I know," he said, "and so have I. At Pereschepino, where I was brought up, I used to be flogged every day. And when I was fighting at Lo-chung-pu I got worms in my bowels, it was like being burnt alive from the inside. But I don't go creaking about and whispering, 'Yes, barin, no barina, God save you!' like one of those dolls at Nijni. . . ."

§

I did not bother to argue with him, since he had made up his mind and was never one to change it. But in fact, he was unjust to Dromelin, who had once been a revolutionary of reckless courage. I knew a little of what eastern Siberia was like for political offenders of the lowest class, and I believed the common report that Sakhalien, where Dromelin had spent six of his nine years' exile, could show worse conditions than any mainland settlement. Dromelin himself would seldom speak of the past; but once, when I was inquiring about his rheumatism, I was bold enough to mention Sakhalien, and he answered, regarding me narrowly from his caved eyes, and speaking with his jaw very stiff:

"Sakhalien, yes, I tried to run away from there."

"And you didn't manage it——"

"Who does?" he said. Suddenly he pulled off his blouse and turned his back to me. "Just pull up my body-vest," he said, almost peremptorily. "Yes, go on, it won't hurt you . . . There! Did you ever see a man given the plet? You lie down on a low bench, arms stretched out and fastened down, like Him on the cross. The man has muscles in his arms like the legs of a racing horse. . . ."

I think that was the longest conversation I ever had with him; and with others he was still less communicative. Sometimes you heard him talking—or rather whispering, for his voice had no chest-sound in it—as he worked about the house; but that was to an imaginary companion, and if he saw you he would stop at once, looking vexed at your intrusion. Had I not known him so long I think his presence would have frightened me; there was something a little less or a little more than human in those stiff mechanic motions that Yevski described; the crookedness of his body, one shoulder thrust forward and the other bent back; the leanness of his scarred face, the depth of the eye-pits, as if his eyes, which would not fully open, had been dragged back towards his brain by some inward suction. Ludmilla, indeed, confessed that he often alarmed her, when he came so quietly into the drawing-room as the daylight was failing. But Konstantin laughed at her nerves. "Dromelin—he is the gentlest creature in the world; if he sees a bluebottle beating against the window-pane he tries to help it get out. If you'd seen him when he first came back from Sakhalien, when I told him that his wife was dead—ah, then you'd have had some reason to be frightened. He was—no, no I shall not describe it to you."

"I will confess to you," he told me on another occasion, "that Dromelin is what I am most proud of. When the Maker and Father of us all asks me, 'Well, Konstantin Viktorovitch, what did you do with the life I gave you?' I shall answer, 'Lord, I did very little, I

was a small and confused creature, I have no great works to show you. But there was one man, Lord, that I took out of hell. Look, he is sitting over there in that corner! Yes, I know he doesn't look much of a man; but can't you remember, Lord, what he looked like when he came back from Sakhalien?' . . . Ah, you will laugh at me, Alexei! But Olga and I, we gave ourselves for nine years to the task of getting him free; the letters we wrote, the journeys we made, the money we had to spend—more than eighteen thousand roubles! And then, when we had got him back, he was more like a beast than a man—less intelligent and less easy to love than those bullocks over there. Well, you see him now. He doesn't look as if he was created in God's image, I grant you that. He's odd in his behaviour, he's estranged, he's often frightened. Yes, but you can recognize him as a man now, I see him as a creature just like myself, I can love him and feel his love for me. Do you know, on the night after my Olga passed away he came into my room, and knelt by my bed, and held my hand all through the night until daybreak."

. . . But that was something I could not pass on to Yevski.

§

A man of Yevski's kind did not often stay long in the same place except under compulsion, and I expected every day to find that he had decamped; indeed, he often spoke of going on to Moscow: "You see, barin, Moscow is where all the excitement will be. In a place like this, with a house and a dog and two dung-heaps, you see no life at all, we might just as well be back in the czarist days. Moscow, it's a big place, almost like America. That's where things happen." But he liked his belly full, and was shrewd enough to know that in Moscow it would generally be empty.

Sometimes I wished he would go, for his presence at Chaveschok was a responsibility. Throughout the summer there had been an epidemic of petty crimes on Konstantin's demesne; a fence badly damaged, a little bridge pushed into the dyke, cattle allowed to escape. These attacks increased in gravity; one morning Versinka, the Danish milch-cow of which Konstantin was so proud, was found cruelly mutilated, and a few nights later an oil-cake store was set on fire. When I spoke of the matter to Yevski he nodded carelessly as if he knew the whole story already, and drawing the obvious conclusion I asked him outright if he were a party to it.

He grinned.

"Sometimes, barin, I think you are the son and the father of all fools," he said amiably. "If I thought it amusing to go hamstring-

ing cattle, do you think this is the place I'd choose to do it? Not that I have any love and respect for the old gentleman here, he's nothing but a lousy bourzhui, he's past his time, we can do without that sort. But so long as I stay here I've got to get my fodder, and Konstantin Viktorovitch, he's the man who gives it me. Why in God's name should I be such a rattle-skull as to give my fodder away for the baby-sport of making a cow scream?"

"You know nothing about it, then?"

"But why should I know anything about it? Of course I could ask questions for you—I know people about the village who might have something to say. But that would be expensive. You can't go on asking a man questions and giving him nothing to cool his gulle. . . ."

I ignored that suggestion, believing that his streak of vanity would make him talk more freely in time. And sure enough, as we sat in the drawing-room that evening Dromelin came to me with a message. "Your man Yevski, barin, he would like the honour of speaking to you for a few moments. He's out in the garden." I went to look for him and, as his manner was, he suddenly came up beside me out of nowhere.

"There was something I forgot," he said, digging a little hole in the ground with a stick. "It's just a little thought I had, it came to me this morning, and it went right out of my head when we were talking. I just thought—all this trouble, fences broken, cows spoilt, it may be done by someone who's angry with Konstantin Viktorovitch."

"Yes," I said, "oddly enough the same thing occurred to me. And now I must go back, I'm reading to the ladies."

"Wait!" he said. "Wait a moment! This is how I've been thinking. You know that Konstantin Viktorovitch sells his wheat, most of it, to that Muraviov in the village down there? Well, Muraviov is one they don't like very much. Back in January he turned off six of his men, and that was the month when a man in Petrograd would give his wife and grandmother tied together for three puds of straight-run flour. Well, suppose Konstantin Viktorovitch was to say to Muraviov, 'No more wheat for you, you lousy bastard, till you take back those men!' What does Muraviov do then? Do you think he'll go to Biviskin's bailiff and pay double the price, taking in carters' wages, for stuff that's only fit to go in hog-mash?"

"What you mean," I said, "is that these outrages are really a vendetta against my father-in-law to make him stop selling to Muraviov?"

"I didn't say—"

"And that the organizer is Krunovitch?"

"How should I know!" he said ingenuously. "Krunovitch—I only know him just to nod to. He would give me a glass of tea if I was hot after the long walk into the village. That's no more than any Christian comrade would do for a poor underpaid, one-eyed old soldier. . . . But perhaps Krunovitch would feel more friendly to Konstantin Viktorovitch if I was to give him, say, fifty roubles for some of the poor people he's interested in. It would be troublesome if things started to happen inside the house. When one of Konstantin Viktorovitch's cows gets hamstrung—well, that's money lost. But if the same thing happens to one of his servants, or perhaps that Ludmilla Vassilievna that he's so fond of, then perhaps he might think it was better to stop selling his wheat to Muraviov. Some of the windows in that house don't shut very well, and you can't say what might happen. . . ."

§

Later on, I reported this conversation to Konstantin. I said: "If you think that Yevski has his own finger in the business, I'll get rid of him, of course. I don't think, myself, that he has. . . ."

Konstantin shook his head. "No, no, your man was in his own quarters all through both those nights. Mivriel told me that. . . . But of course he's quite right, I've never had much doubt that Krunovitch is responsible for what's going on. Krunovitch—you haven't met him, I suppose—he's a sullen fellow, capable of any mischief. Well, I've told him my position again and again: he knows I don't approve of the way Muraviov works his mill; but when he thinks I can interfere with another man's internal affairs to the extent of stopping supplies—and throwing my own harvesters out of work—I tell him he's wrong, and I shall go on telling him so."

"You don't think——"

"No!" he said, with a firmness I had never heard him use before. "No, I will not bargain with the man. When I first came across him I treated him with great respect, I listened with the most long-suffering patience to his ingenuous views on social organization and political economy, I expressed my sympathy with part of his attitude and explained my reasons for disagreeing with the other part. That is all that anyone has a right to expect. And now he has started to make war on me in this cowardly fashion I've all the more reason for not giving way to him. I keep a rifle in my bedroom, and in the Turkish war I learnt to fire it. Russia may have come into an age of lunacy—from what the newspapers say it would appear so. But we have not yet reached the time when I shall act against my

reasonable conscience to please a swaggering bully who sets fire to my barns."

36

I heard from Yelisaveta again early in September—the letter had been a fortnight in the post. She had evidently written in a great hurry, as she usually did, and I had some difficulty in making out her writing.

"Anton has been moved from the hospital," she wrote, "I have found that out definitely, though I can't discover that he was any better. It seems likely that he is in the Vadorka prison now, though I can't be sure. Kahn Abramovitch cannot find out. He is in Moscow, but he does nothing, nothing. It is partly Tatiana's fault, she is with me, and she worries him all the time about Akiniev's affairs.

"However, this is to tell you that I've heard something about your Dr. Mishlayevski. He is working at the military hospital at Voskresensk—it seems to be less than two hours by rail from the Brest station. *But listen!* At present he will do *nothing* for *any private patient.* I have written to him himself, offering seven thousand roubles, which is all I can find at present, and he has replied that he is working eighteen hours a day, and that money makes no difference to him. But it's just possible that we could make him do something if you were to bring Vava here, and then on to Voskresensk, and then simply put him down in Mishlayevski's surgery or office or whatever he has and refuse to move him till Mishlayevski had made an examination. It's for you to decide, of course, but I think the effort is worth making, if Mishlayevski is really anything like the genius that Dr. Tsekhovoi said he was. In Moscow you could all stay with us here—we are living with some obscure relation of Tatiana's who has quite a big house in the Zemblyansi Gorod.

"Moscow is quiet at present, the people here seem to starve more quietly and patiently than they do at Petrograd. But no one seems to know what will be the result of the Kerenski-Kornilov union—if it is a union—and if you decide to come you had better not delay too long. It's not certain that we shall stay through the winter, Tatiana's money is mostly gone, and I don't see where we are to get any more. We owe at least a quarter of a million to Grünauer. Still, it's no good worrying over that.

"I won't write about my loneliness, you would only read it with

a solemn, would-be-kind expression on your nice face. I try to think happily of your happiness, of your browsing and painting in the quiet country, with Natalia and Vava close to you. But that is quite hopeless, I cannot see happiness in others without envy, least of all in those I am fond of. I am bored, Alexei, bored, bored almost to suicide. To shoot a pistol at yourself, that is at any rate a positive action. And what other positive action can you suggest to a woman in my case? At the Vadorka prison you see women—very old women and quite young ones, many of them mothers, and some so pretty—you see them staring towards the windows and weeping and sometimes kissing the granite wall, the nearest they can get to the lips of those that love them. I would do that too—no, Alexei, I am not joking, there's no need for you to smile and look awkward—I would weep and kiss the wall as they do, but I have no tears, never any tears, God will not give me even that relief from the icy emptiness I go on enduring. When I see him again I shall weep, at least I pray so, and then perhaps I shall find inside myself the common feeling that should join me with those others outside the prison. But is that going to happen, or is God still flogging me because I loved too selfishly? To be patient so long, it's like waiting in a disused railway station, with train after train passing. . . ."

I read that letter for the first time with a trembling excitement. That odd remark of Tsekhovoi's—"If Mishlayevski could handle the case he'd have the boy walking, I shouldn't wonder"—had planted in my mind a seed which grew absurdly. I had come to think of Mishlayevski as some who suffer dream of the shrine at Lourdes; to see in him a mystical healer who could change Vava from a beloved property into a person standing and moving at his own will. And now this magic figure had become reality: Moscow, in normal times, was only sixteen hours' journey from our station at Tcheboldinsk; add two hours, and six for margin, and Voskrensensk was just one day from where I stood. Vava was watching me as I read. "Why are you shaking, batiushka, what is it, is it from Lisveta? Oh let me see, come here, come here, let me see!" Surely I could let no obstacle stand in the way. . . . But I did not let Vava see the letter; his brain had become very sharp lately.

I read it again, and the difficulties began to crowd in. I knew what a military hospital was like, and that Mishlayevski had probably not exaggerated the pressure of his work. I knew that no mere pity for a crippled child could stand against the desperate necessity of men who would still be arriving from Galicia, men torn and crumpled,

still just alive, after four or five days in the horse-trucks. And there was no miracle that Mishlayevski or anyone else could work, it was not even the case of a single operation; the work which had made Mishlayevski famous was his application of Heidenreich's method, and that, as I understood it, meant first a series of accurately timed and measured injections. The first stage in the treatment could not take less than twelve months: twelve months, and what would happen to Moscow within that time? Would the Germans be there?

In a few moments Vava's interest had been diverted. Romula, the old Ukrainian wolfhound, had jumped on top of him and lay there patiently while he, with little yelps of laughter and many endearments, was cleaning her teeth with his own toothbrush. I knew that Yevski would saunter up presently to take him for his morning promenade; that was one of the treats of the day, for Yevski could put up with any amount of chatter; then there would be lessons with me or Mme Arnevitch, and at dinner he would have his bed pushed close to the table, and gobble up his food, laughing and talking all the time.

Yes, there was no shortage of simple food here. And the sunny days had gone on so long that I felt as if Chaveschok was always in sunshine; though in the verandah it was never too hot, for the sun only reached it in the early part of the morning. I had meant to go over to the West Reach this afternoon, to finish off a landscape; there they were cutting the flax now, and as I worked I should hear the women singing. . . . Before November we should have the first snowfall here. But the snow would lie clean on all the fields, wrapping us in a deeper silence; the percherons would come steaming up the stiff slope hitched in trace to a timber sled piled high with stove-wood; in the long evenings, with our skin rough and alight from a day's sleigh-run to the winter fair at Zennik, we should cook ourselves in the drowsy heat of Konstantin's library, only the drum of hail on the double shutters invading our close, sweet world. While in Moscow the trodden snow mingled with dirt and dung would pile against the footways, and the wind, angry with narrow streets, would slam the doors and set the windows rattling, and behind mean lanes the trucks would clatter all night long in the shunting yards, and frozen, ragged boys would pester you to buy news of the last reverses on the southern front. For me, I could find old friends in the Pavlovski Club, I could look at pictures. But could I take Natalia back to the long fatigue of traffic jostling between stone walls?

I talked to Konstantin, but he could not help me. He said:

"If you think there's a chance for Vava, if you think you ought

to go, then I shan't say anything to hinder you. You know, you must know what it means to me to have you here. What a summer it has been for me, in spite of all the troubles!—waking up each morning to hear Vava laughing and presently to see your faces. I'm like all old men, I pray each night that God will keep my children about me, I ask Him for nothing else for myself. . . . But no, Alexei, no, I didn't mean to say that! I should never let my selfishness stand in the way of Vava, of any chance you have for him. It is you who must decide, you and Natalia together. You must be very patient with her, it will be difficult to explain. Perhaps it will take a few days to make her understand. But once she realizes what the chance is she will make up her own mind—yes, I think so, I think so. . . ."

§

Natalia always took her coffee in bed, and she was down very late that morning. I knew at once from the way her eyes moved, slow and exploring like a blind man's fingers, that she was not well enough to be troubled with problems.

But after dinner she slept for an hour or so in the wicker chair on the verandah, and I thought from the way her lips were shaped that she dreamed happily; when she woke she had a look of contentment, she smiled a little when I went to her and took her hand.

"Shall we go into the fields?" I said. "It would do you good to walk."

"Into the fields? Yes; yes, if you like."

The hamlet where the harvesters lived was deserted except for drowsy dogs, even the children were in the fields. We walked on, skirting the fields where the flax was still uncut, and took a sloping track which led us to the farther birchwoods. Here your feet fell deliciously on the tagger moss, the sun, catching your face abruptly through rifts in the mat of leaves, had the gentle touch of its first rising. So far we had not spoken, leaving the still air to the high drone of flies. We came out to the shallow, tilted saucer which they called the Beggar's Palm, a place I liked for the crayoned sub-tones of its colouring, the thistle-flowers faintly tinting the caespitosa on its rim, the heavy bog-grass lying like grey whiskers along the black, dry mud below. Here, of her own accord, Natalia lay down where the grass was short and soft, and I beside her; and presently I said:

"Dear one, you like being here, in the country? You are happy here?"

She said, repeating the word as a child repeats a new word which pleases him, "Happy . . . happy. . . ."

"You remember," I said, "that we talked about a doctor, a doctor who might make Vava better? Yes, we did, we talked about Vava, we wondered if anyone could make him better. . . . But you see, there aren't any very good doctors near here, we should have to take him to Moscow. In Moscow there are hundreds of doctors, the best ones, specialists, we might find one there who would do something for him."

I did not think that I had her attention, and I went through it again, talking slowly and patiently of Vava, of the doctors in Moscow. But then she broke in abruptly:

"You mean," she said, quite evenly, quietly, "you mean you want to take Vava away, to take him to Moscow?"

I answered: "It was only a suggestion—an idea. I thought——"

"Oh, I knew!" she said wearily. "I knew it couldn't last, having Vava close to me. I knew that someone would take him away. . . ."

"But listen, Natalia, listen! I only thought of taking him by myself because I felt the journey would be too much for you. It would be far nicer if you came too. I was only wondering if you felt up to the journey, if you could stand all the hurry and noise of Moscow. . . . But there isn't any need to go at all, if we wait long enough we may be able to get a doctor to come here. Dear one, you mustn't worry, I shouldn't do anything you didn't like, you know that, my dear, you know I want you to be happy. . . ."

She nodded then, looking over my shoulder. She said, as if unravelling a very difficult question, "Yes, yes, you must get a doctor to come here. My father will help with the money if you haven't enough to pay for his railway fare. No, I don't want to go to the town any more, it's better to stay here, where the people are nice to you."

That seemed to finish the subject for the time being. But after a few moments she picked it up again:

"Besides, we have nowhere to go in Moscow, nowhere to stay. I used to have friends there—yes, it was in Moscow the Rozhlinevskis lived, I stayed with them there. But that was a long time ago, they would have gone now."

I said, "You know that the Roumanievs are in Moscow now? I have a letter from Yelisaveta Akinievna—you may like to read it some time, some time when you are not too tired. She has offered to give us hospitality there, if we should ever want it."

"No," she answered steadily, "I myself do not want any favours from Yelisaveta Akinievna. And Vava does not either. You, of course, if you care to go—it would be more interesting for you to have the town life again——"

I smiled. "But it wouldn't be any use my going without Vava, would it? The doctors couldn't cure Vava by giving me an operation!"

She took that (as I should have foreseen) quite seriously.

"You mean, you want to take Vava, so that he can live in Yelisaveta's house again? Then Yelisaveta can be his chief friend, as she was before——"

"No," I said firmly, "neither I nor Vava will go to Moscow at all unless you come with us. You see, we can't get on without you, we tried it once but we were never happy, we both need you."

Curiously, I had always found it hard to speak like that, my heart refusing the common dress of speech; but those words had come of themselves, and the sudden joy of their utterance made me turn on my side to watch her eyes unflinchingly, not sparing her confusion. At first she would not meet me, her eyelids fell like a portcullis, she said in a troubled way:

"I should like Vava—yes, when I feel better, I will take Vava myself to a good doctor. There would be no need to stay with Yelisaveta, I could find somewhere to stay——"

"But, dear one, won't you let me come with you when you go? I can be useful, I can manage the porters and people like that. It makes me so happy when I can help you. On the journey, you remember, in that dreadful old kotlas——"

"Yes," she answered, "yes, Alexei, you are always useful, useful and kind. But I don't want——"

Her voice fell away like a candle flame in a puff of wind. She lay on her back, still, with her head turned towards me, her eyes shut. Her face was hot from the sun, her hair had fallen over her damp forehead. She was not crying, but her lips, together and convulsive, were as if they held a bar of pain across her speech. I see that now, her hot face in the grass, and I have no memory of her face in fiercer beauty than it showed me then. But you cannot take to yourself the bright flame shot from suffering, you cannot warm with clumsy caresses a spirit already burning from its own slow fire. I held her hand, which lay in mine lifelessly. I kept myself from drawing her body against my own.

A few moments passed and she spoke again, with a voice not blurred or trembling but very small, as a voice is heard by telephone from a long way off.

"I don't want—I don't want to need anyone, to need you as I did before. I want to be—enough, enough by myself, to live by myself, to be used to that." Silence, silence again, but I waited, waited. "If I need you so much"—her voice still very far away,

like the mind's small voice—"if I live—oh, I'm tired, I forget—if I live as I did before, a part of your life, and you the main part of mine . . . they'll take you away again, yes, they'll only take you away. God won't have people living as close as that, loving so much." She had taken her hand from mine, not abruptly, only by degrees pulling it away. "God wouldn't let me be like that. They'll take you away again, and hide you, and I can't—Alexei, I can't. . . ."

In dreams, again and again, I have seen her carried by a racing current past the bank where I stood, I have seen her head come up from the water and heard her faint cry, "Alexei!" I know that this was the birth of that dream, for as I wake from it I catch a glimpse of her as she lay on the grass that day, with the sun on her hot face. In the dream I stumble into the water, I swim with limbs the weight of iron. I reach at last and grasp her body, and even as I feel it in my clutch I see her face again, distant, floating farther away. . . . I do not remember that she moved towards me, or I to her. Only that she was in my arms, her body's weight pressing down on me, the sleeve of her dress against my neck, her hot cheek against mine. I could not speak to her, for pity overswept my voice, my thoughts. I held her almost cruelly, as if by muscle force I could win her spirit back entirely from the fears withholding it, as if a man by his angry strength could trample out the winter's darkness. She cried out at last, as a child gives a little cry in sleep, I loosed her, and then she opened her eyes. The cloud of fear was still across them, but I could see her love behind it. I whispered, "Natalia, Natalia, my own, my beloved, you must trust me, trust me, I won't let you go."

Until the trees' shadow stretched to our feet we stayed in that embrace. Once, as if snatching free from a cord that held her, she kissed my cheek, and then I kissed her lips, and waited for a time to savour all their loveliness, and kissed again; again, again, her eyes not grudging me their sufferance. Her knees were against my leg, giving me quick, continuous pain, but pain itself seemed a part of that hour's happiness, bringing me closer to her pain. I can remember the sun's glare, the smell of the earth and the feel of rough grasses pressing at one of my wrists only as part of the warm, unearthly ecstasy. It was dim in the woods when we passed through again, and in the fields the flax's gold had deepened. I know how its colour was, I know how the air smelt with the first evening freshness, but I shall not see evening in those tones another time.

Walking, I still held her close to me, almost carrying all her weight against my side. I do not think we spoke at all until we reached the hamlet, where a group of women turned to stare at us, and where she said, with a new gentleness, "Your leg, Alexei, it must be hurt-

ing you, we shouldn't have walked so far." I don't know if I answered. I only remember that a little further on, where you see the roof of Konstantin's house appearing over a line of ricks, she said:

"Yes, when I'm a little stronger we will take Vava to see a doctor. But I want to wait a little while, it's so peaceful here, I must wait a little, a little longer."

That was all; and when we reached the house she left me, going to her own room as she generally did. It was as if the power of daily custom caught her again, pulling her instantly away from my guardianship; but she had kissed me, and I would not let the glow of my contentment be dimmed by the least anxiety.

§

Strubensohn wrote that he would like to have a talk with me if I could possibly spare the time for a journey to Moscow; he was in touch with the legal committee of the Moscow Soviet, which seemed to be increasingly influential; the man with whom he was dealing wanted a number of points explained in connection with the course of events at Mariki before he would be willing to take "aggressive political action," and I was the only one who could answer these questions.

In my reply I requested him if possible to get the questions in the form of a written schedule and send them to me, when I should take pains to answer them in writing with the most minute accuracy and with copious annotation. I was ready, I said, to go to Moscow at an hour's notice if I were required to give formal evidence, but I wanted to postpone the journey as long as possible, since my wife's health was far from satisfactory.

This was not precisely true. Natalia was far better than she had been hitherto, she ate more heartily, she was not so easily tired. But her dependence on me was increasing now, she was restless (Ludmilla told me) when I was out working for a whole day; she liked me to come into her bedroom and make her comfortable before she slept. I tried, by a few words now and again, to keep the idea of an expedition to Moscow in her mind, but I would not hurry her. "Yes," she would say, "later on we must go all together. But Mme Arnevitch says there's a lot of trouble in Moscow, there are revolutionaries active there. Later on, if we hear of a good doctor. . . ."

I worried increasingly about Anton; there was no news of him. I thought he might be very ill. But unless the way opened for me to help him positively I thought the journey to Moscow might perhaps be left until the spring. Natalia would be still better then, firmer in

her grasp of life. And the news from Petrograd which came a little later in the month was reassuring. There had been fears that Kornilov, with the bullock's heart of a trans-Baikal Kazak, would not be happy till his Caucasians had made a new and bloody havoc in the capital. But now it seemed that Kerenski, playing his hand with twice the soldier's wits, had triumphed once again. There he remained, that cool and self-reliant figure, symbolizing my belief that the sharpest birth-pangs of our freedom were over. I thought we were nearing the term of appeasement. It was rumoured that the dreaded and reckless mountebank Braunstein was at large once more, but I believed that Kerenski's indomitable resolution would prove equal even to him. The Germans were established on Oesel and Dago, but seemed to be content with that, their eyes turning westward again. Except for the eternal clatter of its own traffic Petrograd was quiet, we heard, as it had been all summer. Here the wheat was good this year, and the luck of a fine harvest had spread a cheerfulness among our people. I must stay to see the leaves turn. Yes, we might wait, perhaps, until the spring.

37

When Yevski came to inform me that Muraviov's millhands were on strike again I was able (with some satisfaction) to tell him that I knew already; Ludmilla, who spent two afternoons a week in the Lower Town, had heard all the facts on the previous day. This time the chief trouble seemed to be that Muraviov was charging the men the full wholesale rate for middlings which they bought for their own use and on which they had previously been allowed a "loading-floor reduction" of twenty-six kopeks on the medium bag; his argument being that what the men required reduced his weekly loadings at Tcheboldinsk and thus increased his carriage charges at the new scales; the fault, he said, was that of the railwaymen, who had lately secured a wage increase of four kopeks. Ludmilla was entirely in sympathy with the men and vastly indignant; their wives, she told me, could only just struggle along by getting cheap middlings—she had always said that Muraviov should give a free flour allowance in proportion to the size of his workers' families. I have very little doubt that she was right. Muraviov came from peasant stock in the Pskov region, he had done pretty well out of the famine in the cities, he was mean as a Polish horse-coper.

The fact of immediate concern to ourselves was that Krunovitch was back from his excursion to Moscow. At least, I supposed so. Left to themselves, Muraviov's men would never have organized

a strike: they would have gathered outside the mill on the morning of a festival and shouted insults, and sung the dreary song, traditional to their vexation, about the kulak who starved his wife and was subsequently devoured by wolves; they might have thrown a handful of horse droppings at Muraviov as he came out from Mass; they might even have smashed a wagon or two and set them on fire; but without the inspiration of oratory they would have thought it sheep-headed to let go a week's wages in the hope of getting back their twenty-six kopeks on the half-sack. And presently there were other signs of Krunovitch's return. Since his departure, the attacks on Konstantin's property had significantly ceased. On the very day that Yevski held forth to me about the industrial affairs of Chaveschok, Tornik, the herdsman, came to report that one of his steers had "gone into nothing." And during the night that followed a trench was dug, very efficiently, across the track that led from the house to the hamlet where our people lived. Yes, Krunovitch was back all right.

The deputy-intendent of police, one Porenin, formerly Sergeant of Cossacks, came over from Tcheboldinsk again and took the measurements of the trench. He said that careful watch should be kept for the aggressors, and that his salary had not been paid since the end of June.

Konstantin was pitifully distressed. "It is not that I mind the loss of one or two steers, though they're valuable nowadays; or that the trench is anything to worry about—that was a silly prank, but quite easy to put right. No, Alexei, I'm worried because I can't get to terms with these blackguards who work in the shadows. It's not my own people, I'm certain of that. If it were, I should call a meeting, I should stand up on my shooting-cart in the middle of the road and call them all round me, I should say, 'Now look, why is it that you're playing these baby tricks, is it that you don't love me any more? What have I done to hurt you?' And after a long time someone would tell me—I had given a young couple a cottage which another man thought he ought to have, or I had kept the reaping going on some day they considered a festival, something of that sort. Then I should think out some means of reparation, and we should argue for a bit, and when it was all settled we should have a little feast and Father Velikoselski would come to bless us. That's the way I've always managed. But these marauders, they aren't people with any grudge of their own, they're just a set of hired blackguards belonging to Krunovitch. So all I can do is to go to Krunovitch himself —and what's the good of that, when I know just what his views are and he knows mine and we both think we're right?"

Ludmilla, in her gentle way, tried to shift him from this ground.

"But Konstantin, wouldn't it be worth while at least seeing Krunovitch once again? Couldn't you try and get him and Muraviov to meet you together? Then you could at least tell Muraviov that you didn't approve of the way he runs the mill——"

"But my dear Ludmilla, if Muraviov came to me and said he didn't like the way I run my farm, I should simply box his ears. And I doubt if he'd complain—he would certainly have no right to complain."

"Yes, but supposing he came to you and said, 'You will forgive me, Konstantin Viktorovitch, but my men are giving a lot of trouble because I buy from you, and your farm is worked in a way they consider reactionary; so I am obliged, with great regret, to go to another source of supply.' If he said that——"

"If he said that, I should answer that my farming methods and my handling of labour are *not* reactionary, and that he might buy his corn where he liked, and might the devil assist him to get a good good bargain! If he——"

"No, no, Konstantin dear, you've missed my point! What I mean is this: the fact that you sell to Muraviov is the cause of a great deal of trouble for you—anxiety, money losses. There are only two ways of ending the trouble, you could tell him: either you should stop supplying him, or else he should stop treating his men so that their children go hungry on three days in every week. Muraviov may be as obstinate as a Turkestan pack-horse, but he's shrewder than the first Jacob, and he knows quite well that he won't get the grade of wheat you give him at the same price anywhere else. There wouldn't be any need to threaten him——"

Konstantin was regarding her in some perplexity: women, they talked so fast, their brains danced forward like terrier puppies.

"But listen, my dear, you don't understand how I'm placed! If I were to say that sort of thing to Muraviov—especially if Krunovitch was there—he would just say to himself, 'Ah, so Krunovitch has got old Konstantin Viktorovitch tucked in his armpit now! Krunovitch is telling Konstantin just what he must do, and Konstantin's telling me? That's what he'd think, and he'd be quite right. No, Ludmilla, it's too late. I've argued with Muraviov more times than I can remember—it was like reading Homer to a fallen pine-tree, but I did it for the good of his soul. I can't do it any more now. He would only say that Krunovitch had frightened me out of my wits and I was pressing him in my own private interests, and that would be partly true. The old devil knows me too well. . . ."

In spite of that avowal, I thought that Ludmilla's argument was

not entirely lost with him. Once or twice, that day, he said to me, "I don't want to be just stubborn, it isn't right to be led by nothing but your own pride . . ."; and I believe that he might have come right round to Ludmilla's opinion but for a letter which arrived next day. It came by hand, and no one saw who brought it. The dirty manilla envelope was addressed to Konstantin in a clumsy hand that none of us recognized. Inside there was a note done by typewriter on a flimsy sheet of paper, headed "Office of the Rural Intelligence Department of the Central Workers' and Soldiers' Soviet, Moskva." It ran:

"Information has been brought that, first, Konstantin Viktorovitch Lusanov is aiding and abetting the workers' enemy Ivan Muraviov by selling him wheat. And second that he has published a pamphlet of farming management to support the discredited theories of the former ruling (bourzhui) class.

"Lusanov is therefore required to take notice that, first, the supply of wheat or other grains to Muraviov is to cease, and, second, that the pamphlet is to be reprinted with a notice that he now understands the opinion put forward to be reactionary and false, and that he agrees with the co-operative theory of rural organization explained by Z. T. Vardonov in Workers' M.F. Pamphlet No. 64 published Moskva June 1916.

"Or else steps will be taken for Lusanov's enlightenment.

"Signed: I. I. BASTUBIL,
"Kommissar for Rural Intelligence.
"Moskva, 9 September."

"Someone is having a joke with you!" Ludmilla said when she read it.

"Of course!" he answered, smiling rather feebly, looking at her eyes to see if she were smiling. "Of course, yes, such nonsense—who ever could have thought of stringing all that silliness together! It is like the work of a government clerk who has had too much to drink."

But later on, when we were alone, he said to me: "What does this mean, Alexei? Surely it doesn't mean that these mountebanks are really in power in Moscow! How is it that the police do nothing about these rascals—this Kerenski, hasn't he got the police under his control? . . . Well, at any rate, it has made up my mind for me, this piece of impudence. I shall have no more dealings with Krunovitch, or Muraviov either. If I am to be threatened by some portentous revolutionary in Moscow, some urban jackanapes who

wouldn't know the difference between a harrow and a hay-fork, then I shall make no concessions at all. If this is Krunovitch's notion of an argument on rural management, then the best answer I can make is to catch one of his ruffians and give him a thrashing myself. We shall see what these fine friends of his in Moscow can do about that."

§

Next day, without saying anything to Konstantin, I went to see Muraviov myself.

He lived with his mother, an ancient bundle of gabardine and torvity, in two filthy rooms behind a cobbler's workshop; officially, cobbling was his trade, and he was always referred to in the village as Ivan the Cobbler, as if the mill were just his side-line. He was, I suppose, the richest man in the district. He knew who I was, and received me with the spare friendliness of one who would be amiable in manners but must not wear out his much-patched clothes by extravagant gesture; and I was asked to admire his new piano. This piano, it came from Shuya, he said; he had been to Shuya to see a gunny-dealer—you got the cheapest gunnies in Shuya—and he had seen the piano standing in a stable, marked for sale at forty-eight Kerenski roubles; perfect, it looked to him, as if it had just come out of a shop in Moscow, though he heard it had been in the Manenovs' house for twenty years or more; yes, it had taken his fancy; he had made three big scratches at one end of it with his cobbling-jack when the grafter's back was turned, and rubbed the scratches over with a little dirt to make them look older, and then beaten the grafter down to twenty-five kerenskis.

"Well, what do you think, barin? It's all right, isn't it! That's good joinery—German, I should reckon—and the wood's good. And I knew, you see, that I could put it endwise against the wall as it is now, so the scratches won't show. It's pretty, don't you think? You won't see another like that in Chaveschok. Try working it, barin!—You, Mother, get yourself out of the way, go on, get out of it, let the Honourable Captain try and see how it works.—You'll be able to work a piano, barin—I never had the schooling."

I played a few notes to please him, and told him it was a very fine piano. He was delighted. The fact that the inside was as damp as the Volga and that half the keys produced no sound at all did not reach him, and in any case he would not have minded. Then I got down to business.

"Your old friend Konstantin Viktorovitch is in great distress," I said.

He stood, while I was talking, as the dealers stand in the Nijni markets; his hands tucked into the opposite armpits, knees apart and bent, body sloped back as if his buttocks were supported on a trestle. I explained my father-in-law's position as simply and directly as I could. He nodded gravely, as peasants do under admonition, his glance aimed just at the side of my forehead as the trick-shooter aims his gun in the circus. Sometimes he took the bottom of his beard and teased it out a little with his long, black finger-nails, occasionally he lowered his body and stretched it again as if to rearrange the creases in his vast paunch. When I had finished he went on nodding, slowly and in measured time. He said at last:

"Yes . . . yes . . . there are nothing but blackguards in Chaveschok, I know it well enough, ruffians, all of them, drunkards and cuckolds. They'd have my mill on fire—that mill, you know, it belongs to me —they'd have it on fire, Krunovitch and those, if I didn't look out. Konstantin Viktorovitch, he can afford to lose his steers now and then. But it's hard with me, the price of seconds goes down while the sacks are still on the steam-way, it's not often I get a price to meet the bare cost of the wheat. Konstantin Viktorovitch, you know (God and the Blessed Mother pour out their goodness on him!), he's stiff with his reckoning, he won't let any but himself get buxom-bellied."

"But Konstantin Viktorovitch scales his prices on the Moscow flour-market tariff," I objected.

"Yes," he said. "Yes. . . . Those that keep fat kine can laugh into their neighbour's cooking-pots for all the devil will reward them! . . . But I tell you, barin, it's like shoe-iron on my heart, hearing that Konstantin Viktorovitch is being pestered by those sons-of-bitches. If the police were good for anything they'd all have been hanged long since, those bastards. I'll tell you what I'll do: I'll talk to Father Velikoselski about it, I shall tell him to pray the Holy Mother to protect Konstantin Viktorovitch and to punish the ruffians that torment him. I will offer the Father seventy-five kopeks for each time he says that prayer—yes, I will pay that myself, for the love I have for Konstantin Viktorovitch. Or perhaps three roubles and fifty kopeks for six prayers; that would be quite reasonable. . . ."

And an hour later we were still in exactly the same position. When I left, he thanked me for the compliment I had paid him by coming to see his piano.

I said to Yevski, when he came to see me later in the day: "Muraviov seems quite pleased with himself. He doesn't seem inclined to give way to your friend."

"My friend?" he said, eyeing me aslant. "Do you mean Krunovitch?—why, he's only a God-save-you acquaintance of mine."

"Well, Muraviov doesn't seem very frightened of him, anyway."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"So? Ah, perhaps not. Perhaps it's the women Muraviov counts on. Those are what spoil the strikes. It's like this, you see: three days, four days, the men stay about and chew their sunflower seeds. Then their does get angry, 'Off you go, you great slobbering tyke!' they say. 'Your place is Ivan Cobbler's mill, cheap middlings or none, the devil take you and the cobbler together.' So off he goes, and round by the mill he finds Krunovitch waiting. 'Now then,' Krunovitch says, 'out away from here, you pap-sucking bastards! Where's your workers' solidarity?' So Pyotr—whoever it may be—goes wandering round the town, nothing to do, no money to get a swill of braga even. Then when it's dark he goes back to his doe, 'Where's the tinklers?' she says. 'None,' he says. 'All right!' she says, 'no lying with me, I won't do it on an empty belly.' So then, two days on top of that, maybe, Krunovitch, he finds thirty—forty—comrades in a line by the mill, none of them have had their does a whole week, all as fierce as the devil's father. 'Comrades!' he says, 'you know what I said!' 'To hell with what you said!' they say, and they throw a spadeful of muck in his face and stamp off into Ivan's machine-house. And there's Ivan Cobbler looking like a horse-doctor that's just got the two dog-teeth out of a seventeen-hand stallion. 'Welcome, welcome, little brothers!' he says."

"So you think the strike's as good as over?" I asked.

Again his face fell into the shape of a Black priest at his devotions.

"It would make a difference," he said presently, "if some good comrades came here from some big place. Here in Chaveschok we've got nothing but ploughboys turned into engine-oilers. No solidarity. When Krunovitch says, 'Come, comrades, we'll just put the gunny-store on fire, just to show Ivan Cobbler we mean something,' they say, 'No, comrade, we won't do anything to spoil the mill working, else where would our work be?' And they won't lay a hand on Ivan either. They say he's the only one that has the workings in his head, they mustn't spoil anything to do with the mill's workings. But the comrades from Zandroduba, they understand solidarity, they've had workers' training, you see—miners, a lot of them. They won't care about spoiling Ivan's gunny-store, or Ivan's guts either. If you cut the guts out of one bastard you think he looks queer; when you've done a hundred, you hardly notice. So the comrades from Zandroduba may do better at arguing with Ivan Cobbler than these pigeon-kidneyed sons of marsh-rats at Chaveschok."

At this point I felt I was learning more than was good for me, and I said that I could spare no more time. But just as he was going off something prompted me to call him back.

"At any rate," I said, "I hope Krunovitch will be busy enough with his own affairs to keep his hands off Konstantin Viktorovitch's demesne for a few days."

"Ah yes," he answered, "please God it may be so!" Then his pride got the better of him as usual, and he added: "If they thought out any more devilries, those ruffians, they'd choose a night with no moon in it, wouldn't you think? Like next Sunday, when the sky will be as black as the devil's loins. But it's no good asking poor old Yevski about devilries of that kind."

§

I said nothing to Konstantin, but with full confidence in Yevski's powers of prognostication I decided to keep a lookout myself on the night he had named. It was understood that the farmhands were regularly patrolling the demesne; but knowing their temper, I doubted whether any had really found courage to venture out at night at all; indeed, it was not unlikely that they were persuaded pecuniarily to stay indoors.

I had, of course, nothing to guide me as to where an attack might be expected. Yevski was so dumb on this point that I concluded he had not been informed. But the chief group of granaries, which had not yet been attacked, were some two hundred paces from the house in the direction of the hamlet; these buildings were chiefly of timber, highly combustible after the spell of dry weather we had been enjoying; that they might be the object of Krunovitch's next attention was at least a sensible guess; and if I posted myself on one of the mansard roofs I should be able to spot any light that showed in the radius of a verst or so, thus covering an area of a dozen dessiatines. This seemed a more hopeful plan than wandering about, with or without a bodyguard of scared muzhiki, on the chance of running into the marauders.

I nearly gave up the enterprise when I heard, on the Saturday evening, that there had been a day of turbulence in Chaveschok. A group of burr-hands had arrived at the mill, intending to resume work; just as they reached the gate they were heavily stoned by a party of men, strangers to the village, who appeared with military precision from behind a group of jobbing-shops just opposite the wall; four were badly injured, one said to be dying; the strangers had vanished, half the village was raging for Krunovitch's blood,

and Krunovitch was nowhere to be found. It was reasonable to suppose that the agitators would be satisfied with their day's work, or at least too much preoccupied to concern themselves with us for the time being. Nevertheless, I was not quite easy in my mind. Yevski had given me a plain warning: if any attack did occur, while I was peacefully sleeping, I should feel that I had been unforgivably remiss.

On the Sunday night I said good night to Konstantin and went to my room as usual. But I didn't undress. I waited, still undetermined, till I had heard Dromelin locking up, till all the sounds in the house had ceased. I lay down for a while, but I wasn't sleepy and the tickle of indecision kept me from dozing. Yes, I would at least keep watch for an hour or so.

I possessed two Colts, and had cleaned them both for the occasion. One of them was inclined to jam (its awkwardness had nearly cost me my life at Limanova) but I took it with me as a reserve weapon. In case anyone should chance to come into my room I left a note saying that I had been unable to sleep and had gone out for a stroll. I went downstairs carrying my boots, and got out through the library window, pulling the shutters into position behind me.

To reach the post I had chosen was not quite so easy as it had seemed in the daytime. I carried no lamp, knowing how easily a single flash could be spotted, and I was out of practice at moving in darkness. Once, on my way down to the granaries, I tripped on a hurdle lying in the track and fell full length; but I was less hurt than angry at finding myself so clumsy. Arriving there, I discovered that someone had moved the ladder which generally hung on two bosses from the long barn wall, and it took me a quarter of an hour to find it. Then, when I put it in position, I saw that the top came a good deal short of the snow-slats on which I meant to climb. (I should have expected this: in the country no ladder is ever long enough for its obvious purpose.) I had to lower the ox-heavy thing again, carry it round and prop it up at the other side, where by some fortunate aberration of the builder the snow-board came a few inches lower. With this concession I was able to scramble on to the roof—a feat I might have funked in daylight—fondly hoping that getting back to the ladder would not be still more awkward. I crawled up to the flatter slope of the centre and lay on my stomach there.

I lay very still. Technically it was a bad position, for a man looking up at the roof from certain quarters would see by the break of line that something unusual was perched on it. But the night was very dark, a high, tight layer of cloud shut out the stars. I

could only just distinguish the mass of the house a quarter of a verst away against the turbid sky. And the enemy, I thought, would not come too circumspectly—what had he to fear?

If he came at all: and I soon doubted it. Even if Yevski's hint had not been fustian, there was ample reason for the plot to be abandoned; or, if the churls were bent on earning Krunovitch's money, they were as likely as not to make a roundabout approach and do their job in perfect safety. As I got colder, feeling the night's warning of an early autumn, as my body grew stiff and my eyes tired with turning, I thought myself a fool to be playing this dull game at such long odds. That passed, giving place to mere loneliness, and then to melancholy. Those thoughts which stayed in the mind's depths when there was always Vava or Konstantin to talk with, which could hardly rise during nights crammed up with healthy sleep, found freedom now to frolic on the windless surface. If the pains my spirit suffered were only the stony track and the sharp weather which a man must go through as he travels I could have borne them with the common fortitude; but reason, probing those troubles with curious, insistent fingers, seemed to find their cause in my own humiliating weakness. I went back to a conversation I had had with Natalia not long before I left her to join my unit. I had asked her first of all to let me leave her at Chaveschok, in her father's care and companionship; but she had begged me to let her stay in our own villa at Voepensk, where, she said, my spirit would be close to her, where the tide of ordinary intercourse would not flow in between us; and I, loving that jealousy of hers, had given way. There: that was the source of her mind's lingering distemper, unless I could trace it to the dreadful winters of Krasnyesk; and while I struggled to escape responsibility by that narrow chance, the sense of weakness and failure attacked me from another ambush. Anton: what had I really done to save that dear, warm being from the prison where he lay now, wasting under impotence and illness? Why should he, worth ten of me, be captive, and I free? With nothing to divert my thoughts, no sound from the stillness, no prick of light in the sea of shadow, that vision of my selfishness grew larger; till all the hardness that I knew of in my mind, all its lethargy beside the monstrous turgescence of common suffering, seemed to be pictured in my own flawed brain. For a little while my thoughts were lost in that remorse which like an abscess spreads a wide, hot pain across the heart; I was ready, then, to throw myself upon God's mercy, only begging that His judgement be fierce and final, that His love would follow it; but humiliation turned to self-pity and that to anger. This was only another of God's tricks with me

and all men, to make us feel the blame for His misfeasance. Surely I could leave all that behind, as you leave the tears of childhood, the need for protecting arms: surely I should find within myself, in my own angry courage, sufficient armour for my share in the battle!

Still no sound, no light.

I was getting drowsy, and I might have slept except for the discomfort of the slats pressing my thighs and the constant fear of rolling over; my thoughts lost all shape, I only knew that God was playing with my weakness, trying to catch my spirit as the hour's misery enfeebled it and to make me surrender. It was foolish, foolish to stay here, with the cold and cramp keeping me just so wakeful as to feel my thoughts grinding. I pulled up my knees, slowly, to work out the stiffness, chafed my hands for a little while, and started to crawl down.

I had lost the habit of vigilance, it was only by chance that my eyes turned left as I wriggled down the steeper slope. And in that casual glance I caught, or seemed to catch, a fleck of light close to the house.

It was there and gone like a falcon pouncing. I blinked and kept still, watched intently, saw nothing. Then it showed again, brighter, and lasting for perhaps a second, as if a man had swung his lamp right round; and I fancied that I had just seen a man's shape where the light was. There was a moment when I felt no alarm, thinking that someone in the house had found me gone and come out to look for me. Then I knew, with the intuition that feels like certainty, that the light did not belong to any friend. I glanced once again, and saw nothing, except my mind's swift picture of Natalia and Vava sleeping.

I have been frightened often, but that moment's fear stays alone in memory: the suffocating rush of wind from stomach to ear and temple, leaving the throat brick dry; the pain of thrashing heart, the damp coldness spreading over legs and shoulders. For an instant I was paralysed, I shouted wildly but no sound came out. Then, as you recover from a fall into icy water and start to strike out for the bank, I found my instincts taking possession again. To get there, quicker than speed! I had come to the roof's edge already, reason took hold just soon enough to stop me jumping. My legs dropped over, feeling for the ladder, I thrust them down till the outmost board was in my stomach, my weight on forearms slowly slipping. It wasn't there, it wasn't there. Fear left no room for fear, I was conscious only of a hot exasperation: seconds passing, the man with the lamp, inside now. As my legs swung, my toes feeling, I jerked

myself along, three, six inches. My left toe struck, that was it, the upright, now the rung. I forgot it was my bad leg, I let a portion of my weight go there and it sent me back a shaft of agony. I think I must have dropped then, catching a rung with my left arm as I fell. I remember hanging to one side of the ladder by an arm shot with pain, and feeling it slip sideways, a moment when it seemed to hover like a seagull and next the dark ground swinging up towards me. Was it a water-tank that broke the drop, catching the ladder's waist, the ladder's feet trapped in the angle between ground and wall? I know that my right leg and shoulder came to the gravel path with no more force than if a wrestler of my own physique had thrown me; I was lying there, half-stunned, for only a moment, then I was running, unconscious of any pain, running towards the house.

I picture that dash as if it lasted for a long time. I am running lopsided, as my bad leg makes me, but very fast. I see the mass of the house, no light inside or out, I hear nothing but the pumping of my own wind. A big stone catches my foot and I stumble, but do not fall, a prickly branch brushes my face, the handle of a wheelbarrow strikes me across the thigh, but I hardly feel them. My hand tries to drag out a revolver which has stuck across the lining of my pocket. I am snow-cold with terror, I try to run faster, faster.

As if those flashes of light had been a dream the house stayed dark and silent. I had only thirty yards to run when the silence broke, a loud and frightened cry burst from the house, then two reports. I swerved to the right, broke through a hedge of tamarisk, reached the end of the verandah. I saw in one particle of time the salon-door fly open, a faint light fall across the boards, a man—two—three of them dash out and jump the balustrade. I had the Colt free, I fired two shots at the hindmost, missed him. I ran to the open door, someone lurching across the dark room fell into my arms. I cried, "Who's that—who's that—are you hurt?" and the answer was a swinging blow between my eye and ear. He had pulled away, I lost my direction and diving to grasp him I came up against the sofa. I paused, winded, while my vision settled; a second passed, then I saw where the door was and the man had gone. I ran outside and saw him twenty yards away in a petal of light, two of the others had come back for him. I raised the Colt to fire again but it had jammed—I had got the wrong one. The light went out. I ran as best I could to where it had been, dragging out the other revolver. No one there, nothing but darkness which the trees tightened. There were faint voices from not far off, the crack of branches breaking. I went on running but I had no direction, I fired ahead four shots

at random. Then my leg gave out, throwing me on my side. My ears just caught the sound of someone laughing, a long way off, perhaps behind me.

Fool, to chase them when their friends might still be in the house, in Natalia's room! I hobbled back, too sick and blown to run again. Inside the drawing-room I struck a match and saw a trail of blood—big splashes like blobs of ink thrown from a fountain-pen—leading right across the floor: so, someone had winged the fellow. The match went out, I felt my way into the middle hall and found it faintly lit, the light came from the landing above, the shadow of the landing banisters vibrating on the wall beside the stairs. A voice thick with nervousness called down, "Who's that?" and I answered faintly, "It's all right, it's Alexei." I went up slowly, putting both feet on each step, leaning against the wall, terrified of what I might see. I remember noticing that the blood began from half-way up the stairs, where a little pool of it was trickling over; I could hear it dripping down into the hall.

The light belonged to a candle which stood on the landing floor. Close by, someone lay on his back with his knees drawn up, uttering a funny cry, like the cry of a mouse in a cat's teeth. I went closer and saw that it was Dromelin: Dromelin in a grey calico night-shirt, his arms and his long, emaciated legs quite bare, his fingers working like a pianist's, his mouth wide open, exactly as if he were roaring with laughter.

Konstantin sat beside him; he was weeping, and I had not seen him shed tears before. He was murmuring hoarsely: "Where is it, Sofronisha, where is it—tell me, tell me—where do you feel it? Jesus bless you, Sofronisha, loving Jesus hold you, Jesus save you, darling one!" Even now I do not smile when I think of him sitting there, his night-cap dropping over one ear, a dressing-gown of Olga Martinovna's over his shoulders, his night-shirt stuck into the trousers of his old mess-uniform. He was white, quite white and sweating, as if he felt each thrust of Dromelin's agony in his own body. He crossed himself mechanically like a man with chorea. A gun lay beside his bare feet.

I stood there helplessly, feeling very faint, looking at the queer shape of Konstantin's toes, at a cartridge which started rolling towards me as if by its own power, bobbing a little on the roughness of the grain. I whispered:

"What happened?"

Konstantin hardly looked at me. He said like one trying to recall something from his early life, "I don't know. . . . They've done for

him, poor Dromelin! . . . I got him—one of them—I got a shot in him."

Dromelin was quiet at last. His body had relaxed, only his fingers were still moving, drumming on the air. I found myself fiddling with the warm cartridge. I was longing, longing to go and see if Natalia had woken, but my body would not move while Dromelin's fingers were still moving.

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". . . have been to see Dr. Mishlayevski myself. I spent the whole day and half the night in the ante-room of his surgery, I took off my coat and hat and shoes, so when he came out of the surgery round about midnight he couldn't drive me straight out and he just had to listen to me. Also he is of muzhik origin, you can see that by the set of his knees, and he hadn't lost the habit of listening politely to the nobility.

"I have made him promise to at least examine Vava. He confessed to me when I pressed him very hard that he takes one evening off work every week—it is nearly always Tuesday—to spend with his wife in their little house in the Novinski district. It is their rule never to have visitors then, they just sit together and enjoy music. So he will be free to give Vava his undivided attention. . . ."

I showed that letter of Yelisaveta's first to Konstantin and then to Natalia. Konstantin had some difficulty in concentrating sufficiently to understand it; Dromelin's death had left him mournful and distrait, he was silent at meals, in the evenings he would say, "Where are the cards? I don't know, I don't know where they're kept, Dromelin always found them for me." He was always surprised to find that Ludmilla knew where everything was.

"Yes," he said, when I had explained the letter's meaning, "yes, if this Mishlayevski is a good doctor, if you think he might do some good to Vava, you ought perhaps to let him see the child. He couldn't come here, you're sure of that? Well, yes, Vava had better be taken to see him, I suppose you and Natalia must both go, yes, I suppose so. . . ."

But Natalia, to my surprise, turned down the plan at once. She said quietly, holding the letter by its edges as one holds a photograph, "It is very kind of Yelisaveta Akinievna, yes, I am sure she means to be very kind. But I don't want to fall in with her plans—

no, Alexei, we must make plans of our own, I don't want to be mixed up any more with Yelisaveta. . . . Besides, I cannot leave my father, not when he's so worried."

§

I had questioned Yevski on the day after the raid and found that he knew nothing about it; indeed, he was obviously surprised that it had taken place—he had supposed that Krunovitch's henchmen would all be busy in the village. When I said sharply, "Yes, but it was you who told them which door they could break open!" he replied with contemptuous candour that any of the doors could be broken. "I told you to be on the look-out, barin. What more could I do?"

But two days later he had learnt everything from his private sources. According to him, the men involved (he could or would not give their names) had had the impudence to make a report to the police. Their story was that they were returning from a trapping expedition in the Chepit bogs, had lost their way, and seeing Konstantin's house had gone there to ask directions. Unable to arouse anyone inside they had tugged rather sharply at one of the doors and the lock had broken. They had entered the house and called softly, whereupon the owner and his servant had appeared, carrying pistols, and had listened while they politely explained their predicament. All of a sudden, the servant had caught hold of one of them and held him by the throat while the master fired four shots at arm-span range into his ribs. The others, thinking that they were dealing with a maniac, had dragged their companion away and made off as fast as they could. They thought that the servant had been slightly injured in the struggle.

"And do you think the police will believe that story?" I asked.

He grinned.

"I shouldn't wonder. It will save them a lot of trouble to write down in their books 'Accident due to unfortunate misunderstanding.' "

"And what happened to the man wounded, do you know?"

"They say he won't get better. So that will be one on either side, which is perfectly fair. . . . If you were to ask me, I'd say the best that Konstantin Viktorovitch can do is to keep himself quiet. Krunovitch understands the police a lot better than he does. . . ."

I was in great perplexity. At first it seemed my duty to stay with Konstantin, giving him what help I could in his trouble, being ready

to protect him in the case of another attack. But Natalia was visibly nervous—despite my care she had got some garbled account of the affair from Mme Arnevitch—and I myself was not a little alarmed for her safety and for Vava's. I thought first of moving them all together; in my own district some one would doubtless give us hospitality for a while; but Konstantin would not hear of it.

"No no, Alexei, it is kind of you but I have too much work to do, I have no one who can keep the stock books properly and look after the money side. And there will be a meeting of the Zemstvo shortly, I must certainly attend that. . . . Besides, I cannot have people saying that Konstantin Viktorovitch ran away because some burglars broke into his house. I've been a soldier in my time, I can't have people saying that."

That seemed to settle the question. I did not tell him Yevski's story: it seemed too preposterous to be worth anyone's attention.

Then Yelisaveta's letter came, and put my thoughts out of balance once more. I love Konstantin very dearly, but he was an old man, he had seen all the best of his life, he had Ludmilla to look after him. You had said that Vava was contented enough, with three women to spoil him, to say nothing of his grandfather and Yevski: even when he was quite alone he often sang and laughed, there was little going on about the house that he did not notice. But once or twice of late I had found him crying, with a German picture-book on his bed which showed children snowballing, boys playing football; when I asked him what was the matter he wouldn't answer, he seemed ashamed that I had seen his tears; but it was clear enough. I thought then of how I had found him in the house behind the Mlinovakaya, of how, in that moment of anger and pity, I had sworn to make up to him for all he had suffered, to give him everything that a boy might have. And now the one chance he had was waiting in Moscow, and in Moscow, they said, the summer's quiet still lasted—but how long?

Oh, it was peaceful here, in spite of all that had happened. We woke to the chatter of cocks and hens, our sweet routine was seldom varied, all day long we could smell the earth, the mown grass, the fresh dung of our beasts. To leave all that, to pick up the fatigues of travel, the noise, the manifold uncertainty, could I face that again? Yet my soldier's mind was already planning it, as the spring campaigns are mapped in autumn. We should leave Mme Arnevitch behind, she would be happy here in gentle gossip with Ludmilla and never much use to us. Yevski must come, since all parts of the world were tools familiar to his hands and I never mistrusted his loyalty to me. I should have a special carriage on the train, I myself should

sleep in the corridor just outside, in Moscow we should stay at the Nesselrode Hotel, which was comfortable and where they knew me. . . .

Ludmilla urged me to go. "I know how you feel," she said, "how anxious you are about Konstantin. But you know, he has not the least fear for himself, he has kept all his strength of character, it is only Dromelin's death that has made him seem so nervous for the time being. I have written already to see if Kvoritko can come to us—he was once under Konstantin's command, you know—he would be a protection as well as giving us service. . . . I know Konstantin will worry if he thinks you're staying just for his sake. He has spoken of it already, he said, 'You know, Ludmilla, I should rather lose my right hand or my reason than stand in the way of anything that could be done for that little boy.' And surely Natalia will feel like that too, as soon as she has had time to think it over."

I did not think so. But two or three days after that Natalia asked me: "What was his name, that man—that doctor, the doctor Yelisaveta Akinievna talked of in her letter?" I told her, and she said, "He's a good doctor, you think, a clever man? He might do Vava some good?" I said I believed he might.

That, I remember, was a day colder than any we had had so far, there was a fresh wind blowing, and as we talked, walking back from the village, the leaves were floating down on to the road. I had been to see if the weekly packet of newspapers had arrived from Petrograd, but there was nothing: by God's will the train had broken down, they said. The wind had given a warm colour to Natalia's cheeks; I thought, glancing at her face, that she looked younger, and her step was newly vigorous. That evening, when we chanced to be alone in the drawing-room, she said suddenly:

"I have made up my mind. This Doctor Mishlayevski, we must take Vava to see him."

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As far as Vishni Spoeltzevo we managed to keep the compartment for ourselves. The train had been crowded all the way, but till that point the passengers were mostly muzhiki, who had got the idea that they would stand a better chance of an overshare in the land distribution by applying personally to the Moscow Soviet; these were stolid and patient people, they did not mind lying on top of each other in the corridors, they took it in good part when the train was held up for thirty-six hours outside Drebuisk. At Vishni, which we reached in the early hours of morning, the crowd filling the sta-

tion like sugar in a sweet-tray included soldiers and workmen from the timberyards, and some of these looked ready to tear the train to bits if they couldn't get a place. For a time I held the inner door against the scrimmage, repeating "Full up, full up, no room in here!" but when I caught sight of two men in soldiers' tunics with the badge of the Izmailovski, middle-aged, broad-shouldered, I let them slip in; they would look after their own comfort, perhaps after ours. I said, slamming the door behind them, "I don't want anyone else in here if I can help it—the little boy, you see, he has to lie flat." They nodded, they were taciturn fellows, and not much interested. But it was too much to hope that we should not be invaded further. Within five minutes the door was flung open again, I saw a man in the rig of a barge-hauler whose girth blocked the corridor; he leaned down, put his red, greasy face inside the carriage, and said, "That seat, I want it, all of it." I was not going to let this fat and dirty-smelling brute come in without a struggle; but as I started to curse him I saw that he didn't want the space for himself. Two men who looked to be of the petty intelligentsia slipped under his arm, came in, nodded carelessly to me, and sat down in the small vacant space as if it had been reserved for them. "All right, Bakukil, that will do!" one of them said. The bargee shut the door and went away.

Presently I said to one of the newcomers, who had sat down by Vava's feet: "Perhaps you will change over and let my wife have that place. She likes to be near the little boy."

"If you like!" he said curtly, and crossed over.

His face was not uninteresting, small and sallow, lightly bearded, the eyes betraying Circassian stock. He might be something to do with the railway, I thought, a foreman or perhaps a counting clerk in one of the engine-shops. I said, by way of getting him to talk:

"I don't know why this train should be so crowded."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps they imagine there's food in Moscow," he said. "I don't know how that illusion got about. . . . And you, why are you going?"

"I'm taking this youngster to a doctor. His back—I'm hoping that something can be done about it."

He looked across at Vava, who had fallen asleep again, and smiled sympathetically. "He's got to lie like that—always? Poor little thing! Not a good time, though, to be in Moscow."

"Also I have a friend in prison there. I'm hoping perhaps to be able——"

"In prison? Which prison?"

"The Vadorka. Why?"

He ignored the question.

"And your friend, who is he, what's his name?"

"Scheffler. Count Anton Scheffler."

He nodded, and glanced at his companion, who nodded also.

"So Scheffler is in the Vadorka!" he said. "I was not quite certain, though I thought so."

"So you know about him?"

"A little, yes—his name was in the Petrograd papers a good deal. You say he's a friend of yours?"

"Yes, a very dear friend. If it hadn't been for him I should have lost this leg, perhaps my life as well."

"Indeed!" he said, as if his interest in the subject were exhausted.

Again the door opened, and a swarthy Kuban in a blouse covered with engine-grease thrust himself inside, carrying the usual canvas travelling-poke against his stomach. One of the soldiers shifted a little to try and make room for him. The man I had been talking with said quietly:

"You will have to find somewhere else, Comrade. There's no room here."

In answer, the Kuban put one muddy boot on the seat and heaved his bag on to the rack. "That mug of yours," he said in a general way, his eyes on the bag, "you can put your bloody spout in it."

The stouter of the two civilians grasped his arm, quite gently. He said: "Perhaps you don't know, Comrade, that is Deshenvik you're talking to."

The Kuban glanced down sharply. He said nothing. He took his bag down again, flicked with his hand the dirty mark he had made on the seat, sniffed, but not obstreperously, and bundled out.

The man called Deshenvik opened a leather bag and took out a fistful of flimsies.

"And you," I asked him, "are you going to Moscow?"

"Yes," he answered laconically. "Business."

"Business must be difficult," I said.

He smiled.

"Difficult? Yes. But in one way the difficulties are nearly over. In another, they're just beginning.—Isn't that so, Perenkin?"

The stouter man nodded with his lips pursed, his big moustache pushed up against his nose.

"Nearly over, yes!" he said dully. "Just beginning, yes!"

"I suppose you haven't a recent Petrograd paper?" I asked. "I've seen no Petrograd news for some time, or any war news."

"No," Deshenvik said distantly, "I have my local Party papers and that's all." Then, "I can't give you any Petrograd news. I know what is to happen but I don't know if it's happened yet. We shall find

out when we get to Moscow. As to the war, surely no one's interested in that any longer?"

"It interests me," I said, "because I was a good deal concerned with it. When you see men dying in battalions you rather want to know what is the final upshot of their suffering."

"I suppose so!" he said. ". . . With people of your class it is always the most recent memory which carries most weight. We others, we look a little further back. We see, not a few thousand men suffering, a million or so, but million upon million, millions multiplied by thousands. We see the chained gangs driven through the snow, we see one man standing helpless to watch his wife and children die of starvation, while another uses his last strength to break into his master's granaries and gets beaten to death. We remember the two thousand of the Strelitz tortured to death, the floggings of '61, the trial of the Nihilists in '78, the murder of Leon Mirski, of Kviatovski and Priessnakoff, of Sophie Peroffskaja; we remember the Stepniak letters, the banishment of Maria Tshebrikova, the famine of '91, the martyrs of Saratov and Tashkend, the Muravieff report, the countless women and children slashed to bits by the Kazaks in 1905. . . ."

I said: "I, too, I have my memories, memories from the other side of Krasnoyarsk. . . ."

He nodded. "Memories, perhaps, of half a dozen winters spent in some discomfort! You—yes, I see it in your face, I know the type so well—you have been one of the amiable bouzhui who took to radical politics as a pastime more entertaining than hunting wolves. You made little tiny plots, you wrote rather daring little pamphlets, you were a trifle indiscreet, the police were vexed and you got sent away for a time. . . . Forgive me—you meant very well, I've no doubt! Just as M. Kerenski—that well-intentioned optimist who's been barking and posturing in Petrograd all the summer —just as he thought that Russia's illness would be cured in due course by homoeopathic treatment, by gentle adjustments and pious aspirations——"

"And you," I said, "you have no aspirations? You find you can get along without them?"

"We have a programme," he said quietly, "and that is a good deal better. Not a programme of little plots and dilettante pamphleteering, not a scheme for bringing the Russian organization into line with the so-called European democracies, something larger and more imaginative than that; I say imaginative—yes—but fastened down to physical possibilities."

As if those words reminded him of his work, he lowered his eyes

and began perusing his papers with a student's diligence, reading with his lips and making notes in the margins. But presently he looked up again, smiled faintly, and said with a kind of shyness that made him look many years younger:

"You will forgive me—I had no wish to be personally offensive. My mind is tired, I have been very busy, I am perhaps a little excited. It's exciting, you see, when you come so close to a day you've looked forward to for a long time. It's like a young girl on the morning of her wedding—no, I can put it better than that—it is like being a Believer on the Eve of Easter Day. But the Believer has so short a time to wait—there is only the day of the Passion and the day that follows; at most a week in which he undergoes Christ's sufferings. With me, it has been almost a lifetime of waiting—a time that has felt as long as the whole of Russia's misery. Listen, I am fifty-two: and the first thing I remember—that was when I was five—is the soldiers breaking into our house to take my father away. That is as clear as if it happened yesterday—I am crouching behind a chair, one of the soldiers holds my mother as she struggles, his arms right round her and his hands on her breasts; the soldiers have got the irons on one of my father's arms, the hold the other behind his back, they twist it until I hear the bones cracking, one of them strikes him across the side of his face with a belt. Yes, it is all quite clear—I see exactly the shape of my father, all doubled up, I hear the kind of sob he gave, like a child sobbing, it was the first time I had known that a grown-up person can cry. Forty-seven years ago—forty-seven years, and many of those I have spent in prison. But not dejected—I have never been dejected; dejection is a form of stupidity which has been chronic and fatal in the Russian temperament. No, my life has been too full for that. I have had to squeeze a living like the rest of us out of the slender margin that the rich leave over; I have studied—taught myself to read and write, mastered twenty subjects; I have corresponded for fifteen years with Party members in Moscow and elsewhere—thousands of letters, every one written in code, many of them sent to an agent in Paris or Geneva or London to be transmitted back to Russia; secret meetings—in the corner of a workshop after hours, in attics and cellars, once in a railway tunnel—hiding, changing my name, not daring to visit my family or friends, that has been my life. Not exciting, no, it soon ceases to be exciting, secrecy and danger become as monotonous and wearing as rheumatism. But I have never been despondent. I have always known by an inner light that I should live to see the day of salvation. Do you wonder that it excites me a little, to emerge

from the long darkness, to see already the first gleam of the brilliant daylight? No, no, you cannot see as I do the vast company of the oppressed as if they stood in one great arena, the thin faces, the stooping bodies, the flesh eaten by microbes and worn by chains. Even if you saw them you could not feel yourself a part of that multitude, you will never be close enough to see the life come back into those bodies as the light breaks over them."

He stopped abruptly. "But I waste your time," he said, "and also my own. Perenkin, you should have stopped me, there is no time for golden visions, we must lay the first courses before we stand to admire the building."

After two or three false starts, which had taken us just outside the station, we were moving at last. The train settled down to the pace of a draught-horse's canter and that, with luck, would last for the next twelve hours. The soldiers were noisily asleep already, Natalia was dozing. I asked Deshenvik if he would mind my putting out the light, as my wife badly wanted more sleep. and he said briskly: "No, I can't have it out, I have work to do!" But a little later, turning to his companion, he said, "Perenkin, fix your cap or something against the lamp, that will keep the light out of Madame's eyes."

I slept, if you can call it sleep, for I only lapsed, still conscious of the train's broken trot, into succeeding nightmares as vivid as sentient life. Konstantin called out to me, "Alexei, they're after me!" I saw him struggling with Krunovitch and Muraviov together, I tried, from where I lay on the mansard roof, to shoot them, but the Colt had jammed. Anton came close to me and said in my ear, "I'm dying, Alexei, it doesn't matter, but I thought you'd like to know, there's no air in the prison. You die slowly, ever so slowly. . . ." Always I seemed to be going away from Natalia, further and further, the sound of her weeping growing fainter. A jolt woke me and I saw her huddled asleep, I leant across and put my hands on her knees, hardly believing in her presence. Why should she come with me, what should I do with her when we got to Mariki-Matesk? She woke with a start, she said "What is it, Alexei, where are we going?" I knew then, I said, "To Moscow!" and she repeated, "To Moscow, Moscow?" I tried to keep awake, with my eyes fixed steadily on her face, but the heavy shadow dropped between us and I had lost her again, I shouted "Natalia! Natalia!" but I got no answer.

Each time I woke I saw Deshenvik still working, apparently unaware of Perenkin's snoring head on his shoulder, unconscious of everything save the papers spread on his knees. He wore no spec-

tacles, the jolting did not seem to worry him, the cigarette in his mouth had been dead for an hour or more. His small, tired face looked happy, with that deep contentment you can see on the faces of students in a library, as if those pages, grey with smudged type, were better food than an emperor's feast.

When the first daylight showed through the misted window I saw, waking again, that he had a town plan spread on his knees. Perenkin had woken and Deshenvik was talking to him in the flat voice of a bored schoolmaster, the stump of cigarette still between his lips: "The third alternative operates only if the buildings west of that street—there, you see, the one in green marked PP[1]—if those buildings have not been taken by Z + 4½ hours. It's important to remember that. The patrol stationed on the roof here—RN—will give the signal, either red or blue. If it's blue it means that they are operating their third alternative and Fichtner will then operate the corresponding alternative on his schedule—look, the chart makes it quite clear. Now we come to the fourth series of alternatives—these are for remote contingencies, but they ought to be known by heart all the same. . . ." Natalia slept more peacefully now, Vava was still asleep. I wanted to go out into the corridor, where the air might be a little fresher, but men were sleeping against the door and as far as I could see there was not a square six inches to stand in. I twisted my shoulders into a better position and went on drowsing fitfully, Deshenvik's monotonous voice still penetrating the thin film about my consciousness. ". . . the telegraph building in the Jegorievsakaya. The most important thing is to establish the loyalty of existing staff, you must see that Fichtner realizes that. It's no good thinking that a bundle of excited Communists can handle an intricate affair like the telegraph. Two soldiers should be enough to keep the staff on its best behaviour: there's bound to be one or two recalcitrants, and if those are dealt with in a spectacular way—stripped and shot in the stomach is best—the rest'll come round to loyalty soon enough. . . . Fichtner will have to report at headquarters for the day's instructions at 6.30 each morning. . . . Lubyndev will only draw rations for Party members engaged in surveillance—you remember that the depôt for that will be behind the Church of the Adoration, it can be served by two tramway routes if the railway bridge across Vopea is blown up, as it probably will be. He will present signatures for rations issued on the previous day. . . . Yes, that memorandum must be copied in quintuplicate, if Lubyndev hasn't a copy already you must give him one. . . ." The daylight grew stronger, paling the light of the torn mantle. Opening my eyes again I saw Perenkin hunched like an elephant over a ten-kopek

exercise book, in which, with his eyes almost shut, his red, swollen features utterly without expression, he was steadily writing.

Deshenvik smiled and wished me good-morning.

§

Until nine o'clock the train pursued its course, if slowly, with laudable persistence. Every now and then we stopped in the open country, but only for ten minutes or so. We had reached the edge of the Czetverinski forest when our motion slowly petered out as if the engine were beaten by the gradient; we rolled back some fifty yards and then the Kroeder brakes came on with a violent shudder which but for the safety strap I had fixed would have sent Vava on to the floor. I supposed that a coupling had broken. After half an hour Yevski came along the footboard and climbed up to the window; evidently he had found friends further up the train, his breath was ripe and his mouth distinctly saucy. "So here we are, barin!" he said cheerfully. It appeared, from his account, that we were following a troop-train; what kind of troops he could not say, but he fancied they were "Kerenski's bastards." The troop-train had stuck, so we were stuck too, like the old lady who followed her stray bullock down the public sewer at Bogutcher. Why had the troop-train stuck? Nobody quite knew. Some said there was a bridge blown up, some that the soldiers had cut the engine-driver's throat because the train was inadequately heated.

"Avos!" he added inconsequently, "your friend Kerenski is quite all right, he's as cosy as can be. They're saying up the train that he's sitting by the stove in the Winter Palace with twenty thousand babkas all round him dressed up as soldiers—forty thousand, perhaps it is. They'll look after him all right. Chichoots! Yevski will go back into the army if they're going to have babkas in it! Think of it, barin, in one of those cold trenches we used to lie in. . . ."

"You!" Desenvik said suddenly, leaning across me. "Have you got any news from Petrograd? How did you get it?"

Yevski eyed him with calculated insolence.

"News, Comrade? Nothing except the twenty thousand babkas, which the conductor had from the telegraph at Ziffini. That ought to be news enough for man, woman and child."

His head dropped out of sight and we heard his cracked laughter grow fainter as he strolled back to his own quarters.

"You, Perenkin," Deshenvik said curtly, "you'd better see if you can find out something."

The big man got down to the track, and in the hope of seeing

a linesman's cabin where I could get clean water I followed him. We walked to the top of the rise, and from there we could see the buttock of the troop-train, about three versts ahead; nothing else, nothing but the pines.

Perenkin didn't utter a word; he moved like a man asleep, only the muscles about his eyes twitched a little, as if he were working out an abstruse problem in mathematics; somehow I felt a little sorry for the huge, worried creature. We came back to find half our fellow-passengers standing on the track, smoking and chattering. Evidently something had come through on the telegraph at Ziffini, where we must have stopped during the night, and whatever the news had been originally it had swollen to interesting shapes in circulation. A popular version was that Kornilov had tried another throw, this time attacking from the north with a base in Finland, and had fought a savage battle in the suburbs with the Women's Battalions;,but there were just as many who said that the Germans had taken the Capital, and one old man informed us with confidence that the battleships *Kronprinz* and *Ostfriesland* had steamed up the Neva and were lying off the English Quay. Perenkin allowed himself a faint smile. A group of women, fashionably dressed, were talking in the voice of faint exasperation that belongs to the wealthy; one of them came up to me and asked if I would be so kind as to persuade the driver to go on; it was of the utmost importance, she said, that she and her mother should be in Moscow by tomorrow morning, they had promised to be at the christening of the young Prince Andrey Devinskov. And did I think, the mother asked, that they should find disturbances in Moscow? This skirmishing in Petrograd that these people were talking about, presumably it was only local? A youth who looked half-starved and lacked a coat was wandering about in a state of abject anxiety, asking everyone in turn when the train would start. I gave him a cigarette and he told me that he had an appointment in Moscow next morning, there was a job going in the warehouse of the Prusso-Persian Mercantile Union, he had left his wife with her two children at Vishni Spoeltzevo to go and try for it, having sold most of her clothes as well as his own to pay the fare. . . . The wind was strengthening and getting colder, a few tenuous flakes of snow were drifting in the sharp air.

I had still half a dozen apples which I had managed to buy from a Chinese boy at Vishni (for seventy-five kopeks each). I waited till about midday and then we each had one. That made a break in the tedium of waiting. For the rest, our time was occupied in keep-

ing Vava contented. He was in some pain from the jolting of his spine, and cried a little from time to time, but mostly he lay quiet with his eyes half-closed, his head on Natalia's lap, while I read through two of his favourite books again and again, holding them as best I could for him to see the pictures. I wanted Natalia to go out and stretch her limbs and get a little air, but she would not do so; no, she could not leave Vava. The Izmailovski stared at us phlegmatically; neither had moved all morning, and their odour seemed to thicken almost visibly in the prisoned air of the compartment. From time to time Deshenvik glanced up from his work and smiled at the little boy; once he produced a rubber stamp with the words *Approve Release—Deshenik,* and gave it to him with an ink-pad to play with. That was a great success: for half an hour or more Vava was completely happy stamping every piece of paper I could find for him.

At three o'clock news came that we should be off again in an hour's time. It now appeared that only a single track was in use between Oskina and Grebirsk; the delay was due to the weight of traffic moving out from Moscow. But by five o'clock nothing had happened. Deshenvik became increasingly impatient; he said very little, but I could see from his expression that he suffered an almost unbearable anxiety. At last he told Perenkin to go along the line again with instructions to walk at least ten versts on the off-chance of reaching a halt equipped with telegraph. Perenkin, for the first time, showed signs of rebellion: if he walked that distance it would be dark before he got back; the train might start in the meantime and be going too fast for him to jump on; in any case the expedition would not get them to Moscow any sooner.

"No!" Deshenvik snapped, "but you may find out who's trying to stop us getting to Moscow. And I want to know that."

Perenkin shrugged his shoulders and went off.

He came back at eight o'clock, in a thunderous temper. He had actually found a line inspection post some seven versts along the track. Had it a telegraph? Yes, it had a telegraph. And the man on duty had been receiving messages from the headquarters of his section. But all the messages were in railway code. And the man had lost his copy of the code.

Yevski appeared again. He had been forward to the troop-train and had found some old war-comrades there, with whom he had had some "pleasant talk." They were on their way to Moscow for the new revolution, but they were not quite clear—or Yevski was not quite clear—which side they were meant to fight on. In any case it

did not matter, since he was authoritatively informed that the drivers had orders now from someone in Moscow to take both trains back to Nijni Spoeltzevo.

"How were those instructions transmitted?" Deshenvi asked sharply.

Yevski looked at him out of the extreme inside corner of his good eye, a trick that was horrifying when seen for the first time. "Who knows?" he said. "Some say that the Angel Gabriel came to the drivers in a vision, naked and all bloody, and told them that the stationmaster at Moscow said they were to go back to Nijni."

We settled ourselves for sleep. At some time in the night I became aware that we were moving again, but I did not know in which direction and I was too drowsy to find out. I thought vaguely that we were on our way from Tetisoye to Ossupova. Throughout the night the drone of chatter in the corridor never stopped.

§

We spent fourteen hours at Ghepis-Sheksna, where a restive crowd was held away from the train by Volga Cossacks carrying fixed bayonets; they watched us sullenly as if we were the chosen of God and they in some purgatorium. At one time I thought there would be a skirmish, but when one of the would-be passengers had been struck on the shoulder with a rifle-butt the rest grew quieter. Here Yevski, slipping twice through the cordon, got us some food and beer; and I have seldom enjoyed a meal more than that one, slender and tasteless as it was. The news he brought was meagre. They were saying in the town that Kerenski had bolted; the story was that some monks had hidden him in the Paskievitsch Monastery and that he had subsequently escaped to the Kamchatka Province in a flying-machine; but Yevski himself did not believe this. Moscow, he understood, was quiet.

Next evening, in dwindling daylight, we reached the outskirts of the city. I just saw her domes on the heavy grey of the bottom sky.

§

We were halted just past the Tseskesaya crossing, and in half an hour the train was shunted into a siding. The conductor's boy came along to tell us that no trains were allowed to proceed further before the morning.

The two Communists collected their things; they were going to get a street conveyance to take them into the city. I said I thought

of doing the same, but Deshenvik, after a moment's reflection, said seriously: "I should advise you—strongly advise you—to stay in the train. With the child like that, I think it would be better." Having left the train he came back and climbed up to the window. "It's nothing to do with me," he said rather testily, "but if you want my opinion, I think you'd better clear out of Moscow just as quick as you can." "You mean, go back to the country?" "Out of the country altogether," he said, as he climbed down again.

With some difficulty I got hold of Yevski and sent him to reconnoitre. The first part at least of Deshenvik's advice might be sound. A fine sleet was falling, and although with the engine taken off there was no heat in the train it did give us shelter. Already some of our fellow-passengers who had gone off into the streets were returning. You couldn't get far, they said.

I asked if the streets were barricaded.

No. But the trams were not running, there was nothing to take you anywhere.

I told Natalia that we should probably have to spend another night in the train and she took it quite calmly. "All right, Alexei, if you think it's best. . . . but tomorrow, tomorrow we shall be in a comfortable hotel, that's right, isn't it? It's only that Vava gets so tired, always on that narrow seat. . . ."

There were goods trains standing on the lines on each side, making us almost as lonely here as we had been in the forest; when it was quite dark I found it hard to believe that we had moved at all in the intervening time. The same voices rumbled in the corridor, the sentences I overheard were pronounced with the same conviction: Kerenski had gone, they had thrown him into the Neva; the Emperor had come back with a force of Ural Cossacks, he had ridden into the Capital on a grey horse and all the Provisional Government had been beheaded in the Champ de Mars; everyone was to have a hundred dessiatines of land and a pair of snow-boots. I heard one woman ask if this were Moscow; another, crossing herself, said she thought so; the Kremlin must be just behind those trucks. "Ought we to get out, then?" "Ah well, they will tell us when it's time." The name of Lenin came to my ears again and again, as the winning horse's name emerges from the confused shouting at a steeplechase. But the muzhiki in the corridor did not know much about this Lenin: he was a Swiss gentleman, one of them said, whose other name was Kahn Markesevitch; he lived with a prima ballerina in Petrograd; he had a very big forehead and made his money by printing books. . . . I made my way along to the compartment where the ladies were, to offer them any assistance in my power; but all they asked for

now was a pack of cards to play faro with. I said, "I'm afraid you have missed the Christening!" They said yes, it was a bitter disappointment, but they supposed the little prince had been christened very well without them, his mother had no doubt looked charming in the green gown which she invariably wore for these occasions, one only hoped that no one had noticed the child's extraordinary likeness to the young Colonel Gervendriki, who was kindly acting as sponsor. Outside, a pair of grubby children teased me for cigarettes and took the last I had.

I got down at the end of the coach and picked my way between the wagons to the nearest open space. There, looking across the city, I saw hardly any light at all; only far away, southward, there was a fluctuating glow, reddish, as if a house were on fire there. It was very quiet. The voices of two women talking in some house perhaps a hundred yards away reached me distinctly, and behind that noise, much farther off, was the sound of a horse and cart going over cobbles. Once, as I listened intently, I thought I heard a faint tattoo like that of a woodpecker's beat.

By comparison the train seemed warm when I got back to it, and its feeble lights were comforting; I saw as I passed that in one carriage, half full of soldiers, a woman was settling her children for sleep as she had done for five nights past; she looked dully contented; and the men in the corridor, hailing me as an old friend, wished me God's blessing. Two of these stopped me to settle a dispute between them; they were half-brothers, and the younger asserted that when they got their consignment of free land the elder should devote a part of his to the support of the father; he, on the other hand, maintained that as he had the greater number of unmarried children the father's upkeep should devolve on the younger; the younger argued that he had his mother to look after, to which the elder replied that the mother was an accident for which he was not responsible and of which he did not approve. I said they must find a priest to decide for them, and went on to my own carriage. The ladies, when I passed them, were playing faro with pieces torn out of *Pravda.*

This was a friendly place, I would stay here for the night whatever Yevski reported.

§

I was asleep when he came back—it was a little after midnight. He was sober, but had found enough vodka to bring on his mood of bumptiousness.

"Well, Comrade Barin," he said cheerfully. "I shan't be your

servant much longer, it's more likely you'll be mine. They'll be having a short way with people of your sort. If you'd seen what I've been seeing——!"

I asked if he had brought any food. He hadn't. "Very well, then," I said, "you must go back and look for some in the morning, and when you've found it I'll listen to your chatter."

"Oh, then you don't want any news! It doesn't interest you what's going on in the town!"

I told him that if he had gathered any real news I should have been ready to hear it; but I was too sleepy to listen to a lot of gossip picked up in an out-town drinking-cellar.

In answer, he woke one of the soldiers.

"You," he said, "listen to this! The Captain here asked me to go and get him news about the revolution. And I nearly had my belly ripped in the scrounging of it. And now he won't listen, he says I haven't got any news. No news! God and all the saints look down with tender mercy on the rotting hearts of unbelievers! If you knew——"

"You block your stinking mug!" the soldier said.

"Oh well, if no one cares about it——"

Presently he came back, and said, as one who throws a coin to a disreputable beggar:

"You won't get into the city. Not unless you walk. The whole place is on strike. And the Nesselrode Hotel you talked about is smashed to bits, most likely."

I said: "I know all about that. And now I want to go to sleep."

"Oh. Perhaps you won't be wanting a servant any more, not a good, clever servant like Yevski?"

"Perhaps not."

I don't know where he went to, but I think an hour must have passed when he woke me again.

"You don't want any news, is that right?" he asked.

"Quite right!" I told him. "I've had enough false news to last me twelve months."

He nodded, picking his nose with a little finger.

"Then you don't want to hear anything about the Vadorka Prison?"

I glanced at him sharply, and I knew that though he was looking the other way he felt my glance. I had to capitulate.

"Well, what is it?"

"Oh, I don't know anything!" he said sulkily.

"All right, go away!"

"It's Comrade Somov who knows about it," he added.

"Where is he?"

"I should have to pay him ten roubles before he'd say anything."

"Well, it can wait till the morning, then."

He looked at me contemptuously.

"Yes, you think everything can wait! You think the revolution will wait till you're ready for it! And how do you think you're going to find your friend Comrade Scheffler when the Vadorka's lying in small bits all over the road? Specially if Kerenski's police shoot him, and there's no saying they won't. That's what happened in March, when they broke up the Konstantinov Prison in Petrograd, the police got half the prisoners with a Maxim from the top of the Dagmar Palace."

From this rigmarole I gathered that he might really have learnt something. I told him that if he brought the man Somov to me, and if Somov had any means of getting me into touch with Count Scheffler, I should divide ten roubles between them. After five minutes' haggling, in which he raised me to seven roubles for Somov and nine for himself, he climbed down, disappeared between the trucks, and came into sight again almost at once with Somov attached. They came into the carriage together.

I judged at once that this man would be reliable. By his dress a mechanic, he was of middle age, short, wiry, clear-eyed, small and tight in features; no urbanized muzhik but a townsman of perhaps three generations. Narrowing his eyes, which the light dazzled a little, he examined me methodically; while I, exchanging the scrutiny, noticed the way his limp, grey hair sprawled on his forehead, the dead pallor of his skin on which the hairs showed fiercely, and knew what he was after. I took out the seven notes. Completely disregarding Yevski, he addressed himself to me, without the smallest deference: well, what did I want?

"I believe you can take me to the Vadorka Prison?" I said.

He nodded. "That's easy. Less than three versts, the way I know."

"Can you get me inside?"

Yevski laughed.

"The Captain's always trying to get into prison," he said.

Somov ignored him.

"You want to see someone?" he asked.

"Yes, Count Anton Scheffler."

"Scheffler? Yes, he's there. . . . Well, you may see him, you may not."

"You mean——?"

"Everyone the Kerenskists don't like are in that prison," he said

economically. "Lenin, he'll have them out soon. But we may not wait—they're apt to make mistakes of that sort. So they're saying in the streets. And it's dark tonight."

He held me in a look of keen, half-patient inquiry, as a dealer will regard you when you've tried a horse he offers over a fence or two. While I, looking past him at Natalia asleep, was almost deciding that I should pay him off. I had learnt enough from Deshenvik, from the rumours floating up and down the corridor, to regret bitterly that I had undertaken this journey. And here we were at least together, my beloved, Vava, and I. Vava was murmuring as he slept, a little wretchedly, as if his sleep were not profound enough to shield him from the pain in his spine. But she, with her hands crossed on the bundle which served her for pillow, her cheek on the slender wrists, slept very peacefully, with lips seeming to smile No, I could not leave them.

Yevski had read my thoughts. "You won't be gone two hours," he said. "I shall stay with them—who can look after them better than Yevski? I'll cut the throat of any bleeding Bolshevik that comes in here. . . ."

Two hours, yes, that would probably do; I should be back before she woke, or if not, Yevski would tell her that I had just gone into the streets to buy food. There was no danger to speak of. And the train couldn't possibly be moved before morning. . . . Surely so small a risk was worth taking for a chance of seeing Anton, perhaps of helping him; it might be my last chance, for if the expected coup failed in Moscow he would have to get out of the country. And surely it was pusillanimous for a man to curl himself up in a standing railway train, here, on such a night, at the skirt of the Holy City. . . . Perhaps I should do best to wake her and say where I was going. But no, I could not trouble such sleep as this, and it would be hard to make her understand—she had never understood my love for Anton. I said to Somov, "Wait a few moments—wait outside, I'll come to you." I moved Vava's head and shoulders, and straightened out the rug he lay on; that seemed to ease him, the murmuring stopped. I put another blanket over Natalia's knees and kissed her forehead, so lightly as not to wake her. "You'll have your nine roubles," I said to Yevski, "when I come back and find everything all right."

§

Somov took the money, ran it carefully through his fingers and stuck it into the leg of his boot. "You're clear," he said, "that I

don't take on to look after you? I put you where you're most likely to see your friend, that's all. If you get a slug in your belly it's not on my bill."

I was looking back to where my train stood, its line of lights like those of a lonely ship at sea: Natalia, sleeping there, knowing no danger: it was not too late to go back.

I said: "No one ever guaranteed my skin. Which way?"

40

He led me along the outmost siding for a hundred yards or so, and here there was a gap in the wire fence which had evidently become the regular exit, like a gap I remembered in the German wire at Troskzi. On the other side he turned sharply to the left and bent down, whispering: "There's a sentry on that bridge over there. They don't like people going on and off the track." Thus bowed we doubled back on the other side of the wire, broke through a scanty hedge of tamarisk and came into a garden. This belonged to a wooden house of the old Zemblyanoi type; Somov went straight in at the back door, nodded to a group of men and women playing cards, and out again through the other door to a narrow lane. "It's all right here," he said. "All this part—between here and the Rostopchin boulevard—belongs to us. Gepaevitch won't send his curs into these streets." We walked a quarter of a verst along the road, which twisted like the streets of Hankau, until it turned at right angles, ending in a passage donkey-wide. "Keep close," he said, "or you'll lose me."

I did not know this side of Moscow at all, and the course we took routed my sense of direction; I suppose it was the shortest possible, though I felt several times that we were making a circle. Twice we crossed over broad streets, one with tramlines. For the rest our way was through passages and stable yards, across a little orchard flanked by a factory wall, beneath low arches; once, in a hawker's boat, for half a verst along a canal which ran between high walls; pursued, as I remember, by the odour of garlic and scorched linen which belongs to small town-houses. Somov hardly spoke at all. He moved with a cat-like independence, purposefully, as if he had business of his own and his passenger hardly counted.

The sleet had started again, adding its peculiar misery to the trouble that my leg gives in that kind of weather; and the gentle hiss it made on roofs and shrubs, by covering distant sounds, stiff-

ened the town's silence. Occasionally I caught again the patter I had heard from the railway yard; but none of the common noises of a city at night, the pant of engines, the measured tinkle of a welding shop, came to these streets; and I heard no bells. Within this shell of quietness, and as I passed through alleys where I could see nothing but the red point of Somov's cigarette, it was odd to hear as if the walls had lips the voices of a man and woman quarrelling, the prolonged staccato of a group of men in political debate. We crossed what seemed to be a triangle of waste land, our boots sticking in the surface slime; and there as from the thin mist overhead I heard the noise of a water-tap turned on, of a man who stumbled against a chair and cursed it. As we passed along a wall which seemed to have no windows I caught the voice of a child, distressingly like Vava's, calling "Mother! Mother!" That world of little, common noises seemed quite apart from the one in which we picked our way; we met no one, a dog with its nose to the ground was the only living thing that passed us, a shadow crossing the lighted crack in a shutter was the largest human sign my eyes found in the first ten minutes of our progress. But that (as I reflect) was due to my own blindness. Somov, treading a familiar path, moved very fast and confidently, nearly always a few paces ahead, as if he were ashamed of my company. I had to keep my eyes on him, and also to watch my feet, which a batten lying on the ground or one of the many pot-holes would have caught and twisted. By degrees my legs became more skilful at this business, my eyes better focused for the shadowed country. Then I saw, in the corner of a yard we crossed, a shape like a horse-cloth hanging on a peg, and realized from one small movement that a man stood there; I caught sight of another, motionless, in a shallow doorway; my arm brushed what I thought was a gate-post—it was a woman leaning against a wall; a little cough made me glance behind and showed me a castellation of heads above a wooden fence—I had passed a yard in front of them. I caught up with Somov, I asked in a low voice, "What are they doing, these people standing about?" "Doing?" he said. "Just waiting."

But further on these spirits came alive. A tall fellow ran past us at top speed, bumped my arm and cursed me for getting in his way. In a little street we crossed, a gang of boys were walking swiftly, talking in low tones. Once a man in some kind of uniform jumped up in front of us, as if from a trap-door in the ground, and asked what we were up to. "You can ask Leon Arinchik!" Somov said curtly, and he let us go by. Turning once more through a space between two houses we came to the bank of the canal again (the same canal,

or perhaps another—I do not know), and the wooden bridge by which we crossed it was heavy with men and women leaning on the handrail. Here Somov paused.

"You see," he said quietly, "over there—that's the Vadorka."

I looked the way they were all looking. There seemed to be a line of factories or warehouses on both sides of the canal, I could not pick out any individual building.

"You'll see it better where we're going," he said, and hurried on. No one turned to look at us.

And now we came to broader streets, sparsely lit by the ancient corner lamps, evenly cobbled, clothed with shop signs and a kiosk or two, bearing the essential smells of Moscow, pungent and stale. There was an old Boyar house I seemed to recognize from the shape of its doorway, an angle of bridge and traktir I had seen before; but the picture would not be placed. And here the streets were as crowded as they would be at mid-morning, women standing at their doors, men of the barge and factory all over the road, greasy caps and leather belts, soiled blouses, here and there a soldier's tunic with the buttons off, little boys with legs like rifle-rods stuck out from hessian skirts. They alone showed their excitement, scampering about the crowd, ducking under arms. No one else seemed to be in a hurry, a constant hubbub of low voices filled the street as a wood is filled with the cry of birds. I heard no shouts, no laughter. A girl had a little barrow in the gutter, she was selling fillets of sturgeon cooked in vinegar. Those were the only wheels on the road, there were no horses. Somov went on with his purposeful stride, pushing through a group that blocked him, lifting a child out of his way. Someone called to him, "How long now?" and he answered shortly, "Patience, Comrade!" he was not going to stop for conversation, he didn't belong to these idlers. We mounted a flight of steps to another, narrower street; it was dark here, and the wind caught us brutally. From the shadow where a cottage lay obliquely a frightened voice suddenly challenged us, making me jump. "Hold your tongue!" was all Somov said.

That street led upwards at a stiff slope. At the end we turned left; more steps, and I thought we were going down again to the street we had left; but a wooden door barred our way, Somov kicked it open, I followed him along a pitch-dark passage with a brick floor and came into a lighted kitchen.

I think there were a dozen people in this room, drinking tea and chattering: an old man such as you always seemed to find in a Moscow kitchen, dressed like an isvostchik and vastly bearded, who sat as close to the cooking-stove as he could without actually browning

his outer coat; two or three young artisans with their elbows on the table, a child or two fast asleep on the shelf beside the door, a sluttish girl smoking in one corner. Somov twisted round a chair by the stove and said, "Sit there! . . . Give him something to drink, Mother!" One of the young men turned his head and looked inquiringly from me to Somov, who went over and whispered to him. I caught the words "former radical . . . shellshock . . . bit wrong in the head." A woman with grey, scanty hair, very neatly dressed, brought me tea and sat beside me. From her face, which had the beauty of intelligence and hardship, I guessed at once that she came from my own country; and as soon as she spoke her accent confirmed it. "Your leg," she said, "it's very painful? You got it broken in the war? One of my sons was in that, he had both broken—useless. But tonight we don't think of those things. You belong to the Soldiers' Moscow Co-operative? Ah, I thought perhaps you did. I acted as their secretary in the west division once.—No, no, Boris Apelvitch, leave him alone, Mihail says he's all right!" One of the young men, standing behind me, was feeling my pockets; in a casual way, without any roughness; I was glad I had not brought a revolver. "There!" the old woman said, "I told you so. There isn't a police spy in the town that I wouldn't know by name if he borrowed Yevgeni Semionitch's whiskers. . . ." "All right, all right, Dunyasha!" the man said.

Enjoying the warmth, listening rather sleepily to the old woman's gentle voice, I heard tags of the conversation going on behind me. ". . . isn't back yet . . . well, he said he'd be back before two. . . . No, Savurov said no one was to go before he came back, the orders may be changed. . . ."

"So you are a friend of Count Scheffler's!" Dunyasha said. ". . . Sofron, come here, this comrade says he is a friend of Count Scheffler's, fancy that!"

An old man with the peasant's brown, cracked skin, with scattered, stubbly hair, came and stood behind his wife's chair with his hands on her shoulders.

"We don't often have such company," he said shortly, looking down at me with the straightforward curiosity of his kind, "I regret there's nothing in the house we can offer you to eat." Then, "A good creature—yes, I think so."

"You know it!" Dunyasha said, "—only you're too careful to say anyone's good, in case he gets it in his own ears and comes borrowing kopeks." She turned to me. "Sofron's brother's wife, she'd say Count Scheffler was a good man. He fought tooth and nail for Sofron's brother—over there, Petrograd. They had him of course. It

was no good, he went to Sakhalien. But that wasn't the Count's fault."

Sofron nodded. "He'd take on that sort. Never refused."

"Like Kerenski," the girl in the corner said.

The young men stopped talking all together. "Kerenski be damned in hell!" one of them said, and another, "Kerenski, traitor, traitor! To hell with all traitors!"

"And you?" Dunyasha asked me shrewdly.

"I am out of touch," I said, "formerly I knew of Kerenski as——"

"If I had Kerenski here," the first man said fiercely, "I'd offer him one of two things——"

"If I had him here," the other broke in, shouting, "I'd show——"

"Hush, you cockerels!" Dunyasha said sharply. "You'll wake Dvelti and Zesha. This is a night of happiness, I don't want to hear about Kerenski or any such truck. Dmitri, come here! Take off these boots for me, I must have my leather boots if I'm going out tonight."

"You're not, Mother!" he said.

"Not? What do you think's going to keep me in? Do you think I shall wait here till Grigori comes, and then say that my little boy would not let his poor old mother go out on a cold night? Off with them, hurry! You, Sofron, help him like a darling." The two men knelt to unlace her boots, she bent and kissed their heads. "Tonight," she said to me, "I shall have three of my sons about my petticoats, to say nothing of Sofron here, that I'm rather fond of.—All right, all right, hold the heel and I'll pull. Now go over there and offer a prayer to St. Vladimir that Grigori comes safely."

"That's all rubbish!" Dmitri said.

"Dmitri!"

"There's no time, anyway!" Somov broke in. "I told you, Dmitri Sofronovitch, both those Schleifes had to be cleaned, Savurov will expect them to be ready."

"Well, what were you doing?"

"Checking through the Ghepis-Sheksna train. You know I had that job. There are other things besides prisons."

Dunyasha turned to him. "There's a job for me, Mihail, don't forget! You're to bring one of the guards here."

"Don't be silly, Mother!" Dmitri said, and Sofron added, "It's not safe, that sort of thing."

"Safe? As if——"

"Why do you want him?" Somov asked.

"Just talk to him," she answered. "Where's that other boot? Sofron, darling, find it! No, no, Dmitri, don't go away, sit down

here by my knees, your hands are so cold.—Leave him alone, Mihail! —an old woman hasn't many joys beyond picking her nose, and there aren't many nights of happiness like this one.—All right, Sofron, my little bear, Boris Apelvitch will find the other boot, give me a cigarette and then you can sit down here—make room for him, Dmitri, you feel the cold in your stomach when you get as old as he is. Move Yevgeni a little, he's asleep, he won't mind!—No, Comrade Officer, you stay where you are!"

I did not feel an intruder. She was very happy, sitting there with Sofron's hand in hers, with her other arm round Dmitri's neck. She sang softly, and chattered in her low, sweet voice of her life at Sievsk, of how she had disguised herself as a man to go down the river to a meeting at Ponev; she stroked Dmitri's face and sometimes bent to kiss him. Somov glanced at her from time to time with a look of impatience, but the rest took no notice. Boris, the smallest of them, whose pale ferret-face was set in the shape of bursting anger, was reading a list of names and qualifications which Somov laboriously copied down; while Sergei, the lanky creature with the eyes of a Finn, walked restlessly about the room, repeating under his breath what sounded like some formula, occasionally opening the door and slamming it again. I felt within myself the reflection of his seething impatience, I could see that even the listless Somov was taut with excitement. It was all pretence, this busyness, it didn't matter if the Schleifes were cleaned or not, Boris had not the faintest idea what he was reading. I glanced at the girl who sat by herself, and I thought that the grey of her face, the moist brightness of her little, slanting eyes, were something more than the common signs of starvation; a woman sitting beside me in a room of the Skoropadski Palace, waiting like me for her examination, had looked rather like that. I opened my coat: the heat that comforted these people was too much for me. I looked at my watch: it was after three o'clock. Somov put down his pencil and sat with his hands folded on the table. As if her ears had caught some noise she expected, Dunyasha suddenly stopped talking, and in the space of silence I heard Somov's heel tapping, tapping, on the floor. Sergei opened the door once again. "Something's gone wrong!" he burst out. "Savurov's been caught, I know it."

Dmitri looked up at him dreamily. "Nothing can go wrong," he said in his pale voice. "They can get Savurov and pull him to bits—what does it matter! There'll still be Nevreskil—and us."

"And two million others . . ." Somov said, with his eyes shut.

"That is right, Mihail!" Dunyasha said quickly. "These youngsters, these darling boys, they think only of the moment, of them-

selves. They talk as if they were the only saviours, as if the whole burden of revolution rested on their shoulders. What nonsense that is! They are only the latest recruits to the army of Karakozow, of Solovieff and Jessie Heljmann, Leon Tolstoi, Perovnoff, Milaskerski, Father Gapon, the heroes of 1905—do you imagine, you children, that a handful of reactionaries, a pitiful fifty thousand rifles, can stand in the way of those battalions? Do you think the shivering antics of that hollow Kerenski are a match for the brain of a Lenin and the whipping mind of a Braunstein? Do you think the march of liberation that has gone on through the centuries is going to topple over and disappear in a four-foot ditch!—And you, Boris, why do you do nothing, nothing except walk up and down like a mare with its colt taken, why don't you——"

"All the same," Sofron said gloomily, "there is no food in the house. Your friend Lenin doesn't send us any food."

"She talks too much!" Somov snapped.

"I, Mihail Ivanovitch, I talk too much! Do you think I haven't worked, do you think——"

"Leave her alone, Mihail," Dmitri said sharply. "She's excited, she's excited about Grigori, why shouldn't she talk!—Elena, give her some more tea."

Somov shook himself as if throwing off a day dream, got a bundle of exercise books out of a cupboard and began writing again. "It's all very well," he said to no one in particular, "Dunyasha must talk, yes, the old must always be talking, and the young can do no work in the meantime.—Boris, for God's sake sit down!—You, Dmitri, find Nevreskil's return-book for me. . . . What is the use of breaking prisons if you've no plans ready for the men who come out of them? Hurry, Dmitri, turn up the list of personnel for the Nikolkaskaya patrol. There will be two men short there tomorrow, when Maximov goes over to the viaduct."

Dunyasha had subsided, with a gesture of acquiescence. She stretched her thin hands towards the stove, so that her sleeves rode up and I saw white circles on both her wrists, the skin there being dead and hairless. She smiled faintly, as one who turns over exquisite memories, the trembling of her chin, barely perceptible, was the only sign of her impatience; and I saw that Sofron, in a spasm of awkward affection, caught hold of her shoulder and shook it. "It'll be all right," he said with his thick tongue. "These cubs, they know what they're doing." He dropped into a new valley of silence, it was a relief when one of the children woke, coughing, and started to cry. Dunyasha limped across the room and lifted him from the shelf, a white, skinny creature with the face of

an old man. She laid him stomach-down across her knees; she murmured, "Hush, Dvelti, hush, little soldier, if you're bad and fretful Elena won't take you to see the shooting at the Kremlin." Dmitri, kneeling at his mother's side, began stroking the child's nape with his knuckle, while with his free hand he took yet another cigarette from the waist of his blouse and lit it from the old one. The sobbing grew fainter, the child fell into fitful sleep again. I felt that I couldn't stand the heat of the room much longer. The cloud of smoke held by the low black ceiling got deeper and thicker, till the lamp on the table, adding the smoke and odour of cheap kerosene to the room's closeness, hardly threw its yellow light to the corner where Elena was drowsing. Curiously, I remember that my feet were very cold, as if they stood in icy water. The room seemed to rock a little, like the cabin of a yacht lying to moorings. I did not wonder that Dvelti, his doll's legs projecting bare from a cocoon of dirty wrappings, coughed and retched in his sleep incessantly.

Surely it must grow light soon. But the room had no windows, it was always night-time here.

My own impatience had long since changed to dull scepticism when I heard, outside the little noises of the room, the sound of heavy feet on stone steps, the creak of old hinges and the crash of the outer door violently thrown open.

Sergei, who had been standing close to the door in a kind of anxious dream, swung round, clicked up the latch and darted into the passage. I heard him call, in a voice broken by excitement, "That you, Savurov?" and a voice gruffly answering with some word like "All clear!" The other men were on their feet already, capped and tightening their belts. There was a door I hadn't noticed on the other side. Dmitri, though he paused to drop a kiss on his mother's forehead, reached it first and flung it open with one hand, his other ramming a Schleife into his tunic pocket. He was gone like a circus juggler, Boris Apelvitch hard on his heels, old Sofron cramming after them. Somov had stopped to light a cigarette, he looked perfectly calm, he was smiling faintly as a sinner might smile who finds himself by some mistake in Paradise. The old man by the stove woke up. "What is all this noise?" he mumbled. "Sofron—Dunyasha—somebody shut that door!" "Where's my shawl?" Dunyasha called. "Dmitri—Mihail—find it someone—all right, I'll go without." She had put down Dvelti on the brick floor as carelessly as if he were a parcel of cheese; Elena, who had been standing like one paralysed, picked up the screaming child, twisted her shawl about him, put him over her shoulder and ran after the men, shouting "Wait! Dmitri! Wait!" "There's no hurry!" Somov said, but I saw

that his hand was shaking as he shoved another clip of cartridges into his lining-pocket. "Boris—what the devil's he done with those Lebels?—Here, Yevgeni, take this, if anyone comes in here shoot him.—You, you'd better come with me, and you've got to move, see, or that's your lookout."

Pushing in front of Dunyasha—I dared not let her get between us —I followed him into total darkness. I held on to his belt—I should have fallen else—we went steeply downwards in a passage where a cold draught came to meet us. I don't know if there were steps, my feet found bits of wood and iron, a cooking-pot that rattled off ahead of me, a bundle of sacking perhaps, the leg of a broken chair. "Let go!" Somov grunted, but I wouldn't, not till I had some light to help me. When it came it was the sky's light, wet cobbles showing one tone paler than the walls on either side. Somov broke loose and turned. I saw a gleam of water, chips of light blown from a lamp on the other side; and checked myself just in time to avoid colliding with a mooring-boss.

We went at trotting pace along the canal-bank, Somov a few yards ahead with Sofron (I think) just in front of him, others behind me. It was raining steadily, the rain very cold, the sticky mud of the towpath held your boots, it was all I could do to keep up. Once I thought I had lost my guide, his dull shape merging in the confused half-tones, but when I stopped dead I still heard, beneath the hiss of rain on water and my own violent panting, the flooch of his feet dragging from the slime; I ran on, struggling in the harness of exhaustion, as you run in a dream through shapeless shadows, catching the sound of feet now from in front and now behind, sometimes hearing Dunyasha's faint voice, "Dmitri! Wait for me!" my eyes picking blurred glimpses of men's forms hounding through the thick, sloped rain. A camel-backed bridge—I nearly missed it—led me into a maze of narrow alleys, I could mend my pace here on the harder ground. I drew up closer, I saw Somov and Dmitri trotting abreast at a gait of steady purpose, we twisted sharply and were climbing now on a narrow ramp where the close walls gave damp echoes to our plodding, where lamps unseen threw narrow strips of light aslant across the passage, showing for a moment the dirty blur of Dmitri's huge shoulders, Somov's thin legs working like piston-rods. A man appeared at my side as if out of the wall, he ran ahead, breaking between the others, I heard him call back, "How long?" and Somov answering, "Seven minutes, not more!" There were others now, coming up behind us. As we reached the level the pace increased, I had to drive my rebellious leg to the limit of bearing. The

noise seemed to be tremendous, the feet of a dozen men thudding together between the head-high walls, the rain thrashing across the slates above us, the furious panting of the man running beside me. I could see nothing, except the men running in front.

Suddenly Somov stopped and I caught up with him. "Out of the way!" he said, thrusting me back. There was a low door like a barrel-hatch in the wall on the left—I shouldn't have seen it; he turned his back to it and drove it open with his heel, the lock-board splintering. "In there—go in and wait—watch the other passage! And don't say I didn't earn your seven pimples!" He had caught me impatiently by the arm—the force of his grip was surprising—I bent down, and he shoved me through the opening with his knee. I landed on knees and elbows, the hatch was slammed behind me, I was in coffin darkness.

§

For perhaps a minute I stayed quite still, enjoying release from the stress of running and the fierce assault of rain. As my breathing calmed my hands began exploring like a beast in a strange burrow; my eyes, shaped by degrees to new discipline, found the darkness loosened, till outlines that were slowly formed within it could be taken as a line of wheat-sacks, a joiner's bench. I crawled forward over straw and shavings, not knowing if I could stand upright here, and saw that the faint distillation of light broke in from a rectangle of cracks above where I was kneeling and a little way behind. Getting up, and exploring more boldly, I found a ladder in position; it seemed reasonably steady, though a rung or two were missing, I climbed it cautiously, pushed up the ill-fitting trap that the light had come from, and scrambled into a small loft.

Here I sould see much better, for there were two windows on adjacent sides, both with the glass broken. The room seemed to be bare, except for signs that it had been used as a firing-post; there were rifle cartridges all over the rotten floor, a Cossack's belt, the broken tripod of a menon-gun, cigarette stumps everywhere; the smell very like that of a dug-out I had lived in at Limanova. Bending down—there were hardly five feet between floor and roof—I moved across to one of the windows, supposing it would show the alley which had brought me here; but that was wrong—my sense of direction had been confused by the darkness—it gave on to a street some fourteen paces broad, with a three-storeyed house on the other side. The other window looked across a narrow alley, which might have been the one I had come through but for a lamp which hung

on the wall just below me, throwing a saucer of muddy light on the cobbles; this, presumably, was the "other passage" that Somov meant.

I lay prone at the street-side window; at the other the rain would have driven against my face, here I could always see the entrance to the passage and in the present quietness I should hear anyone who came along it. The men I had run with had disappeared altogether, I heard no clatter of boots through the persistent rustle of heavy rain. Seven minutes, Somov had said, and five of those must have gone now; something would happen very soon. But instinctively I shifted my thighs into a position where they wouldn't cramp, and finding an old tunic beside me I folded it into an elbow pad. Except for the cold and my leg's bitter complaint I was comfortable then. My mind's eye travelled back to a railway carriage near the Tseskesaya crossing, but I pushed that thought away.

My watch had stopped. I supposed that daylight must be very close, but it was hard to tell, with the darkness laced by rain. There was no lamp alight in the street.

Opposite, I could see for perhaps eighty yards in each direction the contour of the houses. The building directly facing me was the only high one—it looked like a school or some kind of institution—the rest were of one storey, with roofs of a single plane like the newer cottages of my own town; such houses as would serve for little butchers' shops and beer counters and forges. Above that line I could discern the shape of a few slender trees, a water tank; and over to the left, rising sturdily from a confusion of roof and chimney, a massive rectangle of darkness which might have contained a factory. That must be the Vadorka. It was curiously hard to judge how far away it was; at one glance I thought it stood almost against the backs of the houses, looking again I guessed there would be half a verst in between. There was no sign of life in the street, which, to my right, seemed to come to a dead end not far from where I lay, another street continuing in the same direction. To the left, some sixty paces off, the roadway appeared to be furrowed as if by shell-fire, and here there were shapes like those of bushes crowding against the farther wall; but that might be some trick of shadow formed on the bouncing rain from roofs I could not see; I discerned no movement there. I felt as if the whole town were as empty as the hovel which sheltered me, surrendered by its people to the drive of rain.

That sense was abruptly broken. A spark of light flashed in a window right opposite my nose; someone had struck a match there. It was out in a moment, but it had lasted long enough for me to

see (or think I saw) a man's dark face over the foresight of a menon. So: I was not the only person watching.

The flash was not repeated, and I came to think I had imagined it. But now my vision was improving, and when I looked to where (as I had thought) the street ended, I saw that in reality it was cut by a barricade: two chandler's-drays end-on across the street, piled up with furniture and understuffed with mattresses, with something that looked like a grand piano on its side jammed in between them. Those lines grew firmer, the photographic tones were raised to faint colour, I realized that the sky was lightening. Gradually I distinguished forms on the near half of the wagon floors, a line of bodies lying prone and close together, so extraordinarily still that at first I thought them corpses; but the shoulders were propped by the elbows, these men lay as we had taught them, the breeches of their rifles cosied against the weather between breast and forearm. I scanned the windows of the school again, and as if by the turn of a switch they were alive with faces, grey, bearded patches behind the dirty panes. The rain was slackening, I saw, leftward, behind a grille of telegraph wires, a streak of fiercely crimson cloud shaped like a Rabbi's beard. The prison, hardening its shape, showing its triple line of windows, retained an unreality; it was out of scale, like a child kneeling beside a doll's house, like a stage property it showed me only one lifeless wall. Feeling my eyes tired, I blinked and stared again. No, there was no movement in or near that building, it seemed to be as dead as the deserted towns of Arabia; and I wondered in a sleepy way what kind of assault men small as those on the wagon below me, armed with old service rifles and cartridges that likely didn't fit them, could make on a giant shell like that. By reason of the taller buildings on my own side of the street the leftward view stayed longest indistinct; but now, narrowing my glance in that direction, I found that what I had supposed to be sacks or sandbags lining the roadway were human forms, men in sheepskins standing motionless against the wall, men and women lying or squatting, in the attitude the muzhik can keep to eternity, all over the cobbles. As the day slowly strengthened, drawing a twilight from the heavy grey and blue, I could smell the town's awakening, a freshness in the wind which still blew raindrops into my face, the faint first odour of burning peat. Somewhere behind me—it seemed quite close—hens were chattering. And I had the curious sense, seeing the motionless expectancy of the huddled crowd down there, that I witnessed the army of the dead close to the moment of Resurrection. Another hour passed, or so I felt it; with no stir in the crowd, no sound of feet, no shout or snap of a

rifle. Once, for a moment, the furtive sun came to a slit between the clouds and the men lining the barricade showed in a brilliant triangle of morning light. The clouds shut again, seeming to put the street in closer shadow, a fragile mist that had hung breast-high above the roadway got thicker and swelled. I was awake, kept conscious by faint excitement and the sharp discomforts of my perch, the undervest scoring my elbows, my knees constantly pricked by the rubbish on the floor. But I was losing belief and interest, my thoughts floated loose from their moorings; I worried about rations for the company I vaguely thought to be in my responsibility. Tired of hunting the mist, my eyes fell shut. Perhaps for a minute or two I slept.

The explosion that roused me seemed to occur directly below the house I lay in. I felt it first as a blow—such a feeling as a hare must have when a hound knocks her over—the crash of sound seemed to follow afterwards. Before my eyes opened I heard my voice shout "Keep down!" my hand jerked out for a rifle that wasn't there. The first thing I saw, as my senses tumbled back together, was a chimney dropping over, slowly, as an expert starts a dive; I don't know where that chimney was or where it fell to. My glance swung up to the prison, its upper half reaching above the mist, and right at one end I saw a bush of smoke, pure white with a brown core, standing as though anchored against the dull sky. A moment afterwards my ears were driven together by a second burst, an angry flame shot through the columns of smoke, thrusting it up and over like a tree snatched out by the roots. All round me I heard glass falling. It seemed that half a minute passed and the smoke was floating away, leaving the mist to cover its source, when the maxims started.

I was witness then of a show of discipline not equalled in my experience. While the crowd from my left moved forward, jumping and clambering on each other's shoulders like the excited audience of a circus, the men on the barricade never stirred. I didn't see a head turned round.

In truth there was little for them or me, to see. We were in an orchestra close up against the stage, what little we might have witnessed was screened by the curtain of mist which hung across the low roofs, thickened now by drifting smoke. From that confusion of rolling vapours there came a din quite new to me; it was not the noise of modern battle with its heavy background of artillery, but a racket so disjointed that between the intermittent stammer of the maxims and the wavering slap of rifle-fire you could hear a man shouting hoarse orders, the crash of broken glass and falling ma-

sonry, a woman's tearing scream. The smoke was blowing towards me, blanketing the street, touching my throat and nostrils. It lifted for a moment in an upward gust, I saw in the farther haze the flashes of the rifles, then two bent figures scuttling along a roof and one falling. The crowd below, hidden from me by a hanging bank of fume, was shouting as if with laughter; through a sudden lull I heard a woman yelling "Every one, every bloody one!" I caught a glimpse of men debouching from the broken door and windows of a shop not forty paces down the street like rabbits with a ferret at their quarters. The noise increased as if a stage-coach drove at full gallop into town, something struck the window above my head, a splinter of glass pricked my cheek. The smoke, curling to a tangled knot, rolled in again and blinded me.

"Watch the passage!" I'd forgotten that.

I darted across to the other window, the smoke was drifting down the passage now, through it I saw men running in both directions. To stay up here was hopeless, I couldn't pick one man from the rest and if I did my voice would never carry through the racket to stop him. I went back to the trap and slipped down the ladder. The trap, which would only open half-way, fell shut above me, putting me in darkness; but I saw the outline of the hatch by which I had entered, I got my nails into the cracks and worked it open, pulled it up and crawled outside. A man running past caught his foot against my shoulder and cursed me, but didn't stop. He ran full tilt into the street, where, like a pigeon that has fluttered over the butts, he suddenly pitched forward, fell headlong, lay in the very middle of the road, quite still except for one leg violently kicking. That was a warning but I chose to disregard it, my only thought was to get round to the other alley while a chance remained. I paused for half a second while the smoke thickened again till the man sprawling on the road was hardly visible; then, stooping, I cut round the corner.

I had only a dozen yards to cover along the street, I hobbled close against the wall of the house where I had lain, seeing nothing but the gap I aimed for. I reached it, but a group of men running close together for the passage came straight into me, throwing me back into the street. I lost my footing and fell.

Strangely, in running those few yards I had had the impression that the street was empty. It was only as I dropped that I saw the crowd running towards me, a dark wave carried on a scaffolding of stockings and trousers. They were on me before I could scramble up; as I raised my left shoulder it was driven down on my wrist again; the heel of a riding-boot struck me in the mouth, another cut my forehead. I lay still then, like a practised jockey when his horse

topples at a fence, face down in the mud and hands across the back of my head; a little stunned, so that I didn't feel the roughness of the mob trampling over me. I remember that I felt very tired, like a heavy sleeper roused before his time; I only wanted to lie there, dully hoping that nothing would damage my head. When my senses came to shape I knew that the crowd had gone, the shouts and thumping feet had travelled forward. I raised my head and saw only the mist drifting thinly between me and the barricade, where the men lining the wagons were methodically firing—I saw the regular movements of their elbows as they jerked the bolts, the little puffs, a cartridge spinning. I couldn't see what they fired at. I scrambled on to my knees; dropped again as a menon opened somewhere not far behind me. At a second glance I saw that the middle of the barricade was crumpled as if a shell had hit it. The fire from these had slackened, I saw that three or four of the men were lying still, I watched one rolling till he dropped to the ground. The crowd was over to my left now, sheltering against the wall of the school, a few lay flat across the road, a woman sat there with her feet apart, continuously screaming. The right side was clear, I didn't know why, I started to crawl that way, someone shouted (it sounded like Dmitri's voice) "Keep still! Lie down!" The alley's mouth was four yards off, choked with people, I made another yard and a stray bullet chipping the cobbles a foot before my nose brought me up like a tether. The crowd in the alley parted, but not for me, a man half-naked who had sprung from the broken shop dashed past me into safety. Another came after him with a fellow on his shoulders, I tried to follow but two men guarding the entrance took my arms and flung me back. That violence crumpled my leg, I found myself on hands and knees, for a few seconds paralysed by pain. I glanced about to find another way of escape, saw nothing but the smoke, the gap in the barricade, a shape rising behind it. That held my gaze, it was a horse leaping the broken barricade with the dainty power of a steeplechaser. It stumbled as it landed, a forehoof slipping on the cobbles, I saw the rider thrown forward and sideways, saw him save himself, jerk the horse to its feet with a vicious tug of his powerful arm, swing round and clout its quarters. It started forward like a greyhound slipped from leash, seemed to clear the figures lying on the road in its headlong gallop, came straight towards me through the smoke. It charged right past me only a yard away and I had a fleeting glimpse of the rider, in the uniform of the Turkestan Brigade. He rode her with his knees, the reins hanging loose, his left arm limp and bloody, the sword-arm swinging like a windmill as he rode, his hirsute features set and stolid as if he were on parade. With the tail

of my eye I saw him meet a man who ran from the other side and checked himself, I heard the click that is only made with steel and flesh, the sharp, hoarse cry. But I didn't look that way, another was coming. The guns in the schoolhouse had been quiet, they started now as if touched off by a single trigger, the clatter drowned the shouting and I saw the bullets splintering in a wavy line at the bottom of the wall. They got the next horseman, killed him outright and tumbled his mount against the houses. They missed the third and fourth, they winged the fifth and his horse drove past me riderless. There was a gap then, and as I started crawling towards the alley's refuge I saw, turning my head, that two which had got through were surrounded, hacking viciously. I had just seen one of them dragged down when the menons opened again, and the hooves of a horse that had come from nowhere appeared to fly right over my head. The next one came alone, and seemed to escape the bullets, but a man darted from under the schoolhouse and leapt at its bridle. I didn't see the man again but the horse turned somersault, the Cossack, tilted clear, his sword flying away, fell like a load of peat and rolled to within three yards of where I knelt. He got to his knees, holding one arm, I could see his yellow teeth in his lower lip. A woman darted across the road as if to help him, another followed her, a dozen refuging along the wall forsook their caution and swept towards him, jubilant. The first had got him by the arms, I saw him kick out at the one that followed, but another threw herself across his legs; they had him now, they had him; I saw a giantess stoop down and take one leg and throw her weight back. One glimpse through the struggling circle, one glimpse never to be forgotten, of a woman smiling as she tugged at something with her knee pressed down on it. Then another horseman clattered past her, swinging his sword left handed, and the smiling, bloody head fell over sideways as a tree falls.

Two more, riding together, a third close behind. The third alone gets through, he gallops ventre-à-terre into the crowd, I see the near forehoof go through a woman's ribs like a clown through a paper hoop. But he's down, they've pulled him down, the horse's legs stick up into the air like pen-stakes, the man's helmet pitches into my lap, the man himself is lost altogether. There's a new smell now, joining the smell of powder and men's bodies and mud and greasy clothes, a smell I recognize. And the noise of the menons drubs the senses to insensibility.

I have kept the memory, curiously sharp, of a boy in footman's livery who lay on his back quite close to me with one of his legs angled at the knee, angled the wrong way. His small hand, childish in shape, was combing the ground for something he had lost. I

saw a little square thing lying in the mud—it may have been an Ikon or a girl's picture—I stretched and got hold of it and put it into his palm. He turned his head slowly to look at me in the distant, uncertain way that the dying have, and then he smiled his gratitude, the smile giving a sudden, tender beauty to his bloodless, mud-streaked face. That recollection stands away from its background as if the boy and I had been alone together, separate from noise and feeling. The space that follows it is blank, I may have lain there in a coma for ten minutes more, perhaps for a few seconds only. The next thing I remember is the feel of bony hands in my arm-pits, of being dragged along the ground; then a glimpse of Somov's face with blood all over his beard. "Fool! Why didn't you stay where I put you?"

§

I was in the passage, sitting on the ground with my back propped against the wall, Somov had disappeared, men and women were hurrying past me. In my dulled ears the noise was slackening, the menons seemed to have stopped and the rifle-fire had become more fitful. I worked my limbs one after the other, surprised—as the trivially injured always are—to find nothing but stiffness and bruises; even the pain of my bad leg was quietening. I was tasting blood, and I noticed that the front of my coat was filthy with it; but that came from a single gash in the forehead which didn't feel deep and a few scratches on the cheeks. I got up and leant against the wall, slowly recovering my strength, oddly irritated that the scuffle in the street had made me so feeble.

§

I had got the blood and dirt out of my right eye, by degrees my vision grew steadier. It was a motley file that floundered past me, men who blinked and glanced about them like miners brought back to the surface, men mostly barefoot and trouserless, with a sack or a woman's coat clutched about the shoulders, all of them pale and mildly happy and a good deal frightened. An old man stumping past with his eyes straight ahead talked volubly to no one in particular, as if he preached a sermon; but most of them were silent, like the men lying in the long tents at Krozkohl. I remember one, a tall fellow very lame, who had a tearful woman supporting him; she was a frail creature, hardly able to bear his weight; as they went along, lurching from side to side, she constantly stretched up to kiss his cheek; but he took no notice, he didn't seem to be aware of her except as something to lean on. These men had not got across the

street unscathed. Most were bleeding a little from the head or body, the ear of one had been torn from the top and hung down horridly, one held up a loose arm, one dabbed his face with a dirty handkerchief. But they did not seem much concerned with these injuries, they walked quietly like men who, finding a new country, forget the rigours of the passage there. I found myself strangely moved by this procession of strangers, with the humble dignity that coloured them; and I saw that some of those along the other wall who dumbly watched them were kneeling with their hands clasped as if these ragged creatures were a company of priests with a Tchvdotvorni Ikon. Occasionally one cried out, laughing and weeping, "Look, Vasya, look, there's Nikolka Petrovitch, there he is, look, he's smiling!" A woman would jump up and catch the bleeding hand of a man who passed and kiss it, another drew her back, crying, "Leave him alone, Gechopa, leave him alone!" A wizened kirghiz, reeking of sturgeon glue, who stood beside me was crying bitterly, "He isn't there," he said, "he isn't there!" The shouts and firing in the street had almost stopped, the racket I heard now came from another part of the town. The rain had started again.

I caught sight of Dunyasha, her dress torn and her hair filled with mud, walking proudly apart with a bent, consumptive youth on her arm. She saw me as she passed and gave me a smile, but she didn't stop; I doubt if she realized where she had seen my face before. Dmitri came after her, he strolled with his hands behind his back, his narrow, stubborn face slightly contemptuous, as of one who has made short work of a task which others had thrown over. I wanted to stop him, but a soldier thrusting purposefully towards the front of the file came in between us, a woman left her place by the wall and I found myself shut off from him. It looked as if the last of the rescued had passed me, and as at the close of a formal ceremony the onlookers were crowding in behind them. But as I stepped out from my place a youngster pushed me back, shouting, "Out of the way, can't you!" and two men with a stretcher of coats buttoned to dredging-poles came barging through the crush. Over a woman's shoulder I saw what looked like a dead body on the stretcher, I caught a glimpse of a white face with the eyes half-shut. It had passed me and was out of sight before I reflected that they would hardly take such trouble with a single corpse; and it was then, with the image still clear on my mind's reflecting plate, that I understood the face's faint familiarity.

I hustled after them, calling, "Wait! I want to see that man!" but the rearguard clogged the passage and I couldn't get level. I had to go at toddling pace, hemmed in by the excited crowd squeezing along

the narrow channel, slipping ahead whenever I could drive a wedge between two shoulders. When the passage broadened to the width of a donkey-chaise I got on faster. And there, with my eyes always ahead, I nearly went past him.

§

The bearers had dumped the stretcher in the entrance to a stable, they stood a little way from it and argued sombrely with an angry, half-starved creature who was drilling them with political clichés. Their patient lay on his side unregarded, his eyes shut now, one arm lying out across the footway; as I looked I saw a woman tread heavily on his hand, but he did not seem to notice, his hand didn't move, his face showed no expression. Kneeling beside him I took the arm and carefully put it back against his side. He opened his eyes then, and I was no longer doubtful. I said, "Anton! Anton! Do you know me?" He smiled. "Know you, Alexei!"

For a little time we didn't speak, we only smiled at each other while I held the trodden hand and gently wiped with a spittled handkerchief. It was he who first spoke again, his voice very small but perfectly distinct, with hardly a trace of stammer.

"So like you, Alexei, so like you to come to me just when I wanted you! . . . What a mess you're in, what have you been up to, you old sinner? Can you hear me, can you hear me? I can't talk very loud, it hurts me in the belly, my belly's playing the devil with me these days." Then he laughed. "We meet in odd places!" he said, "I don't know where this is, I don't know where they're taking me——"

An old woman caught hold of my arm. "You," she said anxiously, "can you tell me where Ivan has got to, I haven't seen him, he may have gone some other way, he never would do the same as anyone else, Jesus have mercy on the poor boy." She bent over Anton, her absurd, huge hat, the pre-war fashion of St. Petersburg, pouring a stream of rain on his face. "You, barin, you were in the prison, you must have seen him, what have they done with him?" And without waiting for either of us to answer she hurried on, shooting the same question at everyone she passed. Anton drew me closer to him.

"Where are they taking me, Alexei? I want to know where I'm going."

I said, "I don't know, but I'll get them——"

"Wait!" he said impatiently. "Listen! I want to know what's happening, what is Kerenski doing, where is Yelisaveta now? Look

here, give me a hand, put your arm round me, I think I can get up. It's absurd, I can't lie like this, I'm not ill——"

He had got to a sitting position by himself, I think he would have struggled to his feet if I had not gently prevented him. "I'm all right!" he said, sitting up defiantly, "it's only that my legs are out of use——" And with that, slipping sideways, he fell back again.

"Anton, don't be a fool!" I said. "You know you're not strong enough——"

But he didn't hear me: the effort had been too much, he had lost consciousness.

Someone behind me said sharply: "Is that Comrade Scheffler, there?—What are you doing, Trovitch? I want him in the tea-house, get on with it, can't you!" The bearers came back to their places, negligently picked up the poles and lumbered on, cursing the rain. I walked beside the stretcher holding Anton's hand. He opened his eyes again, and smiled, and said something, something about by leg and the rain, but I didn't catch it.

Grotesquely ill-matched in height, the bearers stumbled along at the crowd's pace, the front one dragging his home-made wool-baize slippers by the toes, each with the damp remains of a cigarette dangling from the tail of his mouth; their thoughts if any were with the crowd, the stretcher was nothing but a chance encumbrance, they shook and swung it recklessly. The rain, falling vertically now and very cold, did nothing to blunt the air of holiday; no one was turning back, from every passage that we passed another tributary flowed into the stream, till it seemed as if the whole of Moscow's undercrust was on the move. Few of these recruits knew what had happened or where they were going; I heard one say that the Kremlin had been "blown to smithereens," another, Kerenski had been brought here to be hanged at Spasskaya Gate; avos! they went on hopefully, like rats in the Piper's wake. They had tumbled out of their houses, most of them coatless and bareheaded, a man wore a farrier's apron, a woman carried a basin and dish-clout under her arm. But the rain reduced them to a uniformity, hair plastered down, clothes shaped to shoulders, boots and slippers slapping with one continuous sound on the wet mud of the roadway. A girl, pressed against my arm, so poorly clothed that her scraggy breast showed white through the soaked kirtle, was coughing convulsively, the sputum dripping down to her waist; but when I told her it was madness to be out in such weather she turned and cursed me, asking why a woman couldn't have her pleasure for a day. "Where are they going?" Anton asked, straining to raise his head, "what are they

after, all these people?" I couldn't tell him. I could only see beside me the pinched, wet faces staring forward, tired eyes lit faintly with a joy I could rather sense than understand; ahead the sombre mass of streaming hair and shoulders spreading unthinned into a broader street.

This place I vaguely knew, it was on one of the tramway routes: a narrow road bulged out like a cobra's head, a little church which aped St. Basil standing between a knacker-house and the monstrous pile of Smirnov's tannery. Here the stream was lost in a lake of heads, which had no main current, only a maze of slowly twisting eddies. But the bearers knew where they were going, they swung a little to the right and ploughed on steadily, kneeling and shouldering their way, grunting, "Out of it! Savourov wants this man. Get out of it, you bastards!" Some turned to stare at the still figure being humped along like a sheep's carcase, "Look, that's Scheffler, Count Scheffler, the advocate, Kerenski had him in the Vadorka." And once a woman, dropping on to her knees, shouted "Jesus bless you, Jesus comfort you!" The bearers took no notice, they only wanted to get the job done with.

At the far side of the rhomboid I saw a row of trucks in a factory siding which were manned by soldiers, a section to each truck. These men stood at ease, some smoking, surveying the multitude with lazy interest. Not far off the maxims were in play again, but the soldiers didn't seem to hear them; that was someone else's war.

Now I saw the place the bearers were making for, a wooden warehouse negligently jutting half across the roadway so that the tramlines had to swerve from their course to pass it. In this direction the crowd was thickest, and I thought they would never force their way through to the wagon-doors. But the man who had given them orders, a slight, clerkly person in a blue waterproof and a soldier's cap, appeared again and went ahead of them, elbowing one man to the side, kicking another's shins, catching a woman by the hair and pitching her out of the way. They did not seem to mind this roughness; one man said mildly "Devil take and blast your soul!" and was silenced instantly by an angry Finn who stood behind him: "You hold your trap, comrade, you keep out of Savurov's light!" So far I had kept my place beside the stretcher, elbowing freely on my own account. In the press a few feet from the doors someone seized me by the arms and held me back.

"Nichevo! You, comrade, you keep still, they don't want you in there."

I twisted round and saw a man with the mild eyes of a shopkeeper, a wisp of sandy beard on a babyish chin.

"Why not?" I asked. "What are they doing, what are we waiting for?"

"God knows," he said. "But only the Party-Tickets can go in there."

No one knew. Through the open doors I could see across the forest of heads a line of men standing along a loading-bank, men so ordinary in appearance that, a little tidier, they might have been the board of a banking firm. One of them was in action, his right arm raised like an auctioneer's, and his raucous voice came strong enough for me to catch a word or two: "never go back . . . solidarity . . . the iron chains of capital . . . never go back . . ." I suppose the sound of it just reached the skirts of the crowd, perhaps they had come for that: to stand in the rain, jammed close together, an amorphous spread of pink-flecked grey like a painting of Tropahin's, to stand all morning with their clothes stuck down to the skin, faces numb from the battering of icy drops; to hear faintly a voice from a pale and hollow-chested man who stood in shelter, somehow to recognize the voice as their own.

I had lost Anton already, lost him finally. In the second when the draper checked me the bearers had pushed on, perhaps three yards, the crowd recoiling in between like air admitted to a vacuum. I couldn't move now except in the general movement; and that, with the current flowing across the doorway, carried me farther away. I caught a glimpse of the after-bearer's head, his long black hair hanging like crêpe from his comic sailor's cap; he was just inside the warehouse, and then he disappeared.

I asked the man nearest me if he knew the time. A little after eight, he thought.

§

Half an hour later (or so I guessed) I was a few yards further to the right, no longer able to see inside. I had freed my arms enough to get out an envelope and pencil, to scrawl a note to Anton, "I shall be in the Nesselrode Hotel." A man squeezing past had an armlet with the letters S.A.K., I asked him if he could get the note to Comrade Scheffler and he thought he might. That was all I could do. I tried now to edge outwards, but the men behind me, patiently straining for a chance word from inside, would not allow that interruption. By the obstinacy of chance the crowd's thrust had altered its direction so that I found myself carried towards the doors again. Inside the warehouse enthusiasm was growing, a speech I could hardly hear at all was chopped by bursts of acclamation. Those around me had no idea what it was all about, but the excitement

spread to us and far into the ranks behind, the inward drive increased. For a moment the platform was in my line of sight again, I saw they had hung two flares above it, making the row of faces grotesquely white. I was swept across the other side, back again till I was opposite the entrance. Just then the thrust immediately behind me came with a new violence, the pressure on my ribs made me momentarily sick and dizzy. Someone squealed, and I saw a white face with the eyes shut being carried past my shoulder. Then the force of the wedge broke the concentration between me and the doors, hurling a wave to either side. I was lifted off my feet, borne forward, landed just inside the building.

That turbulence passed almost unnoticed by those inside. Immediately behind me a row of stalwarts, mostly brassarded, joined into one line and linked arms. The chain seemed strong enough, the pressure eased, I saw over my shoulder that the skurry was abating. The draper was beside me again, winded and rather scared. He smiled. "Avos! We are Party-Members now, I suppose!" I could hardly hear him, the cheering had started again.

Unbelievably, it was Anton speaking from the platform. They had put a bench for him to sit on, two men stood behind and held him up by the arms, a third, when I got the scene to focus, was giving him a mug of water. I remember smiling faintly when I saw him there: at the first impact there was something ludicrous in the sight of those two rather staid bourzhui propping up a white, bedraggled form as if they were setters jointly retrieving a tortoise; in the eager stillness of the motley figures beside them. But that was like laughing in a sick-room, laughing before the Sacrament. I passed through indignation, that they should use him so, to a certain wonder. In the half-light shot with yellow rays from the flares I saw the pallid, dirty faces of those who stood level with me, faces so different from those on the loading-bank. These men had not breakfasted, some might have eaten nothing the day before, none had a blouse or tunic which would sell for ten kopeks in the Trauski market; they were men, you had said, who expected nothing from life, no pleasure of the eyes, of being praised, of taking holiday, nothing but the chance of a full belly once in a while, being warm sometimes, watching a dog-fight, getting a pair of boots just sound enough to keep the snow out. And these, with their cigarettes too wet to light, standing with the next man's beard in their cheeks and another's feet on their toes, were as rapt as at the moment of the Elevation. Years before I had seen such faces in the hunger-queues at Samara, where a woman who had got two rye-cakes was torn in bits as quick and calmly as a boy tears paper; but these moist, straining eyes were held

by no relief-wagon, no pile of sacks behind a fence of bayonets; only a row of shabby tradesmen and machinists, and a small, wet, weary creature, had dropped forward, who looked as if he was dying.

A man on the platform had raised his hand and the shouts were snuffed as if a curtain had dropped across them. Anton was speaking again.

". . . to claim that right which God intended for all Humanity, the right to labour and to have the reward of labour, to nourish children, to follow your own conscience. . . ."

Low and quiet as the voice was, I could hear him in the hush without any strain. He made no gestures, his bloodless face so lacked expression that it might have been a conjurer's doll which spoke. His words came with precision and a certain dryness, like that of counsel summing up in a bankruptcy case, he seemed deliberately to flatten his inflections; and I wondered, first of all, why these people should listen so patiently to a voice which apparently made no effort to stir them.

". . . 1905. I needn't remind you of it, all of you have some memory of that year, it is our common memory. For myself, I witnessed the massacre at Tsarskoe Selo, I was at Odessa in time to see the bodies along the Nikolas Boulevard. You know how, in that year, injustice led to violence, violence to repression, repression to greater violence still. The devil was loose and rampant then. To work the devil's will men like ourselves were burning Jews alive, torturing women, beating children till they were senseless and throwing them to hungry dogs. In that year I decided—it was on a warm evening, as I walked about the smoking ruins at Shusha—I decided that I would join myself to those who worked and fought to crush the devil's power in Russia, whatever their creed might be; that however little I could do myself, I should stand at the side of those who held up skinny arms with broken spears against the monster of autocracy and privilege. I believed then, that I should live to see that monster overthrown. And now I have seen him wounded, and I dare to think the wounds are already mortal. You would not let such cruelty go on for ever. God has been on your side, and you are close to victory."

His eyes had shut, and I thought I saw, watching intently, that movement of the muscles near his eyes which I knew from the first days of our friendship: it was all the expression he gave to physical pain. But when the listeners started cheering again he held up his hand to stop them.

"Listen!" he said, "listen, listen! I want you to see as clearly as I do how huge is the opportunity that's coming, how terrible the chance of missing it. Your conquest of tyranny won't be enough, your

work won't be finished if you are content with guarding your rights and freedom. You have not only to create an order in which it's impossible for wealth and power to belong only to the few: we have to be always looking back at the suffering which lies behind us, resolving to balance it by the happiness we make for those who come after. It doesn't matter about ourselves: the battle and the victory must be enough for us, we can't repair the wastes inside our generation. But for every life lived in despair and darkness we must make possible a life of sunlight; we must see ahead our children ploughing their own fields and tending their own cattle, houses people can't be turned out of, the vast power of machinery bent to making light and warmth and rest for those who have lived in want and squalor; we must picture men enjoying their tiredness in long evenings, we must see the doors of knowledge and beauty flung wide open. Yes, we have got to think of what is behind, but to think of it in a special way. If we remember cruelty only to hate the men who caused it we shall merely keep the wheel of cruelty turning. That is not revolution, it is only a change in the direction of evil. You have worked and suffered for something better than that. Those horrors you have seen will only be obliterated from our children's memory when we have raised a mountain of goodness to hide them. We have to build patiently and slowly. For every hideous act that we remember we must perform an act of love. For each life destroyed, we must give new life to someone. For every memory of injustice there must be a token of mercy. If you were not Russians you might not understand me. But we, who have known how bitterly it's possible for men's bodies and souls to suffer, we are able to see from out of the darkness the whole glory of what may lie ahead. You are a people who have God in your hearts, even if a hundred devils hold him in chains there. You carry within you your own salvation. That is why you who have suffered are ready to go on suffering, that is why you will give yourselves, as if you let your fingers be cut off one by one, for the kingdom of love you see before you. You will lose yourselves, as Jesus did; you will come from one agony asking for another; you will work when your breath is gone and your heart is like a burning iron inside you, you will squeeze out your spirit to the last drop, making its preciousness the seed of life for those that follow. Our names will perish. It is enough that people will remember you together; as men begrimed with earth and oil and sweat who were ill and hungry, often feeble, men whose mightiness of spirit broke down the walls to let God's love shine in on all men. . . ."

When his eyes shut he had forgotten, I thought, what kind of

audience he had, what sort of speech these people were used to hearing. But as if they understood him, their spirit breathing the distillation of his, they listened with what seemed to be perfect sympathy. And now, as his voice got fainter, as his lips stopped moving altogether, they waited in patient silence for him to go on. The man with the water came forward again and tried to make him drink. No one else moved. It was strange, this silence of the huge warehouse, against the murmurous noise of the crowd outside, the noise of the rain on the iron roof. I felt like calling out, "Let him lie down—can't you see how ill he is!" but I had not the boldness. A man beside me whispered, "The Vadorka, that's what they did to them."

Outside, those nearest to the entrance tried untiringly to jostle past the men who guarded it. But the barrier held, and I do not think the foray which had brought me in would have been repeated if the waiting crowd had been undisturbed. The disturbance came with stupefying suddenness. Right above my head—or so I judged from the sound—a maxim opened, giving a single burst which lasted for perhaps ten seconds; I suppose that half the belt went through and then it jammed. In that time we inside hardly moved, we were paralysed by the noise and vibration. When it finished I heard one scream, but louder than the scream of any single voice. Then I saw that the barrier had broken, I saw a sash of men flung up like the wave when you jump into muddy water, men fighting with fist and elbow, leaping on each other's shoulders, a tidal wave of wet, black bodies and frightened faces, mouths shrieking blasphemy.

§

I retained sufficient sense to realize that whatever the hazards of the open the greater danger was in here. In the rush for cover men and women lost all decency, within a few seconds the almost prosaic calm of that assembly was changed to a hurricane of waving arms, fists hammering and tearing. I was on my feet just long enough to catch a glimpse of Anton being carried out through a door at the back of the platform, of a little man in a starched collar pathetically clapping his hands for order. Then the weight of the swaying crowd threw me down, and I didn't try to get up again. On the ground, in such a scuffle, your hands may be trampled and your head kicked open, but you don't get your neck twisted or your ribs crushed in. I knew which way the doors were and I crawled through the forest of legs in that direction. Men stumbled over and

cursed me, I was kicked about the body, and once, not badly, on the side of the head. It was not a comfortable or dignified passage, but it got me out.

Elated by that escape, which at the time seemed near to miraculous, I strolled across the open space, upright, as if there were not a gun on any roof in Moscow.

Some four minutes must have passed since the moment when the maxim was fired. You could see, roughly, the arc of its fire in the figures lying on the cobbles, men and women sprawling as they do in the public parks in summer, but spread with almost geometrical neatness. Except for those, the place was practically empty. An old man crawled on hands and knees towards an entrance of the tannery, stopping at every few feet to cross himself: except for the small red trail he left on the wet cobbles he might have looked funny. A piebald horse ambled slowly along the tramlines, dragging an empty cart. It was still raining. The crowd had gone.

I remember wondering in a stupid, sleepy way where the crowd had got to.

41

In the drowsiness which attacked me powerfully now I kept only one idea distinct: I must get back to the train: quickly, in case they moved it. The thought came, uncoloured by any feeling of pity, that I ought to see if something could still be done for the people lying in the mud over there; I even went a little way towards them; but the sound of a single shot from a Kropatchek was enough to send one off in another direction. Not my affair: someone would look after them. As I turned into a narrow street which went off by the church a soldier came running towards me. I asked him foolishly: "Which is the way to the train?" He stared at me for an instant and ran on.

I was hopelessly lost for direction, and such was the confusion of my mind that I had to lean against a wall with my eyes shut for a minute or two before I could recall the name of the crossing where the train was. When it came to me there was no one to interrogate. A man walking in furtive way down one of the passages broke into a run when I shouted to him, doors were slammed as I passed, in the parallel street I caught a glimpse of people scuttling like rabbits. I thumped at the door of one house, but no one answered; all I heard was the bang of a shutter being pulled across the window above me. The rain fell steadily through the October morning light, levelling every colour in the street towards a uniform of brown and grey,

squeezing the field of vision. I could have wept from impotence and exhaustion.

A child saved me: a rheumy-eyed, half-naked urchin who, apparently unaware of the weather and the town's alarm, was insouciantly contributing to the rush of water along a middle gutter. He told me, with the careless impudence of the Moscow small-streets, that the Tseskesaya crossing was "over that way," swinging the jet the way I had come. That gave me at least a direction, and for ten minutes I followed it, as straight as the streets' vagaries would allow. For all that time I saw no one within hailing distance, I had only the child's word to go on. I could hear firing again, not many streets away; and in spite of sleepiness I remember feeling a good deal frightened by being alone in this emptiness. The clock of a high building showing over the roofs told me that it was going on for ten. I started running.

When I had crossed a stream (or canal, I am not sure which) I found streets that were occupied again. The people here were better-to-do, Jews of the trading class, the families of government clerks; they stood and talked with their ears pricked, with anxious faces, but did not seem to feel themselves in immediate danger. A man who saw me coming over the bridge looked much astonished. He wanted to know what had happened "over there"—I couldn't tell him—and was inclined to make a fuss of me because my face was bloody. When I told him that all I wanted was to get to the Tseskesaya crossing he said that I must have come far out of my way, and proceeded to walk along with me, holding my arm with much kindness. He hoped that I would keep away from the railway-line, it was dangerous there: one or two trains had run through in the night, manned by soldiers and volunteers, and the strikers had fired on them. I asked, how long did he think this was going on. He shrugged his shoulders unhappily. "In Petrograd, they say, it's all over. But there they have no Kremlin." In these streets the shops were open, but no one seemed to be busy. "No, nobody will do any work with things as they are," my Samaritan said simply. "For one thing, what is the good, when any money you get will be taken away from you tomorrow. . . . Now see, from here you go along that street until it turns uphill, then you will find the steps going down to the left. . . ." I went on as he had told me, acutely conscious now that I walked crookedly, that my clothes were badly torn and people were staring. I saw that it was nearly half-past ten, but I could not hurry, the response of all my muscles seemed to be delayed. Going down those steps I felt curiously giddy and had to clutch the wooden handrail. And though the rest of the way cannot have taken more

than a few minutes, the recollection of it is like that of a dream in fever, when your breathless running gives you no progress, the leaning walls that keep your course are eternally prolonged: a squat, brown house with one worn step, a dam of dirty straw and cabbage-stalks in the central drain, a man calling after me, "There's no trains, barin, you won't find a train," and a woman hoarsely laughing—that pattern seemed to be repeated, and repeated, while my picture of Natalia and Vava asleep in the carriage drew steadily away.

What I found at the crossing did not surprise me, my thoughts had sketched it of themselves: a line of gaping loiterers along the cinder-path, an engine standing athwart the rails with two coaches lying on their sides; a perambulator perched on the adjacent sleepers with "Dolai Kerenski!" scrawled on its flank; two bored soldiers guarding a litter of splintered glass, broken cases and bashlyki, a woman's shoe. An old man, determined that I should not get a wrong impression, came running up to me, shouting "An accident, barin! The train, look, it's right off the rails. No good!" He seemed to be right. "The Bolsheviki," he added, "they didn't like the train going through, they debauched it." I pushed this fool away and went on towards the sidings. One of the soldiers came towards me bringing up his rifle; I told him sharply to get out of my light and he obeyed. I walked along the sleepers, treading on sixty-four of them: I know that, I counted them with my feet, my eyes fixed on a row of cattle-trucks ahead of me. There was no one about here, nothing but the waste of rails and the trucks over to my left, a bicycle leaning against a truck, an ice-wagon with something scrawled on the side that I puzzled over and at last could read, "The Blessed Mary loves Comrade Lenin."

The train had gone: I wasn't surprised, I seemed to have known all through the night that it would be gone when I came back. The goods-trains that had flanked it were still in the same position, only my own train had been moved away. I went up and down the trucks, looking for someone who would tell me what they had done with my train. But there wasn't anybody. I went on again, along the line, counting the sleepers.

42

I went to the Nesselrode Hotel; not really expecting to find anything there; I didn't know where else to go. I got there, or most of the way, in an open cart which I shared with a litter of suckling pigs; someone of whom I asked the way stopped this cart and put me on to it. I think the carter must have set me down somewhere near

the Sukharev tower: I know I sat on the footpath for some time, that several people spoke to me, that I saw the Chudov bell-tower blossoming from a soap advertisement. I must have wandered for a little while after that; I was close to the Krasniya Gate when a Jew offered to help me, a small, elderly man, very neatly dressed in European clothes. He told me it was no good going to the Nesselrode Hotel, the Bolsheviki had taken it over; but as I wasn't satisfied he took me there himself. I believe I never thanked him: and I have realized since, shaping that hour again from the lumber of my memory, how kind he was to let himself be seen in company with such a raffish creature.

The rumour that the hotel had been wrecked was partly true. The side facing the Danilevski Boulevard looked as if an armoured car had been driven into it, the whole long window of the famous Marius Petipa salon was smashed to splinters, you saw through the empty frames a jumble of cobblestones and broken pottery all over the Valiavin furniture. The entrance in the Zeshcheginaya had been blocked-up with boards and trench-wire (used very amateurishly). But a servants' door a little farther down the street was open, I pushed past a slovenly guard and went in there.

I found myself in one of the kitchens, a long, late-eighteenth-century room festooned with utensils and still smelling—or so it seemed to me—of a thousand meals. But a chopping-table had been cleared, a man in half a uniform sat there writing, with a fat, bright woman churning a typewriter beside him. When I addressed the man the woman answered me, explaining shortly but not unkindly that the hotel had "passed into new ownership" and was no longer used for guests. I had nothing more to say, I should have gone away then except that I had nowhere to go to. I said feebly:

"But—a message—there's no message, by any chance—no one's left a message for Captain Otraveskov?"

"No!" the man said, without looking up.

The woman said: "Wait; I'll find out. You can sit down—over there— put those basins on the floor."

She went off to some other part of the building, and was gone a long time. At intervals men came in and delivered breathless messages, of which the man at the table took no notice. I saw quite clearly what the woman was doing: she had taken pity on me, she felt she must make a pretence of being helpful: obviously there would be no message. A telephone-bell rang incessantly in the adjoining room and was never answered. Glad as I was to be resting on this chair, I felt impatient and angry.

The woman came back. "Yes," she said, "there's a message, a

message by telegraph, I found it in the vestibule, it's been waiting some time." I couldn't understand that, I couldn't understand how a message had come for me by telegraph. I took the paper the woman held out to me, gave her a feeble thank-you, went out into the street with the paper still folded in my hand. I read it as I went along the street, with everyone stumbling against me.

It had been sent from Chaveschok. Chaveschok: how could Natalia have sent me a telegram from Chaveschok? Surely the train couldn't have gone back to Chaveschok! And got there so soon! Then I looked at the bottom and saw that it was not from Natalia. From Ludmilla.

"Konstantin in grave trouble. Man who broke into house and was shot has died. Krunovitch and friends accusing Konstantin malicious unprovoked assault, deputy-intendant police pretending to take this fantastic charge seriously. Please get into touch with me by telephoning General Truomin's house at Tcheboloinsk."

I could make nothing of this, though I read it through a second time, aloud. Konstantin was in trouble: yes, but I knew that already, there was no need for Ludmilla to send me long telegrams to say so. I could remember, the facts coming up slowly through my drowsiness, what his trouble was: he had lost Dromelin, poor Dromelin had been shot and killed. But this about Krunovitch (Krunovitch—who was that?) Krunovitch accusing someone; this about the deputy-intendant of police; I couldn't make head or tail of it. Curiously, I felt very angry. The anger which should have damned myself falling on gentle Ludmilla. She should have known better than to worry me with all this nonsense, did she think I had nothing else to worry over! In God's name, could not a man whose wife and child had been snatched away be spared from the telegraphic chatter of anxious old women. Of the million people in this place must I, Blood of the Sacred Heart, be picked on for this senile gibbering!

A voice above my head barked *"Look out!"* and my lame foot dropped below the level I walked on. Someone behind me shouted "Fool!" and I had a glimpse of a cart-wheel turning, the wet flank of a horse. I think the shaft caught me on the chest, but that was all. A hand had grabbed me from behind and I was tugged back on to the footpath.

"Spawn of all misbegotten fools!"

I looked up: Yevski.

He was bending over me, actually frightened and angry. Then he started laughing, as nearly as his one-eyed twisting face would allow him laughter. "Katrina, mother of bastard frog-boys, look at you, barin! Belly of St. Barbara, what have you done to yourself, you potulent old fool! I told you not to get mixed up with those gut-

snatching bastards at the prison, didn't I warn you, you muck-head! Volodya, what a spectacle!—turn over, barin, turn over, let's see the dung-pants on the other side of you! You beetle-wit, can't I let you go a pistol-shot away from me and you won't come back like the sweepings of a shambles. . . . You, all you inquisitive doxies, you keep out of it! This is my Captain, d'you hear! . . . What's that? What is it? Why, you poor old darling, you muddle-pate, you didn't suppose Yevski'd leave the daft barina and the lame whelp to mind themselves! Well, what d'you think I've done, d'you think I've put them to bed in that lousy povarnia over there, with all those whelps of Lenin, God save him! Come, bariniusha, you shall see them for yourself—you'll have to walk, the bleeding isvostchiki are all out striking. Wait, let's have another look at you, wait till I just get my laughing swallowed. Now then, comrade barin, you can take old Yevski's arm. . . ."

PART VI

43

I HAD not expected to watch the cherry-blossom coming out in the Spring. But I did watch it, from my own window. The little house I had leased in the Viatchelaya quarter had originally been the outmost portion of a palace, where the Grounskev family had lived for three generations. The main building had gone in the holocaust of 1812, leaving (with a few charred beams for legacy) this humble limb, which had evidently been used as flour store and dairy, with quarters for one or two servants. A part of the old stable building remained as a row of little shops along the Dreshnikaya, sixty paces from my window; the space between had been a paddock, where, it was said, the Grounskevs had always kept a dozen sows from their Ukrainian herd. The paddock had become a wilderness of mud and broken tiles, with a pile of builder's junk which may have stood there for fifty years, a row of drainage pipes forgotten by some contractor, innumerable mangy cats; but parts of the old walls were standing, and at the end furthest from my house a row of trees remained; plum trees, four or five of them, and two cherries.

When you are anchored to the town you regard these things with absurd devotion. Six or seven trees: from the windows of my father's house in Kursk I had seen, I suppose, six or seven thousand. But here that row of leaning trunks, too far away, as I found, to be of any use to a painter, took on a huge importance. When I woke Vava in the morning and drew the curtains they were the first thing we looked at; we always imagined that we saw a little more green, and the first point of blossom, which his sharp eyes picked sooner than mine, put us in high excitement. We looked for sunny days first of all to encourage our trees, we were always anxious lest the night frost should hurt them. I hurried home one afternoon in great alarm; there had been some shooting in our street, where the Em-Tcheka had broken up a demonstration of peasant Social-Revolutionaries. "It's all right," Vava said, when I went into his room, "none of the bullets went near our trees."

He hadn't much else to see. Perhaps once a week a procession passed of schoolchildren who called themselves "The Little Sisters of Lenin," of the "Proletarian Barbers and Pharmacists Group," or the "Spiritual Comrades of Karl Marx." Then Zotova, the old

woman who looked after us, would lean out of the kitchen window, bawling, "Go back to your wives, you lazy bastards!" and that amused Vava very much. But as a rule there was only the long, high wall of a bottle-factory on the other side of the Muedenka, with the cupola of St. Amalia just showing above it; on the other side, far back, the crumbling façade of an old house in the Alexander style; between, the serried rows of washing on a background of shallow Moscow roofs, occasionally the top of a tramcar passing.

Still, it belonged to us, this bit of a house, as long as I could pay for it or until some covetous official pushed us out. Here we had refuge from the noise of main-street traffic, at night it was often very quiet. Here I could paint a little, when the urge could no longer be resisted; above the dirty roofs I could watch clean sky, which at morning and evening sometimes showed a wonderful tenderness of colour. My beloved was always near me; at night I could hear her breathing in the next room.

I had work of sorts, as secretary and interpreter with the Latvian Commission for financial adjustments: Anton had got me that. It was tiresome and irregular; I sat idle for days together in a shabby little room waiting for a deputy-kommissar or a clerk-of-committee who couldn't be bothered to keep appointments, then for a week I would be translating and copying statements-of-claim until three or four in the morning. But it brought me a little, a very little, money, with those perquisites that one lived on in those days if one lived at all. And at a time when my own trade had no economic value whatever it was good to have one's time filled, to call oneself a wage-earner. Physically I became very tired. The clothes I had worn since leaving Petrograd got woefully shabby, and I was surprised, catching my reflection in a shop window, to see how thin I had become. But I don't think Vava was ever really hungry at that period, and Natalia had two new dresses—second-hand, but fairly good—which I got her by walking out to the Potovinski market.

That, I believe, was partly the cause of the inner contentment which I felt then; contentment, or something akin to it, held remote and very privately in a lower chamber of my spirit, not to be rationally explained by anything in the outer world or in that of my thoughts. "Why are you smiling, batiushka?" Vava sometimes asked. What could I answer?

§

And the treatment was in progress.

Mishlayevski was working in Moscow now, he had been brought in from the hospital at Voskresensk to attend one in the Zemblyanoi

Gorod, which was reserved "for Marxist Revolutionary Fighters" and where his special qualifications were even more wasted. He was strictly forbidden to attend any outside patients, except Party members and their dependents who got special tickets from the health section of the city soviet. But he came to us. Yelisaveta somehow arranged it.

He came at intervals first of seven days, then of ten; usually late at night, sometimes very early in the morning. Natalia could not bring herself to witness his operations, fearing to see Vava hurt; she would shut the door of her room when he came and cover her head with a pillow, she was always white and wet-eyed afterwards. But indeed I think he hurt Vava very little, and I, standing by to give the boy assurance, watched his work with a certain fascination. He was a man of immense frame, always in loose, brown clothes such as a petty szlachta would wear in a country town. He had a fine head, with a thatch of stiff brown hair and a wide beard to balance it, his eyes looked distantly and were always very tired, he was a quiet creature, southern-provincial in speech. As he came into the room, calling "Hola, Vava, the fat doctor again!" he would start peeling off his coat and waistcoat; then he would roll his shirt sleeves above the elbow and loosen his tie as if for a bout of fisticuffs, march across to Vava's couch, look into his eyes, laughing, kiss him on both cheeks, gently turn him on to his belly and kneel astride him. All that was done very quickly. From the moment when he had the back bare he worked with the nervous caution of a Chinese carver in ivory. He talked to Vava all the time, in a way of his own. "A stormy night, Vava, listen! (No, keep still, my little fish, keep still!) Listen to the wind, it's angry, it's angry because it's lost in the streets of this fearful fuliginous town, it can't find the way out. But when it gets out it will go roaring and yelling and screaming towards Caucasia, and when it gets to the steppes it'll change into four great horses, which will gallop and pound and snort. . . ." And as he talked his middle finger, a short, blunt finger like a Tartar's, would creep along the spinal column as if it searched for a single particle of dust that had dropped in one of the follicles. That finger was the only one he ever used, and he treated it with delicate care, sometimes waving it gently in the air, I suppose to stimulate the flow of blood. Curiously, Vava never seemed to be tickled. The performance would go on for twenty minutes, sometimes an hour or longer still; you had said that here was an idle man who played with a child's spine as another would play with a feather of snuff-box. But if you watched with close attention you saw a certain system in the finger's passage, studied and geometrical like a figure in ballet; and by degrees the area was narrowed,

till the finger hardly seemed to move at all. His free hand was going round to his hip pocket then, it seemed to go by itself, jerkily, like a conjurer's handkerchief. Out came an instrument unlike anything I have seen another doctor use; it resembled a tiny syphon sprouting from an electric accumulator, the whole thing not larger than an ordinary match-box. "Now," he said gently, "that wolf I told you of, I've found him again, just where my finger is. And I'm going to put that little tiny tube down his throat—never mind if he wriggles a bit —and pour some hot tea down it, and that'll keep him good-tempered till I come again. Keep quite still now, the wolf's asleep, I want to get the little tube in before he wakes up, don't move or you'll wake him." It took eight seconds. All I could see was Mishlayevski's right hand on top of the left one, with the instrument in between; a very small pumping movement at the base of his right thumb. Eight seconds—I checked it once on my watch: it seemed a long time: Mishlayevski's voice saying dreamily, "He likes it, Vava, it's lovely and hot, he likes to be hot inside, he's going off to sleep, going to sleep, going . . ." Vava never moved, never even caught his breath. But when Mishlayevski turned him over his eyes were wet and his lips trembling.

Mishlayevski kissed him again, kissed him until he smiled. "My God, Vava," he would say seriously, "I don't know what I'd do without your help. That old wolf, you kept so still I had the tube right down his throat before he knew what was happening. You and I together, we can manage that old chap. I couldn't have done it without your help. . . ." Then he would shake Vava's hand, and say, "I'm ever so grateful, Vava, ever so grateful. You'll help me again, won't you?"

He and I had hardly any conversation. He was shy when I spoke to him, he stared at his thumbs and his mind seemed to wander. One day I asked him if he was satisfied with the progress of the case. He hunched his shoulders in the way my father's bailiff used when asked why the mowing hadn't begun after three warm days. "It may do some good," he said. And with a gesture that would have been rudeness in another man he turned and walked back into Vava's room. "When I come next time, Vava, I'll bring a soldier's cap with a bullet-hole in it. I bought it for you from a man in the hospital. . . ."

But the man's simplicity and patience, joined with my own ignorance, gave me a certain optimism. I kept it to myself; I told Natalia, dreading her disappointment at failure, that the doctor was not very hopeful.

A day came when my faith seemed to be justified. I remember it clearly; very cold, small flakes of snow sweeping across the win-

dows. I was tired and worried, after being badgered all afternoon for details of my means of living by a man who was obviously a spy. On my way home I bought a toy for Vava, a little bird of the kind that Ukrainian peasants make. When I got to his room I set it on a table near the bed and started working the wings. "Let me!" he cried, "give it me, bitiushka, let me do it!" He stretched out his hand, and I suddenly realized that he had raised his shoulders five or six inches from the frame supporting them.

I went to tell Natalia, but when she asked me what was the matter I found that my tongue and the roof of my mouth were salty. It was half a minute or more before I could speak.

44

To Natalia it was comfort of a kind that her father had been brought to Moscow, though she was not allowed to visit him. He was in the Vadorka Prison. There was a network of barbed wire now, eighteen feet high, where a portion of the wall had been blown away; it served the purpose equally well; and inside, with an urgency altogether strange in Moscow, they were reconstructing the damaged part of the building. It was understood that a new and better prison out at Lediki would take its place in time; but a new republic, created overnight, could not do everything in a moment.

I myself was glad that Konstantin should be here rather than at Chaveschok until the insensate charge had been disposed of. If the case had been left in the hands of the local authority—whatever that might be now—there was no knowing what might have happened. Here there were at least men of sufficient sense, sufficient knowledge of the world, to see the affair in its full absurdity. The law might have altered, but as far as I could see no legal point was involved. Konstantin's house had been forcibly invaded—there was ample evidence of that. His servant had been killed. He had fired two shots in self-defence, and that inside his own walls. I myself could testify to every detail in the episode. On top of that, there were witnesses to prove that his property had been attacked several times in the previous months. These facts had only to be known and checked by the department of the kommissar for criminal affairs, and there would be no excuse for holding Konstantin in confinement one day longer.

I employed an attorney called Nimenov on this business. Within six weeks of my arrival in Moscow (that is to say, almost immediately after the establishment of the latest régime) we had our full

statement lodged, incorporating the necessary affidavits. Nimenov, himself a Social Revolutionary of rather shallow conviction, appeared to be in the confidence of the Moscow Soviet; he had served one or two of its leading members in connection with the textile strike of the previous summer. By his influence I obtained a personal interview with one Grogenyitch, in the provincial division of the kommissar's office. This man, who behaved with a show of truculence that I deemed to be purely formal, agreed with me after half an hour's discussion that the case seemed to be quite straightforward. He even promised to bring it before Comrade Bolurin himself. He warned me, however, that since many questions of the distribution of responsibility were as yet unsettled, it might be necessary for the papers to go to Petrograd.

Would he, in the meantime, give me a chit for the kommissar of police, so that I could obtain permission to visit the prisoner?

No, he could not do that.

I realized that we should have to exercise some patience. I explained to Natalia—how many times!—that in the volcanic disturbance of political change we must expect a quite simple piece of business to take what would normally be a ridiculously long time. Perhaps as long as three weeks, I said. Later on I told her that by all accounts the prisoners in the Vadorka were being treated with great consideration; that according to an article by Lybrunin in *Pravda* it was likely that all charges standing over from the Kerenski period would be automatically written off as soon as the central committee had time to formulate the necessary decree. . . . Meanwhile, we had no reliable news of Konstantin himself. When I visited the office of the Vadorka I was told laconically that the prisoner Lusanov was in sound health. It was not permitted to write letters: at present no prisoners held on criminal charges were permitted to write letters.

§

I could not persuade my beloved that we were in no way to blame for what had happened. "We should not have left him," she repeated. "If you had been there, Alexei, if you could have talked to those stupid policemen, they'd have seen what wickedness it is. Little father: why, the only time he ever struck a man—it was Morenik, he got drunk one day and refused to bring the wood in, and father slapped him on the side of his head—I remember he went round next day to say he was sorry, and gave Morenik's wife two chickens. What do they think, those police, what do they think a

man should do when a crew of ruffians break into his house and kill his servant? . . ."

"All that will be cleared up," I told her. "The men will have to pay heavy damages, when all the facts are proved. We have only to be patient. I'm sure that Konstantin is patient, he has too great a spirit to be troubled by injustice. He will know that we are working for him, that it will all come right soon. . . ."

"We should never have left him," she said again. "It was my fault, it was I who wanted to come here."

I was not sure how far she understood the change that had taken place. For a week the din of the Kremlin battle had been in our ears all day and night, till it seemed that quietness would be too strange a state for us to understand; we had seen the smoke from our upper windows, a party of soldiers had been shot down in our own street. But that seemed to be over, leaving a flotsam of broken furniture along the Muedenka, of tipsy soldiers who beat on our doors at night screaming for vodka, of pale, shabby people who walked into our house quite freely to make inventories of our small possessions. Natalia did not go much abroad, she glanced at the papers with scant attention. When I talked to her of politics she nodded with a rather weary acquiescence, as a woman will when a man tries to explain machinery. "Yes," she would say musingly, "I know that everything has changed, everything is quite different now. . . . It is the royal children I am sorry for, they've done nothing wrong, what is to happen to them?" Or, "It doesn't matter, Alexei, it won't matter when we have got little father out of prison. We shall all be together, nothing will matter then." And to that tristesse she joined a kind of fatalism. "They must always have someone who belongs to me," she said. "They do not want me to be happy."

But I think there was no other obstacle to her contentment. The shortage of food—we had only one proper meal a day now—seemed to make little difference to her health; indeed, I thought she was stronger, though she had lost the colour and some of the extra flesh that Chaveschok had given her. She was always busy; the slatternly Zotova left her most of the house-work to do, as well as the care of Vava. She moved quickly, as she had not done since our days at Voepensk; often in a distrait fashion, starting to clear a table which I had only just laid; but conscientiously, with a sense of her own responsibility. Her times of listlessness were far less frequent now, sometimes she hummed as she worked, I even heard her laughing over Zotova's stupidity. That was delight to me, to see her throwing

off the state of convalescence, taking the handles of a woman's activity. More and more we found ordinary things to talk of, where I did not have to manage my speech carefully; and then I had the joy of hearing her deep voice, which altered in every sentence, sometimes sliding through the French syllables like a dancer's feet in the Czardas, sometimes holding a wide Russian vowel as if to prolong the delicious taste of it. A little of her gaiety returned, occasionally she picked a word too long to manage, and buckled it, and smiled and pouted when I gave her a shorter one to take its place; that was a game we had played in our first days together, and often at Krasnyesk, when the winter made us dreary, it had restored our cheerfulness. But that flame was too fragile to last long; silence would fall on us suddenly, as shower clouds come up in spring. Sometimes the daylight dwindled as we sat together, and I didn't get up to light the gas, fearing to break our serenity; then she would draw away from me, surrounding herself with loneliness, suffering my touch frigidly when I stretched towards her. "You should be busy," she would say, "you mustn't trouble yourself with me." At such a time I talked about Vava: "Do you know, today I saw him nearly turn over, nearly on to his side. . . ." "I know, I know," she would answer, "but what is the good?—they will only take him away from me, as soon as he's all right they'll take him away, just as they've taken my father." Then, as she sat very still, with her eyes closed, "Alexei . . . you remember him? I took the train to St. Petersburg, I took Vava with me. I thought the police would be honest, there was an old man there, he spoke to me quite kindly. But he said——"

"Natalia! Natalia, precious one, listen, my beloved, don't let us talk——"

"Who is that?" she asked sharply. "No no, no, put on the light, put on the light please!"

When I put on the light she would run into Vava's room, and stop short there, surprised to see him lying just as she had placed him. She would sit on the side of the bed, touching his hair with curiosity, like a lion-cub given something strange to play with. I said, caressing her, "Beloved, whenever it is dark you must stretch out your hand to feel me, or call my name. You ought to keep telling yourself, 'Alexei is somewhere near, Alexei is never far away.' Even if I'm not in the house my spirit is with you—how could your spirit ever escape from mine when they have grown together like two trees with their branches touching! Don't you see now how close my spirit always was when you were lonely?"

"Close to me? . . . I don't know, it was dark, so dark. . . . They say that God is always close. But how can we know that? . . . I'm

tired, Alexei, I want to go to bed now. I've done the porridge, there's only the kitchen stove, the cinder-box ought to be shaken out. No, you've got your copying to do, I shall do it in the morning. I'm tired, I must go to bed now."

"Shall I help you?"

"Yes, yes, adoré. . . . Adoré, you are so kind to me, tonight I am quite happy. No, that's wrong, it's wrong to be happy. Tomorrow you must go to the Vadorka again, you must buy a new pillow for Konstantin and give it to the gaoler for him. He likes a big, thick pillow, he can't sleep properly without that. I can't see him, I try to see him in the tiny little room—I suppose there are no pictures, nothing, nothing on the floor. If I only knew he was warm—Ludmilla used to make thick stockings for him, Dromelin always put a hot pan in his bed. . . . Yes. I am quite all right now, quite cosy, you must go now. Kiss me, Alexei!"

§

Often I found Anton waiting for me in a corner of my room. He had crept up without putting the light on, when I struck a match to light the gas I saw him sitting there, shy and smiling. Sometimes he came very late. And once I was in bed—it was going on for two in the morning—when I opened my eyes and saw the shape of his shoulders against the window.

"It's all right, Alexei, it's only me. I got in through the back window—I hoped you wouldn't wake, I didn't want to disturb you. You must go to sleep again—go on, you must go to sleep. I only came to sit here for a bit, I was feeling tired. I was kept late, it disturbs Yelisaveta if I come in as late as this. No, if you're going to start talking I shall go away—you'll wake Natalia Konstantinovna."

But to talk with him for an hour refreshed me better than sleep. I got out of bed and put a coat on, while he lit the lamp I cleared the grey ash from the stove.

"It's you who ought to be in bed," I said, "you're worn out, I can see that."

And indeed, he looked like an old man, his eyes so desperately tired, his body so shrunken in his clothes.

"Worn out?" he said. "You and Yelisaveta, you have a conspiracy to make me an invalid. I tell you I've never felt so full of life. You don't know what it feels like, to be going from one room to another, walking in the streets, to have no one watching you. Why, yesterday I stopped dead in the middle of the Kuznetski Most and laughed

out loud, I was so excited by feeling I could go anywhere I wanted. Really it was ridiculous, I stood there laughing and laughing, there was quite a crowd watching me, it's a wonder I wasn't arrested for irreverence to the Moscow Soviet. . . . Yes, I get tired, it's tiring to deal with such stupidity all day long. But I can go to Mass every week now—Father Vogen celebrates for me specially if I can't be there at the proper time—and you know (no, I don't want to bore you with my own feelings), but you know, it's wonderful how that refreshes me. I didn't quite understand that before, my weekly Mass was something like a tribute I paid, like taking a walk because the doctors say it's good for you. But after nearly a year it comes quite differently, I find that all my irritation and despair go away, I find it isn't a burden any more that I don't seem ever to fit in with other people's ideas. Do you know, last week, just before my Mass, I had a fainting-fit. I'd never had anything like it before, I was walking through the Kittanoi camp and I fell down in the mud. Such a fool I felt. But afterwards I went straight from the Maslov Church to a meeting of the External Relations Committee, and I made a speech lasting nearly two hours. I tell you I've never been in such voice. I slanged Comrade Schubendrov till he was like a fighting-cock on a tether."

"You're nothing but an old braggart," I told him. "It'll serve you right when they chuck you out of the Committee."

"Ah, but they won't, not just yet. Of course my job gives me a permanent seat, but that's neither here nor there. No, they want me on it because I give them a certain respectability—I am a legendary figure, you see, though God alone knows who started the legend. And it gives them a scholastic cachet too. There are always legal questions coming up, questions of international usage, that kind of thing; and these people, these mechanics and journalists, they're out of their depth at once. It's all very well for our friend Trotski to roar like a tiger at Brest Litovsk, to stamp about and shake his cheeky little beard at the Prussian diplomats and blather about the international solidarity of labour. When they come down to roubles and kopeks they've got to get people like me to tell them what the other people have actually promised."

"Then it keeps you quite happy, looking at Trotski's p's and q's?"

He looked past me, over my shoulder. "Happy? . . . I enjoy being busy, I want every hour filled up, I don't want to think of my own affairs. That's the secret, never to think of your own affairs. . . . No, the committee work gives me no pleasure at all, except the pleasure of being busy, of feeling my mind's wheels turning again. You get nowhere, you only struggle through a boundless

thicket of stupidities and obstinacies and private ambitions and sheer naked selfishness. You know, Alexei, often I find myself on the verge of tears over the darkness of the minds all round me, minds like the cell I had in the Vadorka, tiny and damp, with never a particle of daylight. No, it's the other thing that keeps me alive."

The other thing: I thought it would kill him. They had made him Secretary of Organization for the Repatriation of War Prisoners in the Moscow Area; and not content with the hours he spent in wrestling with the department of transport, the Group of the International Mutilated, the Party finance secretariat, the kulak employers, he had taken over the prison camps at Kittanoi and Chonosk as his personal responsibility. In his first day out of hospital he had taken the train to Kittanoi and spent three hours there, walking through the deep snow from hut to hut, just as he had done at Mariki. He knew every man by sight now, the names of a great many. When a party went off he was always at the station to give each man a handshake and a few cigarettes; that would often be late at night or at six in the morning, with the wind blowing straight from the Bieloye More. And the doctors said he should have had three more months in bed.

". . . Still, I shall stick to the Committee as long as I can. It keeps me in touch with people, I want to be close to the centre of things when the Government comes here. Yes, even if it means personal contact with a man like Lenin." He had shut his eyes, he was speaking as if he had forgotten I was there. "One mustn't be pessimistic," he said very quietly. "So far there's nothing but violence and the excitement of victory, nothing has taken shape yet. Even Lenin—I doubt if his philosophy is fully formed, I believe there may be some kindness in the man which he can't show while he feels himself in danger. And I'm not all by myself; there's Pirandrev, there's Shervinskovitch—they, at any rate, see that you can't get a man's happiness out with a pair of pincers and throw it to the crowd. It's only that they're all so frightened, so pitifully frightened."

He had one arm over the back of his chair, his head was dropping on to his wrist.

"You must get some sleep," I told him. "Why don't you lie down on my bed, or on the couch over there."

"I can't sleep," he said. "All night I'm planning and planning, arguing things with Schubendrov. I got like that in prison, I got out of the habit of sleeping. No, let me sit here, just let me sit here, I won't talk any more. You get back into bed. I've got a little writing to do, it won't take me half an hour, then I'll put the light out."

We had kept our voices low, but not low enough. I heard the pat

of bare feet in the next room, the door moved open as if the draught shifted it, Natalia stood there.

"Alexei! Alexei, who are you talking to?"

She blinked at us. She was in her nightgown, no coat or shawl. (That had always been her folly, at Krasnyesk she would run barefoot across the snow to the wood-shed.)

Anton got up and went to the other door. "It's very wrong of me, Natalia Konstantinovna. I was passing, and I just wanted a word with Alexei Alex'itch. I should never . . ."

Rather to my surprise, she smiled at him. "No, Anton Antonovitch, you must sit down, you must stay with us a little while. We don't have much society, it's boring for Alexei.—Alexei, bring the couch up by the stove, Anton Antonovitch must put up his feet, he looks so tired."

I got a coat for her and brought in the samovar. She accepted the cigarette he offered her—that was something new, she had not smoked since her illness—and sat with her feet tucked back on a pillow which she placed beside the stove. I felt curiously shy; these two that I loved had hardly been together except in large company. But she was not shy. She looked sleepy but contented, with the glow from the top of the stove making her white face and her hair very beautiful. "Yes, Anton Antonovitch, I ought to scold you," she said in a voice husky with sleep. "Why do you come here like a burglar, as if I wouldn't let you talk to Alexei, as if I was jealous of you?—Push him nearer, Alexei, he's cold, he wants someone to look after him.—Are you frightened of me? What do you think I can do to you? Look at my arms, look how thin they are! I couldn't wring a chicken's neck with them."

He watched her gravely, with a certain tenderness. When he spoke he stammered a little, but not, I think, from any embarrassment; he stammered most when he picked words carefully, using speech as an instrument of kindness.

"I'm not fit for society," he said. "I've been so long in prison, where you have a special kind of freedom, all my manners have gone to pieces. I'm all right with Alexei, he knows me, he knows I'm nothing but an old yard-dog who means it for the best when he wags his tail and knocks the tables over. With other people I don't know how to behave."

She was studying him minutely, she took one of his hands and scrutinized it as a geologist examines a specimen. "In prison, yes," she said. "I know what that's like. You breathe the same air over and over again, when anyone comes in you watch him like the beasts in a menagerie watching the people who stare at their cages. There

are two worlds, yours and theirs. When you come out you feel more strange than if you were in a foreign country, you think that everyone's looking at you, expecting you to do some tricks, like the bears they used to lead about in country towns."

"Yes," he said, "it's like that, it's just like that."

"But who put you in prison?"

He said: "I don't know, I never could quite understand. There seemed to be ever so many officials, ever so many people who were always explaining to me why I had to stay in prison a little longer."

She nodded comfortably. "Yes, that's what it's like, they talk to you as if you couldn't understand grown-up language."

"But that's over," I said, drawing the tea. "Here we are with no one who can make us go to bed as we ought to or do anything else. If only there was a bottle of cognac anywhere in Moscow I'd go and steal it, and then we could drink to our freedom."

"No," Natalia said, "to his—to Konstantin's."

That brought us to a silence, which was broken by a whimper from Vava's room. I went in to see what was wrong and found him troubled by a bad dream, he had dreamed that some woman with a hideous face was threatening to beat him. I lit the candle by his bed, and altered his position, and talked to him for a little while until he slept again. When I went back, Natalia was speaking, her voice urgent, with a note of fretfulness. I heard her say, as I came into the room.

". . . don't understand. If you do that, then it must be a Government post, you must belong to the Government in some way."

"In a way, yes," Anton answered. "You might say that I belong to the Government, but it doesn't belong to me. They've given me the job chiefly to keep me out of harm's way. It's entirely executive, it carries no authority outside my own department——"

"But it must give you some influence, you must know people! I don't know what kind of government it is now, I've been ill so long, and Alexei only muddles me.—Alexei, is Anton Antonovitch a member of the Government? I can't make him tell me."

I said: "No, dear one, he isn't. He only——"

"But he works for it, he supports it?"

I looked at Anton. He said:

"In a sense, yes, I work for it——"

"Then why can't you make them release my father?"

I said: "Dear one, I told you, Anton has——"

But he spoke across me.

"I've done everything I can, up to the present," he said soberly, "everything, I do ask you to believe that. I saw Zakharin myself

on Sunday, I had a long talk with him. But he can't do anything at present, the papers have all had to go to Petrograd and he can't do anything till he gets instructions from there——"

"He could let my father out for the time being. If you gave your guarantee——"

He shook his head. "No," he said with his eyes closed, "I'm afraid not. You see, for some reason—I haven't quite got to the bottom of it—Konstantin Viktorovitch's name appears on the list of those specially marked as hostile to the Revolution. The rule is that no one on that list—'Enemies to the Workers' Movement,' that's the name they use—no one on that list can be released pending trial. I asked Zakharin why Konstantin's name should be on the list, but he couldn't tell me. He said he would have to send to Chaveschok to have it investigated—the warning of indictment comes from there. As soon as that information comes through——"

"Yes," she said wearily, "as soon as it comes through! Lawyers always talk like that. And all the time Konstantin is in prison, he may be ill. . . ."

"If I could do anything to hurry it. . . . But you know, I'm helpless——"

"Yes," she repeated. She was looking into a corner of the room, she spoke rather as if Anton were a child who had interrupted her thoughts. "It was like that before, at the Skoropadski Palace. Zvetzkov—no, you wouldn't remember, a lawyer can't remember all the hundreds of cases that go through his hands. I understand that. You take a case, any case that the attorneys find for you, you win it or lose it, you take your fee, that's the end of it. But I was there, in the Court. I'd been sitting with Zvetzkov's wife——"

"Dear one, you're tired," I said, "you don't remember all the details——"

"It wasn't quite like that with Zvetzkov," Anton said gently. "There was no fee, none at all. At least, it didn't come to me. . . . It cost me seven thousand roubles—actually it was seven thousand five hundred—that was the fine I had to pay to stop a process for contempt of Court. Of course that was my affair, the price of my own rashness. But really—I just want you to understand, I wouldn't have told you if you hadn't mentioned poor Zvetzkov—it cost me more than that. I was working on it five weeks. I had to employ a corps of secret agents to get evidence. I lost three good briefs. . . ."

I said: "Anton, I didn't know that. If I'd known——"

"But then you were fighting against the Government," Natalia said quietly.

So tired, she looked. I knelt behind her and put my hands to her

sides, waiting for the chance to carry her back to bed. I said: "My darling, you mustn't stay talking any more, you must get some sleep." She didn't seem to hear me.

"And now you belong to the Government," she said, her voice beginning to break. "You work for them, that means you belong to them—I can't be wrong about that, even if my head's not very good. Why do you work for them if you can't make them do what's obviously right? Why do you work for people when you know they're wicked and cruel?" She was weeping now, but she wouldn't let me comfort her. Suddenly angry, she repeated, "Why? Why?"

Anton looked into her face, his eyes steady and distressful. He said at last:

"But what else can I do! Outside, one is powerless. If I were to cut myself away I should have no voice, it would be no good my staying in Russia at all. . . . Listen, Natalia Konstantinovna, listen! Alexei and I have been friends so long, Alexei is the dearest friend I have. How could I fail to do everything I can for you who are part of him! Won't you believe that, won't you trust me as far as that? Listen, I want to make you a promise, a solemn promise. Look at me, look at my eyes, I want you to trust me. I promise that if Konstantin Viktorovitch is brought to trial—I don't expect that, it seems unthinkable—but I promise that if he's brought to trial I'll defend him. I promise I'll use everything I have, my little influence, all my experience, all the powers God has given me."

I had to interrupt him. "But Anton, you can't promise that. They may not let you, holding the position you do——"

"Let me? My God, Alexei, do you think anything's going to stop me, do you think I can't have my own way against a lot of shivering upstart politicians! That isn't what I've lived for all these months, to see a new, free Russia where a man can be held in prison on a charge that wouldn't impress Diego Deza." I glanced towards the door, and remembering Vava he lowered his voice again. "I've made Zakharin clear about that already. I'm giving him time—he's tethered by Petrograd on one side and his own firebrands on the other. But he knows, and everyone else is going to know, if Lusanov gets put in the ring by a party escamoterie they've got me and those who believe in me to reckon with. You know, Alexei, you can call me a braggart if you like, but I've witnessed more judicial manipulation than any man in Russia. There's nothing that could take me by surprise. Zakharin knew me in the old days, he'll know what sort of creature he's fighting."

I looked at Natalia, but her eyes were shut as if she were praying. She whispered: "It's no use. It will be like it was with Zvetzkov

over again." Then, opening her eyes, "Look, Alexei, Anton Antonovitch's glass is empty. Do give him some more.—It's so kind of you to come and visit us, Alexei and I are quite strangers in Moscow, we don't understand all that's happening. You must visit us often. . . ."

He left us soon after that, to go back to his office in the Scherchelidze building; he was behind with his correspondence, he said. I offered to lend him a thicker coat than the one he had, but he said it was the one he always used, it was good enough. I hated to see him go like that: he looked so frail, and so unhappy.

I saw him out into the street. When I got back to my room I found that Natalia had fallen asleep, sitting sideways on the couch with her head stretched back over the scroll. I slipped my arms beneath her thighs and shoulders, meaning to carry her back to bed without her waking. But she opened her eyes a little way and smiled at me, murmuring, "It's nice like that, Alexei, I'd like to stay like this." Presently, lying in my arms, she said, "Did I hurt him, Alexei? I didn't hurt him, did I? That was wrong. I didn't understand, I was angry with him, I thought he didn't care about the people he spoke for, I thought it was just a part of his business, like a trapper killing the beasts as he goes round. I think he must be a kind person, his face shows how he has suffered. Only those who are kind can suffer like that. . . . That's why batiushka must be suffering."

"But surely people suffer less when they are selfless?"

"No. No, that's wrong. When they have pain it shows them what others go through, the pain comes back to them like that. I know that. . . . The light, it's getting in my eyes, couldn't we have the light out? . . . Yes, I think he must be kind, your Anton Antonovitch. And if he hadn't come I wouldn't have thought how nice it is to sit here, to sit here instead of being in bed."

"You know, he will keep his promise. He'll do everything for Konstantin, everything he possibly can."

"No, he can't do that. Yelisaveta Akinievna won't let him. . . . Tomorrow you must take me to the prison again, we must try again to see him. What is the mark on your hand, Alexei, how did you get that? You didn't use to have a mark there. Such beautiful hands, so rough! Vava—is Vava all right? Beautiful hands . . ."

45

I had a letter from Ludmilla Vassilievna.

"It is Godsent news," she wrote, "that you hope to have Kon-

stantin free very soon now. In a way it was a relief to me when he was taken to Moscow, for I knew that you would be in touch with those responsible for his detention, and I was sure you would be able to do far more than I could here. I pray that we shall very, very soon see a happy finish to this cruelly stupid business.

"But when Konstantin is free I think you ought to keep him in Moscow for a time, and try to break to him what has been happening here. Everything has gone except the house itself, the long yard, and a very small portion of the stock—about sixty head altogether—which I have kept hidden in the old flax-houses. And these beasts will have to be killed off shortly—the fodder will give out in a month or two. Tornik and Neksin have remained loyal, no one else will do anything at all. They say that Konstantin's land belongs to them now. I say, 'All right, then for goodness sake get on and work it properly, you stupid goslings, get something out of it for yourselves!' but all they do is to loaf about and get drunk. They say they are all members of the Rural Workers' Co-operative, and they are 'waiting instructions from Comrade Krunovitch, who has gone to Moscow.' In the meantime all they do is to slaughter the beasts and cut the half-grown corn. They say they won't work to supply food for the 'bloody bourzhui in the towns,' they will only send food for 'the empty stomachs of the international oppressed.' And every day one of the women comes to ask if I will let her have some milk and something to put round her baby, and give a hearty thrashing to her husband.

"Don't think I am in despair. All this will pass, and I thank God daily that the house has not been destroyed, as so many have, and that I have one or two faithful servants left. But I have to tell you about these misfortunes, so that you can give the news by degrees to Konstantin. I know you will do it very cautiously, dear Alexei Alex'itch, very gently.

"From such news as we get here I understand that Moscow is quieter now, that the new Government (if I am right in calling it that) is getting things under control both there and in the Capital. The only paper I can get hold of speaks of increasing prosperity and of universal enthusiasm for the new régime. I pray that may be so. Here we are so far out of the world that we see nothing clearly, we don't understand where the prosperity can come from. But in Moscow there must be so many who, like you, have worked to give freedom and life and hope to the downtrodden, and who, in this year of opportunity, will not let the harvest be wasted.

"Mme Arnevitch is in bed with some kind of nervous trouble

and requires a good deal of nursing. She is not in sufficient spirit for much conversation. So you won't chide me if I tell you that sometimes I am lonely and wish I could be with you in Moscow, to play my own small part in laying the foundations of the Russia that is to be.

"I am constantly with all of you in my thoughts and prayers."

§

That made me wish that I had not sounded a note of optimism in my letter to her. The outlook was less hopeful now. Just before her letter reached me I had received a note from Anton giving the latest news. He had discovered, by patient inquiry, that an indictment had been lodged against "the czarist landowner Lusanov" by a rural reorganization committee of the Moscow Soviet, who were acting on information received from the Party secretary at Chaveschok; in this statement Konstantin was described as "a tireless propagandist for reactionary systems of rural economy, the author of works on agricultural organization antipathetic to the rights of rural workers, an inveterate enemy to the enfranchisement of the muzhik." "At present," Anton wrote, "this is the kind of balderdash that the Em-Tcheka swallows like olive soup. I have to go very carefully, for if I press the matter too hard Konstantin Viktorovitch will become an important figure, and the more important you are the more dangerous your position. At the present time everyone is living in hourly terror of counter-revolution. That means that enemies must be ruthlessly destroyed, and if from time to time they can't light on an enemy for their gamekeeper's gibbet, then one has to be manufactured. It is sickening that I must keep on telling you to be patient. But that's how it is: I am regarded suspiciously enough myself, and I'm terrified of Konstantin getting branded with the same iron. I have to keep his name off my official tongue for a bit and wait for the right moment to suggest, with an air of disinterest, that a foolish old man in the Vadorka might just as well be let go now.

"Yelisaveta and her mother are hurt that you haven't been to see them for so long. . . ."

§

I took that hint, and set off for the Zembyanoi Gorod on the next Sunday morning, when the bright sun, warmer than it had been this year, encouraged me to walk. Natalia would not come. "Vava doesn't care for that house," she said. "I shall push him to the Komaroff Park, it will be nice for us there in the sunshine."

I had to walk all the way, for most of the trams were labelled "Reserved for M.A.P.B." and the rest packed to the stern-rail. It was hard on my leg, and not the walk I should have chosen. The straight stretch of the Lomakinaya, nearly two versts long, was ineffably dreary, with the sunlight flooding its drab dilapidation; half the shop windows still carried their October boarding, the modern buildings on the west side were mostly empty and their windows broken, the road and footways were spread with a six-inch layer of dung and paper. One shop was newly painted in gaudy colours. It had been a branch of Vosteil the furriers, and was now a depôt of the Municipal and Transport Workers' Supplies and Progress Association. In the window was a lay figure which might have been newly imported from Paris, clad only in a blue brassière, with one hand holding a feeding-bottle and the other a placard, "Comrade Lenin came to seek and to save them which were lost." That was the single touch of brightness in the long vista; the rest seemed to be dying, as a house dies when it is left empty. A dog's body lay beside the tram-lines with its feet in the air, a swarm of flies making festival over what was left of its stomach.

The sun seemed to give no cheerfulness to the crowds strolling along the street. They looked hungry and disinherited. But an old Tartar who came limping along with a barrow-load of *Moskva Pravda* spread a surprising animation. In about one minute I saw him sell thirty copies, every buyer was at once surrounded by a group to whom he read aloud, men smiled and embraced each other, I saw an old fellow dancing and waving his hands in the middle of the tram-track. I bought a copy for myself: the bonne bouche seemed to be a speech of Hoelsdov's, in which he announced that "over nine million German workers" had now solemnly pledged themselves to confraternity with the free and united proletariat of Russia. That was all. A youth looking over my shoulder caught hold of my hand and pulled me round to face him. "Think of that!" he said, his sunken eyes shining, "—nine million of our brothers in Germany—from Comrade Hoelsdov's own lips—nine million! What can they do—what can they say—the people's enemies, when the whole world is joining arms and catching hold of Truth! What is to stop our freedom now! . . ." I couldn't resist such eagerness. "It's wonderful," I answered, "it's glorious news!"

And curiously, I felt that. I didn't believe a word of it, but there was some wonder in news that could so change the expression of starving people. Except in the great religious festivals I had not seen faces lit like this, changed at a moment from the dull visage of cattle into spiritual radiance, as the lights come on all together in a

modern town. I saw that everyone was going the same way now, and purposefully. The Lomzha Gardens, someone said: there was going to be a demonstration. I found myself hurrying with the rest, joining in when they started to sing the Vanguard Hymn. At the Bobrikov statue the crowd became thick and confused. A long, untidy procession of children with little flags, flanked by their relations, was coming across from the Viazina Avenue; its head got lost in the confluence and I saw two streams of rather bewildered little boys and girls going off in different directions, still faintly singing, while Party officials thrust about like sheep-dogs trying to get them joined again. I stood on the steps of a house to watch, it was gay and amusing, everyone was in splendid humour. A body of youths in some attempt at uniform appeared now, they came in military formation and a little self-consciously; weedy fellows, but straight-eyed like the soldiers of Prussia, marching with determination. They were cheered spontaneously. A little cart followed them, drawn rather solemnly by a rank of four with two men marching on each side. On that a little, frightened man was standing, trying to smile, and I saw when the cart had passed me that he had a placard with the word "Individualist" on his back. I asked a woman standing by if she knew what that meant, and she answered, laughing, that that was Gagut, the cabinet-maker, who had refused to join the association of proletarian carpenters; but they'd put him out of his cottage now, and he had five children—he'd soon be joining. The muddle at the crossing was getting sorted out, the procession and the crowd began to move as a solid tongue along the Lomzhakaya. I struggled through the press and managed to break away into the Shchiki passage, where there were only a few children hurrying to join the fun.

Beyond the Juriniya Gate I might have been in a different city. The narrow street ran roughly east and west; and the tall houses, once lodgings of the prisiazhniye poverenniye, leant so far towards each other that only in one short space, where they stood a little back in favour of a courtyard with a maple tree, could the sun get down to the cobbles. There was no one about here, all the noise you heard came from the pigeons perched along the gutters. The shabby walls had scars where axles had scraped them, nowhere the marks of clubs or bullets; some of the window frames were empty, but you saw no cracked or shattered panes; and the smell of ripened wall, wood in rot and plaster crumbling, gave you the sense that here at least Moscow was dying a natural death, with no quack physics to help her. I crossed the scallop-shaped court where the Church of the Sacred Wounds protrudes its apse across the pave-

ment and went down the watermill steps, bending my head to pass under the old wheel. You had said, not knowing the place, that this narrow passage twisting between old stables could only lead to a workman's cottage; but the wooden, colonnaded porch to which it brought you was the only entrance I knew of to Mme Lenschitzi's house, where Tatiana Vascovna was living; and that house, at a guess, must have had thirty rooms.

Gobodin opened the door: no small business—I heard three bolts drawn, and a great rattling of chains: and seemed relieved when he saw me. "God be praised, Alexei Alexeivitch barin," he said warmly, "—I thought it would be the bastard Bolsheviki again. Three of them, we had here last night, dragging their stink all round the pantries. We had to make them drunk before they'd go. And what does Count Anton do about it?—he's hand-in-glove with the bastards, why can't he keep them off? He'll find one of them in the little Princess's bed one of these days, that'll give him more sense than pope or schoolmaster."

"The Princess is well?" I asked.

"As you'd think," he said vaguely. "In Moscow—what would you expect! St. Petersburg, that's where the nobility ought to live. This place—a stink-market for the tsekohivye, with a pack of snuffling priests to season it—nothing else. . . . I thank you, barin. You'd better go to the little dining-room, if you'll be so kind. They're all in there, I shouldn't wonder."

In fact the little dining-room was empty, except for a dachshund bitch lying on the table who put up her head when she saw me and yawned and went to sleep again; there were newspapers scattered all over the two arm-chairs, a pair of shooting-boots in one corner, nothing else in the room at all; but I heard voices and laughing from the one on the right and went in there. A tabid creature with a moustache like a hawthorn in winter sat on the edge of the table, squealing with laughter; and every shriek he gave was answered by a bellow from a rainbow-paunched old gentleman in riding-clothes who lolled in an easy-chair with a girl on each of its arms. Of three or four others in the room, only two were facing the door: a dark youth in the dress of an artist, with a thin, intelligent face, slightly semitic; and a sonsy girl who stood with her arm round his waist. I had met this girl, Yelena Astrovna, once or twice before; she caught sight of me and crossed the room.

"They're being so cruel about Tatiana!" she said. "But really, it's unbearably amusing."

"You oughtn't to laugh at poor Tatiana!" the young man said

gaily, coming to join us. "When a woman has lost all her money I find her pathetic, I no longer see anything funny in her absurdities."

"But Ilya, we've all lost our money——"

"Yes, but Tatiana Vascovna lost hers a bit sooner, she feels bad about that. And she is one of those unfortunates who cannot get on without money."

"Or without her pet corset!"

The young man broke into laughter again. Yelena called:

"Mitya, come here, do come and tell Alexei Alexeivitch about poor Tatiana. . . . You see, Tatiana Vascovna has a favourite corset that Saint-Victor made her, and some of the hooks came off, and she wrapped it up in a copy of *Izvestia* and went trotting all over Moscow trying to find someone who'd sew them on again. And then she left it in a tram——"

"—and she came and besought me to come and help her recover it, because Yelisaveta Akinievna was sulky that day and wouldn't go with her. So we went to about five hundred places, and at last we got sent to the Missing Articles department of the southeastern district Soviet—it was just an engine-shed near the Saratov Station —and Tatiana said, 'Listen yemstchik, have you got a corset?' and he said, 'No, Comrade, it is unnecessary, seeing that I've had nothing to eat for ten days,' and Tatiana said, 'I mean, have you got a corset that was found in a tram?' and he said, 'Yes, we've got about eight hundred.' So then he got out about two dozen, all mixed up with extraordinary underclothes and walking-sticks and false teeth and things, and he said, 'Well, Comrade, which is yours?' and she said, 'Well, they all look more or less like mine,' and he said, 'Oh well, you'll have to try each one on till you find the right one.' Of course the place was packed with Czechs and Tartars, all hunting for their undervests or whatever it was. . . ."

The man on the table had moved, and I saw that Mme Lenschitzi was sitting on the other side of the room, hunched up over a pastry-board on which her clever, knurred hands were fashioning a row of patty-cases. Seeing me, she beckoned, and I went over to stand beside her.

"Tatiana isn't down yet," she said. "She stays in bed a little longer every morning, I think her theory is that if you spend half the day in bed you don't miss the meals so much—which is quite sensible up to a point. Yelisaveta? I don't know, I expect she's sulking somewhere by herself—Anton Antonovitch is out, of course, he's always out."

"No news of Akiniev?" I asked.

"Akiniev? My dear Captain, what news is there likely to be? He must be miles away from Russia by now—Paris or Firenze, I shouldn't be surprised. There is one thing I've never said about the Roumanievs—that any of them are fools. They may, as people say, be selfish and extravagant and dishonest and vulgar; but like all families of oriental derivation they are cunning, one has to recognize that. Akiniev Mihailovitch hasn't been quite clever enough—he overreached himself, when you're robbing an eagle's nest it's better to leave an egg or two in place—but he's not the kind of consummate imbecile to stay about and see if the new Government is more broadminded about embezzlement than the last one. (Lend me a handkerchief, will you, just to get this mess off this dress—it's the only decent one I've got.) You know, I'm in something of a difficulty about Tatiana Vascovna. I'm very fond of her, you know, she is really a sweet woman in spite of all her little conceits—we were brought up together as girls—at least, for a month or two—we shared an English governess. But you see, she made me understand when she came that she would be spending just a fortnight or so here. . . . With Yelisaveta it's different—Anton Antonovitch has a little money, one doesn't inquire where it comes from. . . . Of course I have the use of Tasha's servants, the three she brought here—my own have all gone now. But that arrangement would be still more satisfactory if she were able to pay their wages. I was wondering whether you could have a chat with her—I know she is very fond of you, you are the only person she ever seems able to listen to—I thought you might perhaps find out something about her future plans. That would be so helpful. Possibly you could let her know that General Nekrechin and his wife may be coming to visit us shortly, with their family. They are all rather large eaters.—Vladimir, come here! Do go down and make that creature Gobodin find you a bottle of something for Captain Otraveskov. And Vladimir, listen! If you can't keep control of that silly laugh of yours you had better go and take the dogs for a walk."

The man with the moustache brought his amusing face into the shape of repentance and kissed her forehead.

"But you know, Va'isha, we've got to do something to keep up Sophie's spirits."

Mme Lenschitzi turned to me. "You've heard about Sophie? Yes, that straw-haired creature talking to Ilya Stepan'itch over there. She's lost her brother, the one she was so fond of. It was last week, the Bolsheviki shot him. Wait, I don't think you know this child—my cousin, Vladimir Gavrilovitch. My cousin by marriage, I ought to say. And that porpoise in the chair is another cousin by marriage,

Nikolas Branislavovitch. No one ever had quite so many cousins as my husband, his family were all the most reckless and incompetent breeders, that's why I wouldn't let him breed by me.—Captain Otraveskov, you know, is a great friend of Anton Antonovitch. They were in the war together, wasn't that it?"

Vladimir Gavrilovitch looked at me with faint amusement. "Of Anton Antonovitch? Indeed! A remarkable man, I think. The war —how long ago that seems! Well, I suppose it had to end one way or another."

"I do not see," said Mme Lenschitzi, "why it had to end in the loss of Poland, Finland, Esthonia, Livonia, and Ukrainia. I should have thought we could have lost those without the expense of a war. But I never had any head for politics—politics, I always think, are the preoccupation of minds which are slightly second-rate, minds which enjoy moving among vague generalizations."

She had raised her voice just enough to reach the old man in the chair.

"Yes, I heard you, Va'isha!" he said, getting up and pulling down his crimson waistcoat and stumbling towards us. "If I were not enjoying your hospitality I should tell you exactly what I think. As it is, I shall content myself with saying that those whose minds work most easily in the sphere of vulgar and paltry gossip do better to leave politics to brains of a different order."

"You might just as well be outspoken," Vladimir said. "Today—like yesterday and tomorrow—is *jour maigre*. The patties are for the General when he comes. Listen to those children—what are they squealing about now? You talk of my laughter——"

"Go on, Vladimir, go and get the wine!"

"So you are a friend of Anton's!" Nikolas Branislavovitch said to me. "A very interesting person—I find his ideas difficult to follow, but then I am all out of date, my political education was based on patriotism, respect for the Church, honest dealing with friends and opponents alike. I realize that all that is very old-fashioned——"

"You needn't bother to listen to him," Mme Lenschitzi said kindly. "He has been making that speech for the last forty years, you will find a copy of it in the Proceedings of the Novgorod Slavophils for 1883."

Nikolas pulled out his beard and squinted at the point.

"In this house," he said gruffly, "no one is allowed to make the smallest criticism of Anton Antonovitch or his political affiliations. You see, as long as he stays here, Va'isha Lvovna feels that she has a kind of hostage. Ever since her friend the Countess Schegolki had her house blown up with a bomb——"

"What he means is that if we are to have a government of upstart adventurers it is just as well to be on good terms with one of its members. That, I should have thought, is ordinary common sense."

"But Anton Antonovitch is not a member of the Government," I said. "He's not even a member of the Communist Party."

"That doesn't matter—he's the nearest to it I can get hold of. And as long as the present régime lasts he will be very welcome as my guest, in spite of his wife. His mother-in-law I shall not refer to, as she is my blood-relation."

"As long as what lasts?" Vladimir inquired, returning with three bottles under each arm.

"Comrade Lenin's picnic."

"Oh that? I imagine we've got to get settled down to that. Yes, Va'isha, these are the last six, the very last, but I thought we might celebrate Mitya's festival—here, Mitya, Yelena, catch!—oh Mitya, you walrus, look at it, all over Va'isha's lovely floor! Go on your knees and lap it up, you codfish!—Yes, Va'isha my dear, we must recognize that this order of affairs has come to stay. I myself have been round to the office of the district Soviet begging for a job as a lavatory-attendant—on strictly proletarian lines, of course."

"I think you're wrong!" Ilya Stepanovitch said demurely as he came towards us, leaving the girls to giggle round the pool of wine and dab at it with their handkerchiefs. "Yes, I think you're far too pessimistic."

"I beg you to listen to this young man, Va'isha," Nikolas said solemnly. "He is—or was—a journalist, and God is frequently at-home to journalists when the Metropolitan stands at the door unanswered. Proceed, O Pythia!"

Ilya stubbed his cigarette on the edge of the pastry-board and surveyed us over the top of imaginary spectacles.

"You had much better seek advice from Nikolas Branislavovitch," he said coolly. "He is a politician, he sees things from the inside. All that a poor scribbler can do is to notice what's going on and make what seems the obvious deduction. I give Lenin three months for his comic operetta."

"M. Lenin ought to be told," Vladimir said softly. "Ilya Stepanovitch Mariaschov, lately of *Russkoe Slovo,* gives him just three months."

"And on what grounds?" Nikolas asked.

Ilya lit another cigarette. "In my view," he said rather preciously, "Lenin signed his own death-warrant in December. Yes, when he dissolved the Constituent Assembly. By that single move he alienated the peasantry finally and completely."

"But he seems to get on passing well without the peasantry."

"For how long? I tell you, Vladimir Gavril'itch, the Revolution is an affair of the tshekoviye. And how many are there, in all Russia? One million. Call it, if you like, a million and a half. And what's the total population? Two hundred millions—getting on that way."

Nikolas began polishing his nose with a silk handkerchief. "Am I wrong in thinking that we and the bourzhui together numbered less than five millions? And we managed it somehow—for quite a long time."

"Everything depends on the peasantry," Ilya said, ignoring him. "The most marvellous political manœuvres, the most beautifully conceived programmes, they cannot be operated on empty stomachs, they depend ultimately on one supreme necessity and that is grain. When Lenin deliberately challenged the nerve centre of rural opinion he proved himself once and for all a man of such preternatural stupidity that I have since lost all interest in his antics. In the autumn I shall write a short history of the Communist Experiment, which may be of interest to future students as describing a rather unusual sideshow."

"I should like the opinion of Anton Antonovitch on that," Nikolas said sombrely.

Vladimir sighed.

"But the fellow never will talk about politics. Or not as I understand the subject."

"That," said Nikolas ponderously, "would tax the ingenuity of a good many politicians." The girl had started a gramophone, and his feet, grotesquely shod with old woollen slippers, were already pointing and sliding. "Va'isha," he said, "I cannot bear to see you wasting your ripest, your loveliest years in puddling with that dough. It is work fit only for French journeymen. I implore the favour of a dance."

"Go on, Va'isha!" Vladimir said. "It will be quite pointless, you will hardly feel his trotters with those slippers on them."

"You are not to tease Va'isha!" somebody said. "Va'isha, darling, I've told Gobodin to make up the stove in your room, I want you to go and lie down for an hour, you never get enough rest. Do, my sweet, just to please me!"

I turned round to see Tatiana standing a little behind Mme Lenschitzi's chair; and my first thought was the contact she made with everyone else in the room. She was wearing a dress (an evening dress, it appeared to me) which I had seen a long time before. It was mended, not too skilfully, along the bottom of the bodice and in two places on the sleeves; it was rather dirty and the skirt wanted iron-

ing; but beside Mme Lenschitzi's wrapping of dull brown velveteen it appeared a masterpiece of elegance. Her grey hair was beautifully dressed—Bajouska's work, I supposed—her hands were manicured with the old perfection, her shoes, rubbed as they were, had the stamp of Paris. She looked ill, worse than when I had seen her last; it was not the powder which made her face so pale, for she always used powder very sparingly; but when she saw me her weary eyes brightened and she gave me that brilliant smile which always flattered you into thinking it was kept for yourself alone.

"Alexei! Alexeieska! Why didn't someone tell me.—Va'isha, how cruel of you to keep him hidden, you are nothing but a selfish old woman!—No, Nikolas Branislavovitch, I shall dance with Alexei, you're much too clever for me, you go too fast.—Sophie darling, do stop that dreadful thing and let us have a Kosatchek or a Cracovienne. —Oh nonsense, Alexei, your leg won't make any difference—look at me, my legs are as stiff as ramrods and I've lost my corset.—You go to bed, Va'isha, I'll look after them all, I'll tell Gobodin to send you up something nice for luncheon. . . ."

Her dancing was certainly stiff, as stiff as my own, but as I steered her through the archipelago of girls and furniture I found her astonishingly light and sure; she danced mechanically, the nod of her head showing that she enjoyed the music without reflection; and she talked in her cosy way, as if we were all alone sitting side by side on a sofa.

"Poor Va'isha!" she said, "she overworks herself. It's really nothing but habit—you see, she has never had any money; it was understood when she married Stepan Lenschitzi that he had mining property in Georgia, but it turned out that there wasn't anything in the mines, or there weren't any mines at all, something like that. She has had to struggle all the way along, poor darling; it has completely spoilt her looks, she used to be quite a pretty girl, though perhaps rather plump. (Ilya Stepan'itch, do look where you're going.—Mitya, can't you guide him!) That is practically the only reason I stay in Moscow—I do feel that I can keep an eye on poor Va'isha and try to make her take life a little more reasonably. Moscow—you've no idea how I detest the place, it is the most provincial town in the world, a city of barbarians, it has no real culture. Oh yes, I know it has a great many churches—*ciel!* do I not know it! When I stayed here as a child I was made to see every one of them, yes, I'm sure they can't have left out a single one, sometimes I still feel that half my life has been spent jammed in between a stuffy old governess and a smelly little deacon, walking for mile after mile through candlelight and a suffocating ocean of incense, mountains of baroqueries,

every ikonostasia more monstrous than the last. I've always said that Bonaparte showed at least a respectable taste when he took one look at this town and went straight off back to Paris. I don't know how many dresses I haven't had ruined in days gone by with the mud splashing up from the droshkis. And now that you can't go from the Nikitski Gate to the Sadovaya without someone shooting at you, it seems to me that life would be less disagreeable in Yeniseisk. Hélas! You'll have to let me sit down for a bit, I've had one of my chest-colds, they always leave me short of breath."

"You haven't drunk Mitya's health!" Vladimir said, coming up with a glass. "Don't you know it's her festival?"

"Mitya's? Mitya, come here my dear, come and let me kiss you. God bless you, child! May you grow up to be a good girl and marry one of those kommissars—that seems to be the thing to do now."

"But first," said Vladimir, "you must be betrothed to me for a time. It is the custom. No young lady can really belong to the beau monde of Moscow until she has spent a short qualifying period as the fiancée of Vladimir Milaskerski."

"Take her, take her!" Nikolas said expansively. "Take her away, give her some wine, do anything you like with her, only don't marry her. I did that to her mother in a rash moment. Tatiana Vascovna, I ask you very humbly for the favour of your partnership. This young man cannot have you all day long—we shall show these children what dancing really is."

"No," she said, "No, Nikolas, please go away, I'm not fit to dance any more, and I want to talk to Alexei. Alexei is the only one who doesn't bore me with politics. I'll dance with you some other time." She lowered her voice as he turned away. ' Poor Nikolas, he's so bored, he's only hanging about because he thinks Va'isha will give him luncheon. And of course she can't, there's nothing in the house today, Gobodin told me. You don't mind going without luncheon today, do you?"

I told her it was only a question of where I went without it. "Have you—any news?" I asked cautiously.

"About Akiniev? Well, nothing from Akiniev himself, I don't suppose I shall hear anything now till the business is cleared up—really, you know, I think it's very wise of him not to write, wherever he is. The new police are said to be even sharper than the old, directly you start writing letters they trace them back—at least, that's what Ilya Stepanovitch tells me—such a nice boy, don't you think, and very clever—he gets that from his mother, she was a Grundelstein. Oh, but talking of the Grundelsteins, I had a letter from M. Strubensohn this morning, you must read it—oh dear, I've left it

upstairs. Well, he's gone back to Petrograd for a week, and he's trying to get evidence to show that all the money Akiniev took from the Industrial Committee was given to some charity or other—some war charity, I think he said. He sounds quite hopeful in his letter, he seems to have got hold of a man called Grevoesche who may be able to give the necessary evidence. And of course if that could once be proved, the present Government wouldn't really have anything against poor Akiniev, and he could show himself again, and he might find some way of taking part in the new administration—Akiniev is very adaptable, you know, with all his faults he was always a broad-minded man. Of course I know perfectly well there was no charity about it—Akiniev must have been hard-up, as he was so often, and seeing how wasteful the Committee was with all that money he must have just thought he could find a better use for some of it. Which of course is just what these Bolsheviki say is the right idea—isn't that right? But it wouldn't be any good trying to explain it to them in that way, such stubborn and prejudiced sort of people. . . . Be a good boy and fill my glass again before Vladimir Gavril'itch finishes the wine."

As I poured out the wine I looked across to where I had left her and saw that her head had dropped down on to the back of the chair, that her eyes were closed. And I thought for a moment that she had fainted. Mme Lenschitzi, who had settled down to devil's cribbage with Nikolas, must have seen my look of alarm, for she leant forward and said, under cover of the gramophone:

"It's all right, Alexei Alexeivitch, she is always like that on our *jours maigres*. It is just to show that she is the one especially adapted by nature to suffer from hunger."

I said nothing, I carried the wine to Tatiana, picking my way between the dancers. She opened her eyes with a little start and took the glass gratefully. "I have to rest my eyes sometimes," she said. "It seems stupid, but the light in my room is fixed in a bad position, I suppose it rather tires my eyes when I read at night. . . . But how selfish I am, to talk of nothing but my own paltry affairs. Tell me, Alexei, how is the little boy getting on? I can't tell you how overjoyed I was to hear that Dr. Mishlayevski's treatment is doing some good! Will he really be able to walk in the end, do you think? . . . And dear Natalia—you're very naughty not to have brought her—how is she now?"

"Natalia is very well," I said. "It's only that this trouble of her father's is weighing on her mind all the time. Naturally she can't be happy so long——"

"I know, I know, that was what I wanted to talk to you about, I've

been thinking about it all the time, I needn't tell you that. You know, I do think you ought to get a first-class lawyer—now, at once—who can take the case over and see it all the way through. I was going to suggest that we should get M. Strubensohn for you, but then I thought 'No, in a case like this you simply must have someone who's known to be *persona grata* with the Party in power.' That was always a wise rule—so Akiniev used to say—and more than ever now. No, listen! I've heard of a man—a Jew, of course, they're the only lawyers who are worth anything—a man called Druinlohe, who does odd work for the new Ministry of Justice, or whatever it's called, and knows all the officials personally. He's rather expensive, they say, but if we could borrow some money with Akiniev's name as security—he may not know about Akiniev being under a cloud at present—if we could borrow some money to start him off with, and then get him interested——"

"But wait!" I said. "Anton has very kindly promised that he will act for me, he is already in touch——"

"I know, yes, he has talked to us about it. And you know how glad I should be to think of his helping you. The only thing is, I don't think Anton is quite in the right position to handle it. You see —I don't understand these political complications myself, I can only go by what Yelisaveta tells me—you see, Anton's position with these dreadful people seems to be a day-to-day affair. Of course he's useful to them, he seems to have a special gift for all this ridiculous business of getting all the German prisoners together and putting them into camps and moving them about; so I suppose as long as that goes on Anton will be all right. But it can't go on forever, and if Anton does something to offend these blackguards, then the moment he's finished this job of his, well—— You see, it has made all the difference to Yelisaveta, knowing that Anton is in a safe position, doing work he likes instead of living in one long quarrel with everybody or else being in prison. Men are so difficult to look after. And I thought if you were to tell Anton about this Druinlohe, and his being exactly the right man for the case, then he wouldn't feel it was his duty to go on with it any more. You do see what I mean?"

Vladimir, stopping to borrow my matches, said quietly: "I must say, I agree with you, Tatiana Vascovna. My own feeling is that if Anton Antonovitch gets mixed up with a semi-political criminal case he's playing with fire."

"Who's playing with fire?" Ilya Stepanovitch asked.

"Anton Scheffler. You know, Yelisaveta was talking about it, this unfortunate business of M. Lusanov."

Ilya nodded gloomily. "Yes, he would do better to keep away

from that. Anton Antonovitch holds his present position on the strength of a legend. A legend is all right as long as it lasts, but how long is that? Nowadays there are always new ones, every back-street shooting affair produces another crop of Heroes of the Revolution. Siberian exiles—even popular assassins—they're all at a discount now."

I said quietly: "I have a rather special interest in M. Lusanov. He happens to be——"

The farther door opened; and I knew from the way it opened, before I saw her, that Yelisaveta was there. She was in bedroom shoes, with a dirty brown overall; her short hair was rumpled as if she had just got out of bed, her face was bare of powder. She stood still for a second or two, glancing about the room, and in that moment, I think without meaning to, she gathered the attention of everyone there. "Herself!" Vladimir called. "Look, I've saved just one glass for you!" "Where have you been, darling," Tatiana began, "didn't you know it was Mitya's festival?" Yelisaveta did not seem to hear, she came across to me as if there were no one else in the room. "Alexei, why didn't you say you were coming, why didn't you send someone to tell me you were here?" She took my arm and led me away from the others, calling over her shoulder, "No, Vladimir, it's very sweet of you, but I can't drink that stuff, I should really as soon drink braga.—Blessings, Mitya!—Va'isha, don't let Mother smoke too much, it's bad for her chest." She hooked the door open with her foot and we went through to the next room.

"You haven't brought Vava?" she said.

"No, Natalia thought he ought to be in the open air, on a sunny day like this."

She hesitated, and then said swiftly, "Yes, that's perfectly right. Natalia is really very sensible about him. . . . Alexei, I want you to see something, something I've got for him. It's up in my room. Oh yes, of course you can come up!" Still holding my arm, she took me along the back corridor and up the stairs. ". . . But I'm not going to let you take it to him, you must bring him here, or else I shall bring it to your house—some time, if I've got time. I don't get much time, I never know when Anton is going to be home."

§

Her bedroom, which I had not seen before, was the size of a Boyar's banqueting-chamber; or that was the impression it gave me. The bed was in a corner on the window side, a bed such as you would find in a cheap hotel in Petrograd; there was one chair,

a good piece but groggy-legged, a long table by the wall, of the kind once used for village feasts, a heavy baroque wardrobe, a cheap, European chest of drawers. The vast floor, which sagged alarmingly, had no carpet. The room had this in common with Yelisaveta's other bedrooms—her clothes were spread all over it; and it smelt, stuffily, of stale tobacco smoke, with a vein of tuberose. "Yes, it's rather bare," she said, seeing my glance. "I had a better room, one that you pay for, but Va'isha put Mother in here when she couldn't pay so I changed over. Look, do you think he'll like this?"

She was rummaging in a drawer, throwing clothes over her shoulder, and she pulled out a little cuckoo-clock. "I got it in the Zubovski," she said, "I think it must have come from Prince Aradiev's place. I had a new cuckoo carved for it—the bird was a bit shabby —and I've had this bracket made; I thought it could be fixed at the end of his cot, it might amuse him to see the cuckoo coming out.

The case was exquisite: very old Neuchâtel work. I said: "It's wonderfully kind of you—it must have cost a terrible lot of money."

She shrugged her shoulders. "Nothing to what it would have cost a few months ago! If you had a hundred roubles today you could furnish a house—all in Louis Treize. But then nobody has a hundred roubles. You think Vava will like it?"

I told her it would give him more joy than anything I could have thought of.

She smiled then; it was a rare smile, and one which I could not have pictured when I first knew her. "When you're not about," she said, quite gaily, "I talk of him as if he were my own child. I say 'my little son Vava,' I say to Anton, 'I have been to see my little son today.' Come and sit down, Alexei, sit down and talk to me!"

She dropped on to the bed. I turned the chair round and sat astride it, leaning forward over its back.

"Listen!" I said, "I want to get something straightened out. You know that Anton has promised to do all he can to help Konstantin Viktorovitch?"

She nodded.

"And you know what they're all saying, your mother and Ilya Stepan'itch and all the rest of them?"

"Yes."

"Well, what do you think? I mean—there are other lawyers I could get to take the case over——"

She said in her tired voice: "It doesn't matter what I think. If Anton has made up his mind——"

"No, but if I felt it was right I might persuade him that someone else could act for me equally well."

"You mean, you think you could persuade him, even if I couldn't? Oh yes, that's perfectly right, I know that! When I talk to him, he begins by thinking that I'm trying to make him act against his conscience. No, Alexei, I'm not being bitter, I only want to keep everything clear. It's not a question of whether he loves me, this; it's just a question of how he looks at my thoughts. . . . I wouldn't say that to anyone else."

Moved by that after-word, I could only repeat, "No, no, it isn't a question of whether he loves you." And then, picking my way, I said, "There's been so little time up to now. You know, a man can only be educated very slowly—his heart, I mean. I think that women have a special, separate means of perception, they understand instantly so much that we have to learn with the mind, groping our way. It was—how long?—nearly two years in which he only saw you once, just those few minutes in the Montresor Palace. Then he had, in a way, to begin all over again, learning to know the riper woman you had become. For a man it takes a long time."

She had listened, quite patiently; she said gravely, "Yes, a long time! That's it, that's just it, we must have more time." And added, as if to herself, "But shall we get that?"

She leant back against the pillow, closing her eyes; and I saw which way her thoughts were going. I let the silence run for a few moments, then I said:

"I think I ought to release him from his promise. I must talk to Natalia about it, but I think that is right. You know how much I love him: it would hurt me to think he was running grave risks when I can quite well get someone else."

"He will know you've been talking to me," she said quietly, without looking up. "He will think I've persuaded you."

"Will it matter if he does?"

"Yes. He will think—no, it's no good trying to reason it out. You must do what you think best—what is best for me. . . . More time, that is what I want, more time. Time to do something, make him see that my spirit's not such a different shape to his. . . . Then perhaps he will give me a child."

"But surely—surely you needn't wait for that?"

She opened her eyes and looked at my face, very seriously, like an employer who is interviewing a candidate. She said slowly, rather as if she were reading from a dull and badly-written document, "When we were married we had our rooms just like these are. That door, you see, that's Anton's. I told him—I was teasing him, you see—I told him he could only come when I opened the door. And then he went away—that was only a month after we were married

—he went away to Warsaw, there was some case he was interested in, some peasant who had deserted from military service. He was there six months. He asked me to join him, but I wouldn't. I had wanted him not to go, you see. I went to Rome instead, I had a lot of friends there, I didn't see Anton for nearly a year. Then when I came back I—didn't want it."

I hesitated.

"But you want it now?"

"No. Not until he does. I don't want just what any man can give me. I don't want him—just to please me."

She had been very calm; but I saw that her calm was going. I sat beside her on the bed and took her hand.

"Listen, 'Lisveta. Don't you think I could help you, help you both? Knowing Anton so well as I do, being so fond of him, couldn't I, if I talked to him——"

"No," she whispered, "no, Alexei, I must find my way to him, no one can help me."

She was weeping now, without any restraint, like a very young child. She turned over and lay with her face in the pillow, so that all the sound of her crying was smothered and I could only feel it from the bed and the floor shaking.

§

When someone knocked at the door she got up instantly and went to sponge her face. Glancing back at me, she said, "Why are you standing there? Go and see who it is!" It was Emelian. He smiled at me with his warm, grave friendship. Did Madame know, he asked, that Count Anton was in? He was in the library with two Communist gentlemen. Should he go in and tell Count Anton that the Captain was here? She said:

"Yes, Emelian, do go and tell him. No, no don't, I'll go myself. Thank you, Emelian." When he had gone she asked, "You'd better fetch him—if you want to see him, I expect you do. I don't think he likes me to break in when he's got those men with him. Oh yes, he won't mind you, it will only be Pirandrev and one or two harmless fools. Yes, go along, I want to tidy myself."

The library door was just open, and as I went along the corridor I heard Anton's voice. "I'm sorry, Vasya, but I can't agree. If the committee is going to pass resolutions simply because Golchovitch puts them up, there might just as well not be a committee." I went straight in.

An elderly man leaning against the shelves was the first to see me;

a pale, tidy person in a neat factory-made suit. He said abruptly:

"Well, we'd better talk about that tonight, since you have your social duties."

Anton caught sight of me then. He said: "Come in, Alexei—it's nothing private. You know these Comrades? Vasya Pirandrev, Pyotr Shervinskovitch, Pyotr Danilov.—This is my friend Alexei Otraveskov who was with me at Mariki-Matesk."

The elderly man bowed to me and buttoned up his coat. "Well, tonight——"

The lard-faced youth, Danilov, had taken no notice of me at all. He sat in a low chair, bunched up like a tortoise, and stared moodily at the motif of the carpet between his feet.

"It might just as well be settled now," he said. "I think Scheffler's view is merely academic.—What are you snivelling at, Vasya? —I say it's academic. We don't have to pass every resolution that's put up, only Golchovitch's. That's a concession to Party leadership. You've got to make concessions—you, Scheffler, who talk all the time about European practice, you ought to know that."

"Or at least," Pirandrev said gently, "you ought to remember what happened to Solotouchenko over the same sort of business. And he, bear in mind, was a Party member of long standing, not a distinguished outsider. It's not as if the Revolution was over and done with."

Anton nodded, with his lips folded in.

"Yes, I see. You mean that it's sufficient to justify us, as a committee, if we devote ourselves to passing revolutions of our own, which, *ex hypothesi,* can only relate to trivial questions of procedure, and which in any case are only formally reported to Council? If, apart from that, our function is to write our names in a long file at the bottom of any yellow sheet that Golchovitch sends across to us——?"

"Yes, that's all very well, but what is the use of having a Party philosophy if everyone is allowed——"

"No, but wait a bit!" Shervinskovitch said. He was the least presentable and the most capable looking man in the room; Siberian, by the shade of his hard, brown skin, cadaverous in features, the forehead broad and pendulous; a lank, powerful creature in a very dirty blouse and boatman's trousers. His Russian was rather awkward, he grimaced in speaking as if it hurt his mouth. "Can't you see what he means, you, Pyotr! Well, you can do as you please. For me, I didn't fight my way out of Churakansk, shoot my way through twenty policemen, just to write 'approved' on the toilet-paper of a tramway clerk."

"Quite so, quite so!" Pirandrev said mildly. "I can see some advantage in opposing one of Golchovitch's resolutions from time to time—provided we can persuade a dozen others to do the same——"

"You mean," said Danilov, "provided we can wean them from workers' class-allegiance——"

"I mean, to show that Golchovitch is not the sole true interpreter of workers' opinion—or Lenin either, for that matter. But the question is, which particular resolution to oppose. I say: oppose Golchovitch when he seems to be straying from the main principle of proletarian government as we understand it."

"As who understands it?" Anton asked.

Danilov said: "Not as you do! You don't learn to understand it in houses like this. You learn in the corners of factories, in little groups during the dinner-hour——"

"Yes, yes!" Pirandrev said impatiently. "What I was going to say is that the resolution we're talking about seems to me to conflict with no main principle——"

"Except the principles of international law and usage."

"What in God's name is that?" Danilov asked.

Anton, hoisting himself on to the edge of the table, looked at him with sleepy eyes; and I guessed that they had been through this a dozen times before. He said patiently, "The man in question, Adolf Scheurich, came into this country prior to the establishment of the present régime. He has retained his nationality as an American subject. He now wishes to go back to his own country. A great many other cases will arise with almost precisely similar features. The rights of any State in regard to its own nationals differ from its rights in regard to the nationals of other States——"

"And what in hell has all that got to do with the workers?" Danilov said testily. "The workers don't recognize national boundaries, they only recognize an international proletariat at present under the tyranny of various opposing capitalist groups."

"What we have to decide, however, is how we are to vote on the resolution which concerns the case of Adolf Scheurich."

Danilov yawned. "What does it matter? Why do we waste time with all that nonsense? Have we nothing in the world to bother about except the private affairs of some stray American?"

"The thing to bother about," Pirandrev said laconically, "is that Scheurich has been sending anti-Revolutionary articles to the American newspapers, and that Karl Radek says he is not to be allowed out of the country on any pretext whatever."

Danilov spat triumphantly.

"There you are!" he said. "You see, all you wiseheads who don't bother about Party direction, it isn't just an affair of Golchovitch's at all. The instruction comes from Petrograd, and it has Karl Radek behind it."

Shervinskovitch turned to Pirandrev:

"Are you sure about that?"

"Perfectly."

"Did you realize that, Scheffler?"

Anton smiled. It was the diffident smile of a man who receives a flowery compliment, and was always dangerous.

"I did. And who—the devil—may I ask—is Karl Radek, or any —other—undersized, flea-bitten little—liar in the—propaganda office in Petrograd to give instructions to our committee!"

Pirandrev stretched the corners of his mouth, sniffed, tightened a bootlace. Walking towards the door, he said haltingly: "It's all very well—for people who haven't grown up with us—for people like you, Scheffler, to cock a snoot whenever things don't go just as you fancy. We old-timers, if we'd played that game, gone as we pleased, taken no bloody orders from Party Secretary or whom-you-please, if we'd used our sweat and blood like that—well, there'd be Nikolas still saying his prayers at Tsarskoe Selo and Protopopov still sucking the veins of all the Russias."

He paused, started to say something else, and pulled it back; kicked the door open and went off, whistling through his teeth. Danilov got up and shuffled after him.

Shervinskovitch stared at his nails and then at Anton.

"You have been imprudent, my friend!" he said softly. "Pirandrev has been paid to vote for this resolution, Danilov will vote for it because he is loyal, and because he thinks of the American as a class enemy. . . . So!"

"I know that," Anton said.

"Then why, why, Comrade Billy-goat, did you go out of your way to fight them? On this, when so many things are more important? Wouldn't it have been enough to vote against it yourself, making your cross as large as all the ticks? Have you so many friends that you can afford to make all the fools into your enemies? What is the good?"

Anton sighed. "I don't know, Pyotr. I'm tired. Or else I'm sick of stroking the cheeks of nitwits, like a schoolma'am coaxing the toddlers into their multiplication tables. . . . What is the use—how can we ever get on fast enough if every single piece of honest thinking has to be titivated with Marxist jargon to make it sound vindictive! That's what these people want: they've been brought up

on anger and they want to be eternally angry. Poor things, poor children—to be angry, that's the only virtue they understand!—It's too bad, Alexei, to keep you waiting all this time. And I've got some news for you—no, not good, I'm afraid.—Come, Pyotr, come along! I'm a terrible donkey, I know, but you won't refuse to drink a glass of tea with me?"

Shervinskovitch, however, would not come with us further than the end of the passage. He was distrait and unhappy. He said, looking away from us, "You know—I can't let myself drop out, not now. I've lived for it, all my life, all my life, ever since Mera drowned herself. . . . I can't drop out now."

Laughing, Anton stretched up and shook him by the hair. "You take me too solemnly, Pyotr, you old sentimentalist! You've got to vote as you like, cuckoo-head—what does it matter if a fussy lawyer won't see eye-to-eye with our friend Golchovitch! . . . Turn me out? Do you think I shall burst into tears and bury my face with shame? Get along with you, Petrusha, you've got something better to worry about than a cranky fellow like Anton Antonovitch!"

But Shervinskovitch wouldn't smile. His eyes came round to the clerk over the salon door, he said abruptly, "Look at the time! The rations meeting's at twelve, they'll fine me for being late." And without any other farewell he strode off down the main corridor.

Anton stood still, gazing rather glumly at his feet. Presently he raised his eyes to my face and started, as if he had just woken from a long sleep and was surprised to find me there. He smiled. "I'm sorry, Alexei, I'm muddle-headed today! The meeting went on all night, you've no idea how these people chatter when they're frightened out of their wits." He took my arm and led me towards the Wine Room.

"Listen, Alexei!" he said. "I don't want you and Natalia to be alarmed about this, it's nothing to worry about, the whole thing will be perfectly easy to manage—I saw Zakharin last night and he understands that I'm not going to have any hanky-panky. But it's just this—they're going to bring Konstantin's case up for trial, I'm afraid there's no avoiding that. Yes, it's fixed now, there's no possible way of dodging it."

§

I was too much shocked to make any reply. We stood facing each other in the doorway of the Wine Room, and I hardly saw his anxious, sympathetic eyes; I saw the face of Konstantin as I had last seen it at Chaveschok: so old, so tender and humble.

"It will be all right," he repeated. "They're only doing it because the Rural Organization Committee wants a little advertisement. The thing will be pure theatre, no one is really concerned to hurt an old man like that."

Neither of us had noticed Yelisaveta. And when she spoke a moment passed before I saw where she was, sitting on a sofa by the window.

"You've taken a long time to get away from his friends," she said.

Anton turned round sharply, rather as a boy does on suddenly hearing the schoolmaster's voice. He smiled and went over to the sofa and sat down by her legs. He said:

"My dear, I'm so sorry, I meant to send a message that I couldn't get back last night—I couldn't find anyone to take it."

Looking down at him as if her thoughts were far away, she said patiently: "Will it always be like this? Will there always be these committees going on and on?"

"Not always," he answered, "no, not always. . . . Perhaps not very long more." I think he had forgotten my presence. He had her wrist in his hand, his eyes were exploring her face, puzzled and anxious; and my thoughts went back to his room in the Montresor. "You look so tired!" he said. "I don't look after you properly. . . . It was Zakharin, I had to wait till the end of the meeting or I shouldn't have got hold of him. And then Berussov kept me a long time. . . . You must put your feet up, Vetrisha, yes you must—there! Now keep still there, I'll get a cushion to go behind your shoulders."

"I'll get it!" I said, "—if you'll tell me——"

"No," she called, "no, Alexei! I won't have you making a carcase of me too.—No, Toni, leave me alone, I'm quite comfy, I'm not tired."

He stood a few feet away from her, awkward and helpless, smiling rather foolishly.

"I shall take her away from Moscow," he said, more to himself than to me. "Yes, as soon as there isn't so much work. . . . We shall go abroad, I shall buy you a new dress in Paris.—Do you know, Alexei, I haven't bought her a dress since the beginning of the war! That's what'll do me more good than anything in the world, to buy my wife a new dress, a blue one, very pale blue, with a—yes, a silver collar.—My dear, are you warm there? Shall I get a hot-bottle to go at your feet?"

"No, no," she said quickly. "I'm quite warm, perfectly warm." She had shut her eyes. "Tell me, Toni, tell me what you've all been talking about."

"Talking about? Oh, just the usual nonsense, arguing and arguing."

"Anton, what's the time?" I asked. "I told Natalia——"

"No, no, you must stay for luncheon, you can't go home with an empty stomach.—Can he, Vetrisha?"

"Jour maigre!" she said simply.

"I'd forgotten," he said. "—No, I hadn't forgotten, I thought of it last night." From the pocket of the overcoat he was still wearing he took a bundle wrapped in newspaper and spread it out to reveal two cakes, big ones. "Party rations!" he said irreverently. "I'm not supposed to get any, I more or less stole them. They'll go into three. . . . Oh yes, you must!" He split the cakes, rather clumsily, and tore the paper into three bits for us to use as napkins. He was smiling all the time, laughing now, like a child excited by a picnic. "Be a good fellow and lock the door!" he said. "We don't want to have to share it with Va'isha Lvovna and all the rest of them. No, sit down, I'll do it, you'll only drop crumbs all over the floor and that'll give the game away. You know, I like having doors locked with the key on my own side, it gives me a wonderful feeling of superiority."

"When it comes to dropping crumbs——!" Yelisaveta said.

He looked at the floor with dismay; there was a trail of them right across the room. "I'll pick every one up!" he said, and went down on his knees, and felt for the crumbs as if he couldn't quite see them. It was amusing to watch. But I noticed—I was not sure if Yelisaveta did—that his eyes were nearly shut. "That must do!" he said, pouring a handful into his pocket. "Come, Alexei, we'll be comfortable now." He took my arm and pulled me across to the sofa, where he sat between us. Yes, I saw now that Yelisaveta was watching him, watching the energy, the slight uncertainty of all his movements. He felt for our hands. "Think of it!" he said. "We can sit and talk as long as we like: no Kralitzkov, no Voldik with that dreadful sniff of his, no one in the world to come and take you away and slam the bolts outside my door."

Yelisaveta was absently breaking up her piece of cake, she had eaten none of it so far. "You, Anton," she asked, "when did you last have something to eat?"

"Me? Last night. . . . Yes, I think so."

"You mean yesterday morning, just before you left here?"

He laughed. "You know, Alexei, I've been a bachelor so long, I'd forgotten how a wife takes charge of you. She follows me with a mysterious eye, I'm always in trouble for forgetting to brush my hair or have a meal at the proper time."

She had passed her share of the cake across to him. "Yes, go on," she said, "you've got to have that! Oh yes, I had something a few minutes ago, Emelian got hold of some fish for me." She turned to me and said seriously, "What am I to do? I don't even know where he goes. If I go to the Morvenkaya I find he's gone off to Kittanoi, when I telephone to Kittanoi they say he's just left and they don't know where he's gone. . . . In ten minutes he'll be off to Kittanoi again.—Isn't that right?"

He nodded, shamefaced. "Well, not ten minutes—I've got one, two hours all to myself,—but this afternoon I must go, I'm afraid. There's been some trouble, it's a case of typhoid, I've got to get the man isolated, no one'll do anything if I don't go and see to it."

"But you'll be home tonight?"

"I think so—I can't be quite sure. It's difficult, you see—you know how it is, Alexei. These other men, you see, these men I deal with on committees, they've got their whole hearts in what they're doing, they're ready to work twenty-four hours in the day to keep the thing going at top pressure. It's everything to them, you see, the Revolution has been their meat and drink, the only thing they've thought and dreamed of, ever since they learnt to think at all. One has to try and go their pace."

"Otherwise——?"

"Otherwise you can't play any part at all, the thing goes past you and you see it going all wrong. But listen! Are you too tired, or won't you come to Kittanoi with me? It's so fine, it would be an outing for you. It means going into a smelly train—rather crowded—but it isn't very long, an hour and a quarter, not much more."

"And what happens when I get there?"

"You could come round with me. Some of the men are very nice, very friendly. They're dirty, of course, but you don't notice that after the first two or three. And there's the hospital—the men there would like to see a woman, they have an awfully dull time; got no legs, some of them."

"No," she said quickly, "not the hospital! I—I can't stand up to that sort of thing. . . . When is it all going to finish, when are you going to get all these men back to Germany?"

"It's going to take a long time," he said. "For one thing, the lines are all so blocked. You can only send small parties, they have to be properly escorted——"

"Why don't you go?" I asked her. "It would do you good."

"Yes, people are always trying to improve me," she said, hardly smiling. "What's the use of my going? I shouldn't know what to say to those men."

"It's just that I should be pleased to have you with me," Anton said quietly. "—And proud."

"Looking like this?"

He looked at her, surprised. "Why, yes."

"No, it's no good!" she said decisively. "It's no use my trying to play a part that doesn't fit me. I've never taken any interest in German prisoners, I've never been a charity lady, I never played about in the hospitals pretending to be a war-worker or an angel in human shape or something like that. I must have been the only woman in Petrograd who never thought she was the little friend sent by God on High to all the peasantry. . . . Don't you see, Toni —Alexei, don't you see—that it's no good my pretending? I mean, going about with Anton, pretending to share in his work. Everyone would say, 'Look at Yelisaveta Akinievna, the doll that Count Scheffler married in Petrograd! Have you heard, she's suddenly become a proper wife, she goes about with him everywhere! Oh yes, now the Bolsheviki have got the reins she's a tireless labourer in the cause of the proletaria!' Don't you see what a hypocrite I'd feel, what a pitiful performance it would be! Do you think you'd really be proud if you saw me smiling and patting the shoulders of greasy workers out of the ghettoes and making myself nice to kommissars, when you knew I was loathing it all and despising myself for doing it? . . . Is that the only way.—Tell me, Alexei—is that the only way you can be a good wife, by following your husband round, pretending you're excited over his work, that you agree with all the people he agrees with?"

Anton sat with his face in his hands.

He said: "I'm sorry, Vetrisha. . . . I didn't mean to offend you, I only thought it would be—an excursion for you, something that might amuse you, get you out of this house for a bit——"

"Is a prison-camp so very amusing?"

"I've thought of something better," I said. "On the first really warm day, or as soon as Anton can get an afternoon free, we shall all have an excursion together; we three, and Natalia and Vava. We could borrow a carriage from somebody——"

"Is that likely," Yelisaveta asked softly, "will Anton ever be free? . . . Never mind, we'll think about it, plan it all, we'll pray for the day when there's nothing and no one in the world that Toni feels he's got to fuss about. Then we'll all go into the country, and Vava and I shall make cowslip balls, while you paint the trees, Alexei, and Toni will collect some peasants and make a speech to them and form them into a committee.—Toni, don't frown like that!—don't you like my nice ideas?" She pulled his head towards her and

kissed his ear, he glanced at her sleepily, like a child when a grown-up makes fun of him, and smiled slowly as a shy child does. "No," she said quickly, as if afraid of being interrupted, "we'll leave Alexei behind, Alexei is always so serious—it's the military training, Alexei would be worrying all the time about the rations, he'd be measuring the distance to the nearest ditch in case of being attacked——"

"No, you've got him all wrong," he said, "you don't understand the military training at all! Alexei would be worrying about his socks getting muddy, that's all he ever worries about; at Mariki he spent all his time hunting for someone to wash his clothes properly. All officers are like that."

He was trying to laugh, but it wouldn't come; his eyelids were dropping all the time, I could see he had to struggle to keep his head up. He looked so white, so very feeble.

"Poor Alexei!" she was saying. "We mustn't make fun of him!"

"No," he answered uncertainly, "no—Alexei must come. . . . I promise, Vetrisha, I promise we'll do that—go for a day in the country. That will be nice, yes, to picnic under the trees, I promise that. As soon as I've got this—all this—as soon as I've got it all cleared up. . . ."

Someone was rattling the handle of the door; at a sign from Yelisaveta I went to unlock it, and Nikolas Branislavovitch came in, with the distant sound of the gramophone following him. He beamed at all of us.

"What! Anton Antonovitch? Why, I thought you must have left Moscow altogether—didn't someone tell me you had gone to act as right-hand man to M. Trotski! Come along, my dear fellow, you can't have Yelisaveta Akinievna all to yourself—or you either, sir!—Do you realize, fair lady, that I have not yet had the pleasure of a dance!"

"Nikolas! Where is the old wanderer? Ah, there you are!" Vladimir came in with Sophie on his arm, roaring with laughter. "Nikolas, you really must come and pacify Va'isha! What? Is this really Anton Antonovitch?"

"My dear!" Sophie came across and put an arm round Yelisaveta's waist. "My dear, you must come, your naughty mother has made Va'isha Lvovna quite cross, she's been saying that the Lenschitzis are meaner than all the hotel-keepers in Pskov!"

Anton, standing up, had his hand on my shoulder. "I want to lie down—just a few minutes," he whispered. "You might just—give me a hand upstairs." But Ilya Stepanovitch, striding in behind Yelena Astrovna, caught sight of me and came to join us.

"I say, is this true about M. Lusanov?" he asked. "Grigori's

just been in, he says it's in some paper that the old fellow's going to be put up for trial. Surely it's impossible, the whole thing is pure invention——"

"It is, unfortunately, true," Anton said.

"But does that mean——"

"Yelisaveta—is she in here?" Tatiana was standing in the door. "Where is she?—Oh, there you are! Lisveta, you'll have to go and say something nice to Va'isha, I seem to have trodden on her toes somehow or other.—Oh, Alexei, I thought you'd gone!—my dear, I'm so sorry, so terribly sorry, about your poor father-in-law. I really never thought—no one thought. . . . But I do believe this M. Druinlohe will put everything right for you if you let him look after the case. Ilya says——"

Anton said quietly: "Druinlohe is the greatest nincompoop in Moscow. He is not going to act for Konstantin Viktorovitch. I am."

There was a moment's silence.

"If you'll take my advice——" Ilya began.

Anton swung round to face him.

"I won't take your advice or anyone else's.—And you, Nikolas Branislavovitch, will you please stop pawing my wife!—So long as Zakharin brings people into court on that kind of charge I'm going to fight him.—And now, if you don't mind taking your moustache out of my way, Vladimir Gavril'itch, I'm going to my room."

46

But we came towards full summer, and the dirt and smell of the Moscow streets grew more oppressive in the hot sunshine, and the case of the counter-revolutionary landowner Lusanov was still "outstanding on schedule." It was a good thing, Yevski said when he came to see me: so long as a prisoner's name was on the schedule he was all right, others had been struck off and no one knew what had happened to them, though he, Yevski, had seen queer things and heard interesting noises. Anton could tell me nothing. "Next week!" Zakharin always said to him.

I was already making plans for getting out of Russia. Vava now spent three or four hours a day sitting up at an angle of sixty degrees or so with a single support across the shoulders; the next stage would be slower, Mishlayevski said, but perhaps, by the early autumn, the case could be transferred to a Dr. Hauchard in Paris: he would make no promises, he was inclined to be testy when I asked for any more precision. "You think I am an engineer, a building contractor!" He

was always desperately tired, poor fellow; and he still refused to say anything about his fees. Secretly, I thought of early September as the time. By then, certainly, we should have Konstantin free. There would be no major obstacle.

My brother Vassili wrote from Petrograd advising me to get away as soon as possible. At the present time he might be able to get me a passage from Petrograd to Stockholm, through someone he knew in the department of transport; but it was becoming more difficult every day. "I take it you have some money in Europe already? In any case, if you have anything you can spare in Nikolas or even Kerenski roubles you might send it to me (not more than a hundred at a time, wrapped in with copies of *Moskva Pravda*) and I can fix up a credit account for you, through a discount broker I know, with Liljenbaum in Kjobenhavn; Liljenbaum will credit at the rate of approximately 55 per cent.—that's the best anyone will do now, and 45 per cent. is not too great a charge against the risk he takes. . . . You would be wise to get ready two or three alternative sets of forged papers. . . . I thought that Katie might be helpful, but she isn't. She is working in Radek's office, I don't think she puts down her telephone receiver between five in the morning and midnight; she has ceased to be a human being at all, she is a thin, ghostly-looking automaton which multiplies and disseminates falsehoods at the rate of half a million words a day. For myself, I shall stay where I am; it is my profession, and one which I have always considered honourable enough, to fight against Russia's enemies; her enemies are in Russia now, and I shall go on with my job. Do I lack imagination? Yes, reality has killed it. Everything, everything I lived for has gone. . . ."

In September, I thought, in September we shall be out of Russia. I had something in the Banque du Nord at Paris. About eight thousand francs, not more. And in Paris there might still be people who bought pictures.

We could not go very far on the afternoons when I was free. It was too much of an undertaking to get Vava on to the crowded trains for a short excursion, and Natalia was not up to much walking. The Komaroff Gardens were near at hand, we went there as a rule. They had lost their elegance: most of the railings had been torn away; in a moment of exuberance someone had set fire to the Chinese pavilion and a scorched rectangle on the ground was all that was left of it; the crowds had trampled over all the flower beds, rooted up the plants, smashed the little statues along the Archduke's Terrace. But the giant cedar that Catherine II is said to have planted had somehow been left untouched, and if you didn't mind rough neighbours you could lie on the ragged grass enjoying its shade. Vava was happy there, he liked

to watch the crowd wandering by, the Jews in their long kaftans, the scarlet blouses of the Sister-Comrades of the International, vastly bearded Tartars, sometimes a Father scuttling along the Broad Walk with a cloud of dust rising from his skirts. But Natalia was always uneasy, always a little restless.

"It's better at home, Alexei—all these people, I don't know what they're after."

Vava and I had little jokes about the people we saw, little, common jokes about the lovers who walked along gazing at each other's faces and hardly noticing the people they collided with. But I could not get my beloved to join in our gaiety. She would smile faintly. "Yes, yes, I see, they are careless, aren't they. . . . What was it that Anton said? Has he seen Zakharin since last Wednesday? Will he be here again tonight—couldn't you ask him to try and make Zakharin do something quickly?"

It was on one of those afternoons (but fortunately Natalia had stayed at home) that I had a tiresome encounter. The day before, Trigurin had made his famous speech about the Remnant of the Parasites. ("The Soviets rely on You, Workers, Peasants, Comrades who toil to wring the means of life from the hard earth and the dark mines and the grinding engines, they rely on You, each one by individual action, to attack this plague and stamp it out. They are all among you, these class-enemies, these under-humans with their huge bellies and their hands too fair to have ever touched the shovel or the oil-can, these locusts, these useless mouths, these leeches sucking from the veins of your poverty. Go after them, find them, hunt them out, strip them! Show them what poverty is like! They had no mercy. Show them none!") Already, by a miracle of organization, there were extracts in letters three inches high in the shop windows all over the city, pasted in rows along the walls, on droshkis, on the sides of barges. All along the Tverskaya men were reading the speech aloud to crowds who never seemed tired of hearing; children trotting about the streets in groups were repeating in a sing-song chorus, "Go after them, find them, hunt them out! They had no mercy, show them none!" But in the Gardens it was quieter than usual today, Lundrev was going to make a speech in support of the new drive at the Kudrinskaya crossing and the largest crowds were going in that direction. The shady patch beneath our cedar was for once almost deserted, only the aged and the amorous seemed to be enjoying the sunshine along the terraces. Vava was practising the use of his legs. It was an exercise we did for a few minutes every day now according to Mishlayevski's instructions: I had to carry him against my stomach while he, feebly but with gradual improvement, moved one foot

after the other, each a few inches, trying to imitate the action of walking: it was rather tiring and painful for him, but we always went through it with a good deal of laughter. I was so intent on the business that I didn't notice a group of men who looked like sailors coming along the Broad Walk until one of them called out to me:

"Hi! Nancy-liver! Come here! Come here and give us Trigurin's speech, see if you know it!"

For a moment I took no notice, but the man ran up and pulled me round by the arm. "Speak up, can't you! Haven't you got a tongue in your bloody mug!"

I put Vava back in his chair and then turned to face the fellow. I said: "As soon as you're sober, old friend, you can go and ask Comrade Osteschiel if I know Trigurin's speech. Dendrov, my name is. You go and ask him. Give him my compliments and tell him there are some little brothers in Moscow who don't know what to do with their time on a Sunday afternoon."

He looked at me rather uncertainly.

"Those are nice boots you've got, Comrade," he said suddenly. "They'd fit me just nicely. Perhaps you could spare that pair of boots."

I said: "I'm sorry, they don't belong to me, I only have the use of them. They belong to the Paper Workers' Co-operative."

"Take them off, you f——!" he said.

I sat down and unlaced them.

"What does he want?" Vava asked.

"He wants my boots, it's a little joke of his."

"Hurry!" the man said. "And the socks too, I shall want them."

The boots didn't fit him or any of his friends. You could see that at a glance. But he tied the laces together and flung them over his shoulder.

"I'll find someone for them," he said. "Too good for any bloody locust!—Here, Boris, look—look at his feet! Did you ever see feet like that? Look at his big toe, look at the colour of them! Come and smell them! God, what a smell! Did you ever see feet that colour?"

I said: "That's the remains of frost-bite, if you care to know. That comes from the Bzura."

"Hell to the Bzura!" the man said. "Down with the bloody war!"

I thought it best to get home, and I pushed the chair up the slope to the Archduke's Terrace; that was the shortest way, though the gravel was painful to bare feet. The sailors followed us, all the way to the Viatschelaya, yelling with laughter and shouting, "Look at the bourzhui locust! Keep clear, keep clear, mind you don't get gassed with his stinking feet!" Vava was a good deal scared, I had to keep

telling him that sailors were jolly fellows, who liked playing jokes—"What a pity you can't see me, Vava, it's terribly funny, Batiushka pushing the chair in his bare feet! . . ."

§

But that campaign was soon past its crest. They smashed a house in the Bieli Gorod and dragged out some old ladies and pulled their clothes off in the street. The gesture seemed to satisfy the keener elements for the time being, I heard that Lundrev had given secret instructions to ease the pace. The wages and food-tickets I got for my work with the Latvian Commission were cut by one-half on the grounds that I was a "worker of the lower grade (non-manual)." But that, I thought, was temporary; and in warm weather I could get along without so much food.

September: I held to it firmly that we should get away then. And I believed that the poverty we must suffer afterwards would be as nothing when we found our spirits free.

Curiously, I suffered at that time from a kind of nostalgia. This place had been dear to me, almost as dear as my own home; I had known some pride in the largeness of Moscow and its eccentric beauty, feeling that the rare, wide culture of my race, my several races, had here a stranger monument, of no less dignity, than the palaces of Versailles and Wien. I felt that pride again, walking along the Sofiskaya late at night, when I looked across the river at the Kremlin's vastness, its many towers striking into the mauve sky. And here were sounds and smells I had known nearly all my life, the yellow cabin-lights of barges creeping along the Moskva, the hollow sound of droshki-wheels as they rattled over the Kruimski bridge, the isvostchik's rasping cries. Here, when you went along with the hurrying crowds, you could follow what two in every three of your neighbours were saying; even the tongues you didn't understand seemed homely by familiarity. These crowds, pressed close on the footways, brought into one compound the smells of several Moscows, and of the fields beyond, warm with summer. At night they were friendly, the feeble lamps not showing-up the shape of your bourzhui clothes; you could take a man's arm and say, "Bless you, brother, let me pass!" and he would laugh and give way to you. I did not want to leave this city then, I didn't want to change its warm and flowing life for the prettiness of Europe, the clicking European voices. But in daytime it was different, the faces became hostile, men watched you as you crossed the street. At any hour a man would come, with a soldier or two to guard his feeble person, and keep you for half an

hour under cross-examination: how long had we been in Moscow? how many children had we? what was this room used for? why did this child want a separate room? The waste of time was tiresome: our servant Zotova had long since left us (taking a drawerful of Vava's clothes), Natalia was always busy with Vava and I did the cooking: but far less endurable was the sense it gave us, this perpetual inquisition, of having no place here, of being unwelcome aliens. In Siberia we had sometimes been subject to a similar interference; but there we had had our slender rights, and however strict the inspectors were they treated us with a modicum of politeness. Sometimes I came home now to find Natalia weeping with fear and anger. "Another of those men, Alexei, a gross, stupid creature, he wanted to know all about Konstantin, what illnesses he'd had, whether he'd loved his wife. And he turned out all our clothes. . . ." It took me a long time to calm her, telling her that one must bear with these busybodies when they came and afterwards laugh at them; that we should be rid of it all before very long, when Konstantin was free, and as soon as Vava was ready.

Yes, I could have borne with the straitness of that mean existence, with all the insults and the petty persecution, if I could have sheltered her. Her spirit was like a picture in gouache with the colours not yet dry: I lived in the constant fear that some roughness would injure its settling beauty. When I was very hungry this fear became an abscess in my mind, I would hurry with my work and run, as well as my leg allowed, all the way home, arriving frightened and exhausted. Before, the contentment which her presence gave had brought me courage, my spirit had seemed strong enough to carry hers. Now I was growing feebler from a kind of loneliness. I wanted a stronger man to put his shoulder underneath the weight. Anton would have helped me: when I talked to him, slowly, feeling his tender patience, some part of him flowed into me, leaving me quiet and happy: but he came less often now, he could never find more than half an hour between his crowding duties, and I felt it selfish to talk too much of my private burdens while he said so little of his. "God is useful," he once said, stammering a little, as he lit a cigarette. "Of course one can't be lazy, you have to make use of what you find inside yourself, to do the best you can with it. But I find so much outside my own capacity, like—like when you pick a firing-post with immense strategical insight and then get it peppered by your own artillery. If you can once feel—at least, I find that—if you can once feel that beyond the sphere of your own competence you have no—no responsibility; I mean if you can realize that that's God's business, that He's glad to be asked to manage it, you get a relief that's very

exhilarating. . . . I'm only giving you the thing as I—as I find it." But I knew better than that, and however kind the invitation I would not be led that way again. We had travelled so far already; I, by myself, had brought my beloved so far towards the daylight; I would finish the journey (finish? finish? where could it end completely?) with my own muscles and my own shallow breath. I could last the summer: one meal a day, of stalk soup with a little kasha mixed into it, was enough to keep me going. Sometimes, in the hot, small streets, I had to stop for a minute, feeling my legs uncertain; and once I sat for an hour, hardly conscious, on the steps of a Mosque in the Preschitenka. But I could do with my present clothes till the cold weather came, and then we could still get rid of a little furniture. As soon as Konstantin was free Natalia's heart would take new strength. We could last till September.

47

At last there was some movement, or it seemed so. Late one night an asthmatic old man arrived with a note from Anton:

> "Please be at the Old Weigh-House in Lichvinskaya (which is being used for cases overflowing from Tropov's court) tomorrow (Sunday) 8 a.m. Before starting please read through notes I gave you on your evidence. In haste—A. A."

Natalia watched me reading it. She said: "It is about Batiushka. I know that." I told her I could not be certain, we must be patient and not too hopeful. I went off straight away to arrange the subletting of my job for a few days—I knew a man who would take it on a 60/40 basis—and after that I spent two hours learning the notes by heart.

§

I was at the Weigh-House a little after seven next morning. All the doors were shut, there was a sentry on guard, no one else about. At a quarter past the hour I asked the sentry if I was mistaken in thinking that the building should have been open at eight o'clock. No, I was not mistaken. It should be. It never was. The officials, in any case, came in on the other side, through the Telkner gardens; no one went in this way except independent witnesses.

Shortly after nine o'clock a small door at the end of the building was opened from the inside, and half a dozen men and women who had been hanging about strolled in. I followed them, but the dvornik

stopped me. Who was I?—he hadn't seen me before. Had I a party ticket or other proof of identity? I told him that I had to give evidence in the case of Lusanov and that Comrade Scheffler would vouch for me. He replied that Comrade Scheffler would be difficult to find; he, the dvornik, had orders not to leave the door, and his time was valuable. I asked if one bread- and two vegetable-tickets would perhaps compensate him for the trouble involved. He jerked his chin over his shoulder. "Along at the end of the passage," he said.

I found a room measuring about five yards by four, with a door at each end of it. Some ten or eleven people were there already; I thought from the state of the atmosphere that some of them had already been waiting a long time, but I discovered later that the atmosphere was kept from one day's occupation to the next—the first arrivals found it in good preservation. There was a small table, already occupied by three women; the rest of us, if we wanted to sit down, had to sit on the stone floor. The walls were coloured with a slaky red distemper. On one the inevitable extracts from Trigurin's speech had been pasted, alongside a newspaper photograph of Lunacharski, and an ancient notice quoting 85 kopeks as the fine for nuisance. The other walls were bare.

Four of the men had already started a game of Yarolash, another was reading the sheet of newspaper in which he had brought his dinner. One of the women sat in silence, glumly smoking through a packet of kanivskai cigarettes; the other two, much better dressed, conversed incessantly of one Mevrenya, the mistress of a party officer, and the various means she had tried for getting an abortion. One man stood with his hands in his tunic pockets, patiently spitting at a fly on the top of the wall and always failing to reach it. Another lay full length on the floor and snored.

Someone came and locked the door through which I had entered. An hour passed, the other door opened, a name was called. An old man, appearing much surprised, said "Me!" and went out. That door was locked again. The air got thicker and hotter. Another hour passed, nothing happened. The man who had the newspaper gave it to his nearest neighbour and settled himself to sleep, the shabby woman took her last cigarette and threw the packet away, one of the card-players turned his back and made himself liable for eighty-five kopeks. The sun came round to the high window and blazed on to one half of the room. A youth offered to sell me a pull at his bottle of cold tea for half a bread-chit, and I nearly took it. At five o'clock, or thereabouts, the door was unlocked and we were curtly ordered to go home.

In the evening the same old man appeared with another note:

"I am dreadfully sorry, but it was essential to have you there on the chance of our case being called. I am afraid you will have to go on attending until it does come up. Impossible to calculate time or day. I shall try to see you tomorrow, but can't promise. —Zakharin is being extremely shifty."

I went again next day. The programme was the same, except that two men were called in the morning and one of the women in the afternoon. I had no sight of Anton; and it was not easy to speak comfortingly to Natalia that night. On the day following two men were again called, but our numbers were increased again by the arrival of three more women, one of whom was coughing into a blood-soaked handkerchief throughout the day. On this day (or the one after—I am not sure) the usher brought me another of Anton's notes, which he delivered for two Kerenski roubles. It said:

"A miracle has happened. Bialochevski has been sent from Petrograd to preside. He is one of the soundest criminal lawyers still living and will have no nonsense."

I was actually called late on the Friday afternoon.

§

The usher, a bald, grey-faced creature who was stone-deaf, led me through three or four rooms filled with tobacco-smoke and the chatter of typewriters, along a built-out passage with a glass roof, up an iron staircase. He walked very slowly, with a priestly solemnity, which had the effect of making me as physically nervous as if I myself were on trial. Two more doors: the second was labelled "Stuffs other than fabric-stuffs: Moscow District Standards": the usher, jerking up the latch, said, "On the right, on that form with the others."

The big room had been arranged in much the same way as the old Okruzhniye Sudi chamber, except that everything was at one level. The public area, over to the right of where I sat down, consisted of the old measuring benches arranged in two rough semi-circles. There some thirty or forty men, with a few women among them, were sprawling in manifest and abject boredom, some were reading papers, some were asleep. Anton sat directly opposite me, right against the wall; with his hands in his trouser pockets and his legs stretched

out. He nodded to me when I came in and then turned his eyes away. He, too, looked sleepy and bored; ill, but not worse than he had looked all through the recent weeks. Between us were the ordinary paraphernalia, the clerks' desks, the primary witness benches. A dirty-skinned old man whom I recognized as Druvalov, secretary of the political department of the People's Judiciary Committee, sat all by himself, smiling at nothing in particular, his eyes perpetually blinking. Two men were on their feet and seemed to be debating between themselves some obscure question of procedure. No one was paying them the smallest attention.

My eyes, after their first sweep, went straight to the desk where Bialochevski sat. Certainly his figure was imposing, he was by several inches the tallest man in the room, he was clean and dressed with dignity, he had an unusually high forehead and fine, sweeping eyebrows. But he did not give me the impression which Anton had led me to expect: he was smiling, with a wide, silly smile; his eyes wandered incessantly and without apparent purpose about the Court; his forehead was unnecessarily damp; he was dribbling. Zakharin, whom I already knew by sight, sat just in front of him, frowning rather nervously at his black finger-nails. I noticed that he had grown his red moustache to a larger and fiercer pattern, but it made no difference; he was still what he always had been, a niggling, shy, underpaid professor of political economy.

I looked for Konstantin. He wasn't there. No, nowhere.

A man in front of me got up and began a speech. He was a wiry, pigeon-chested fellow, with a rather fine, spare profile and heroic eyes. He stood up very straight and spoke with astonishing fluency, emphasizing his words with a uniform gesture, slicing with his open hand at an imaginary target hung just in front of his face. Of the speech itself I could make neither head nor tail: it appeared to be chiefly a political harangue, of a kind I had heard a hundred times before, on the notorious iniquities of landowners in general. Occasionally the name "Lusanov" came in, but it seemed to be lost at once beneath the tide of generalities. One passage came to me clearly. "So barren was this man's mind of practicable doctrine that he dared not face the opposition of the worker-scientists. He would bear no arguments. When an agrarian communist, one who had given a lifetime to the study of rural questions, went to reason with him, Lusanov had only one answer. That answer was the pistol. He listened for three—five minutes. Lost his temper. Shot the Comrade dead." But by the time I had grasped the significance of this assertion the speaker had passed on to other themes: the virtues of the dead man, his party-loyalty, the desperate plight of his widow. I looked across

to see how Anton was taking it. He was listening carefully, but without any expression of special interest, except that sometimes he faintly smiled. Bialochevski did not seem to be listening at all. He was trying to balance a piece of india-rubber on the edge of his desk.

The speech went on for half an hour. When it was over Anton stood up. No one noticed him. Zakharin was trying to make the usher understand something that was wanted, the soldier who seemed to have the office of Judge's Clerk was steadily writing, the whole of Bialochevski's attention was on his rubber, which had fallen down to the Clerk's table and which he could not quite reach. Anton coughed. No result. With great deliberation he picked up a heavy book from the chair beside him and dropped it on the floor. Everyone jumped. He began speaking immediately, his voice very quiet.

"At this stage I have to lodge a protest. I have been denied all opportunity for seeing the prisoner whom I am supposed to be defending. The prohibition is quite unprecedented. It has made my task almost impossible."

Doller, Counsel for the prosecution, jumped up.

"Comrade President——" But Zakharin motioned him to sit down. He half-turned towards Bialochevski.

"I have here a report," he said, "from the medical officer responsible for the Vadorka Prison. It states that up to last night the prisoner Lusanov was not fit for the strain of an interview. The case is only being heard today on the insistence of M. Scheffler. My own opinion was that it should be postponed."

Bialochevski nodded. He said "Exactly! Exactly!"

Zakharin sat down.

Anton said: "I wish my protest to be formally registered."

Zakharin rose again.

"Perhaps M. Scheffler will tell us if he is supplicating for a further postponement?"

"No."

"Then perhaps M. Scheffler will say what exactly he has in his mind?"

"I require an interval of half-an-hour, during which I may have access to the prisoner."

Zakharin said promptly: "I move that that demand is irregular."

Bialochevski nodded. "Exactly! Exactly!"

"Then at least I insist on the prisoner being brought into Court now, in order——"

"I am advised," said Zakharin, "that it would be unwise for the prisoner to be subject to the strain of being in the Court throughout

the hearing. In my opinion it will be sufficient for him to be summoned when the time comes for him to make his own statement."

Bialochevski smiled and said nothing. The rubber fell over again, he grabbed for it wildly, the Clerk passed it back to him. "Good boy!" he said. "Thank-you! Thank-you!" I realized then what was wrong with him; he was completely, helplessly drunk. The first witness for the prosecution was already on his feet.

I looked attentively at this man, searching rather foolishly for some trait that would remind me of the encounter in darkness. There was none. But his flat, mumbling speech belonged to the Chaveschok district, and there was no reason to doubt that he was one of the men who had made the attack. Probably he had belonged to Muraviov's mill—he wore muzhik dress and a ditcher's heavy boots, but his skin was not that of a fieldsman. He was a tallish man with very big shoulders, his face loutish and stolid. He had been well tutored. He gave his answers as glibly as a phonograph, his eyes fixed on the floor. . . . Yes, Nikolin, the murdered man, had been speaking with the greatest good-humour. Yes, the servant had seized Nikolin by the arms and held him tightly, Lusanov had come up to a distance of two yards and fired three shots into his stomach. . . .

His speech was so indistinct that I found it hard to understand a quarter of what he said, and even harder to concentrate. My nervousness had gone: the shape of this assembly might be that of a Law Court, but the patent human mediocrity of the chief performers combined with its informal aspect to make it feel innocuous. Anton had resumed his former attitude, attentive, a little bored, in no wise taken aback by the most monstrous of the witness's assertions. Purposely, I took my mind away from the complex falsehoods dropping like beads from a torn bag and mentally revised my own evidence once again. The replies to Anton's own questions were easy enough to remember; they were simply an account of what I had heard and seen, scientifically divided, and the only difficulty would be not to answer too mechanically: much harder was the memorization of Doller's trick-questions—Anton had given me forty or fifty which Doller was likely to use—and the appropriate replies. The principle was never to answer an ambiguous question except ambiguously: that sounded simple, but I had to keep clear-headed. . . . I glanced constantly at the door where Konstantin would probably come in, and tried to picture his appearance when he came. Would he be on his feet? Would he see me across the Court? What kind of answers would he make when Doller shot questions at him in his high, sharp voice like a quick-firing gun? Nervousness returned again, the dread

of seeing Konstantin suffer. Natalia's father: he was so gentle, that old man, so innocent in mind. . . .

"Lusanov had previously shown no objection to your presence and that of the other two Comrades?"

"No."

"Did he say 'I tell you, I will never let the Workers have one square-yard of my land'?"

"No . . . I mean, yes."

"Did he say 'I refuse to let any of my Workers join the Rural-Workers' Coöperative'?"

"Yes."

"Did he say, as he fired the pistol, 'To hell with you and all the Bolsheviki!'?"

"Yes."

"That will do."

Anton, without rising, began his cross-examination.

"Throughout the conversation you saw Lusanov's face quite clearly?"

"Oh yes, barin."

"So I take it that the lamp in the hall, where you were standing, was shining right on to his face?"

"Yes. Yes, it was."

"Did you notice anything particular about the nightshirt Lusanov was wearing?"

"No, nothing particular."

"It was just an ordinary nightshirt?"

"Yes, I suppose so. Quite ordinary."

"Did Lusanov help you to carry Nikolin out of the house?"

"What? No, of course he didn't."

"But the servant did?"

"What?—No, of course not."

"He didn't help you?"

"No."

"He just let go of Nikolin and ran away?"

"Yes. Yes, that was what he did."

"Where did he run to?"

"I don't know, I didn't see."

"Did he run upstairs?"

"Yes, I think he did."

"Well, there wasn't anywhere else he could have run to, was there?"

"No, that was it, he ran upstairs."

"You say that none of you was armed—you or Nikolin or the other man who was with you?"

"That's right."

"You hadn't got rifles?"

"Rifles? Of course not."

"Or revolvers—pistols of any kind?"

"No."

"You say that Lusanov fired into Nikolin's stomach?"

"Yes."

"That is to say, downwards?"

"Well yes, I suppose so."

"I mean—he didn't kneel down and then fire?"

"No, of course not."

"He was standing up when he fired?"

"Yes."

"And he aimed carefully at Nikolin's stomach?"

"Yes."

"Looking along the sights?"

"Yes."

"I gather that you and Nikolin had visited Lusanov before to discuss these political questions?"

"—Yes. Yes, we had."

"Often?"

"Once or twice."

"And on the previous occasions Lusanov had behaved in a friendly fashion?"

"Yes—no, I don't remember."

"But at any rate you weren't alarmed about going again? You weren't afraid he would attack you?"

"I'm not sure."

"At any rate you went unarmed?"

"Yes, of course."

"So you didn't expect him to be violently angry?"

"Oh, no."

"And to begin with, during the interview at which Nikolin was shot, Lusanov was, in fact, quite friendly?"

"He seemed to be."

"He wasn't surprised at your coming?"

"I don't know."

"Well, surely it wouldn't surprise him, since you had been two or three times before?"

"I suppose not."

"You had always been at about the same time?"

"Yes—no, I don't remember."

"But if you hadn't been at the same time before, surely Lusanov would have been surprised at your coming so late?"

"Yes. I mean—I remember now, we always went about the same time."

"In the evening?"

"Yes."

"Late?"

"No, not very late."

"Fairly early in the evening?"

"Yes, fairly early."

"Not later than—say—seven o'clock?"

"Oh no, not later."

"I see. So Lusanov wasn't in any way alarmed or surprised to see you, because you arrived at the usual time, as you had done previously?"

"Yes."

"Some time before seven o'clock?"

"Yes."

"And that was in mid-August?"

Doller got up.

"I protest against these irrelevant questions," he said sharply.

Biolochevski started. "What's that? What's he saying? The dirty man, I mean—that one—what did he say just now?"

Zakharin explained: "Counsel is complaining that M. Scheffler is wasting the Court's time with irrelevant questions. His objection seems to me an entirely proper one."

Bialochevski smiled. "Quite so! Quite so!"

Zakharin and Doller sat down. Anton began again.

"Do you know how Lusanov's servant came to be mortally wounded in the encounter?"

"No."

"You say that you and your friends were unarmed?"

"I've told you that."

"Yes, yes, you did! You say that at the moment when Nikolin was shot, the servant was standing behind him, holding him by the arms?"

"That's right."

"Then the servant may have been hit by one of the bullets that was fired at Nikolin?"

"I suppose so."

"In fact, that is the most likely explanation of the fact that he was hit, since you and your friends had no revolvers?"

"What? Yes, yes of course."

"And you mean to tell me that you didn't realize he'd been hit? The servant, I mean."

"What?"

"You agree that the servant was hit by one of Lusanov's bullets. You told M. Doller that you were standing just beside Nikolin when Lusanov fired his three shots. What I'm asking you is, how was it you didn't see that one of those shots hit the servant and mortally wounded him."

"I don't know—I think I did see it."

"You saw him stagger?"

"Yes."

"Didn't he cry out?"

"No—yes."

"He did?"

"Yes."

"You heard him?"

"Yes."

"What did he shout?"

"I don't know. Something like 'Christ!' "

"How was it that you didn't get wet as you were taking Nikolin home?"

"Wet?"

"Yes, had you a carriage or something?"

"No. It wasn't raining."

"Do you mean to tell me it was quite fine?"

"Yes. Yes, I remember, the weather was very good."

Doller rose again. "I really must protest——"

Anton smiled. "M. Doller, I apologize!" He turned back to the witness. "I must thank you for your patience," he said. "You have now given me a perfectly clear and satisfactory account of the incident as you witnessed it. Will you just listen while I go through what you have told me? To begin with, you and Nikolin were in the habit of going to discuss political and economic subjects with the prisoner Lusanov. You always went at the same time—shortly before seven o'clock in the evening. On one beautifully fine evening in the middle of August you went to pay him one of these visits. Lusanov, for some reason which has yet to be explained, had already gone to bed. But he came down to see you, wearing his nightshirt. The lamp in the hall—again for some reason which has yet

to be explained—was lit, shining full on to Lusanov's face. . . ."

"I must protest," Doller barked, "against M. Scheffler's complete and deliberate misunderstanding of the evidence given by this witness. The witness said quite plainly, in answer to one of my questions——"

Slow-witted as he was, the witness had realized his error.

"That's wrong," he said, "I made a mistake, I tell you I made a mistake. I remember now, we went late that night."

Anton nodded. "I understand—it was just a slip. Actually you went very late that night?"

"Well, fairly late."

"In view of the evidence that is to follow," Anton said, "I should advise you to be truthful. Actually you went at about two o'clock in the morning. That's right, isn't it?"

"What?"

"Did you or did you not go at about two o'clock in the morning?"

"Yes."

"All right! Now we can complete the story, as you have told it. At two o'clock in the morning you visited Lusanov to start a discussion on political and economic subjects, Lusanov came down in his nightshirt—he did not, at first, appear to find your visit peculiar or objectionable. But after talking to you in quite a friendly fashion for three or four minutes (standing, as you have indicated to M. Doller, more than two yards away) he suddenly produced a revolver. His servant went behind Nikolin, caught hold of him by the arms, and (with what seems to me exceptional fidelity to duty) stood there holding him while Lusanov fired three shots, aiming downwards at Nikolin's stomach. You, standing close beside Nikolin, did not consider that any action on your part was necessary. One of the three shots, which you say were fired downwards, hit the servant, either with or without previously passing through the body of Nikolin. Presumably it hit him in the legs. The servant staggered back, uttering a loud cry. He then ran away upstairs, and, as later evidence will show, died from the wound within fifteen minutes. . . . You're quite satisfied with that story?"

For the first time, the witness smiled. He was obviously much relieved at getting the business over. "Yes, that's all right!" he said cheerfully.

I expected Doller to start re-examining at once, but I was wrong. He called his next witness. I surveyed the faces of the nine men sitting by themselves on a long bench in front of the public area; they were the faces of very young children who have just heard a lecture on trigonometry. Anton himself showed no sense of triumph; he had

rather the look of a man who has just performed a profoundly distasteful duty. Bialochevski appeared to be fast asleep. Only Zakharin was watchful and restless, constantly running his fingers round the inside of his starched collar. I found myself growing sleepy.

The new witness appeared to be a student, very young, with huge spectacles which gave him an appearance of rather nauseating precocity. He took Doller's leads as a runner takes the snap of a pistol, each question sent him hurtling along some favourite path of social dialectic. He addressed the sleeping Bialochevski in the manner of an orator, banging his fist into his palm, constantly sweeping the long hair back from his forehead, playing a shower of spittle all over the Clerk's desk. His evidence had nothing to do with the case, except that at intervals, turning to face the "public," he interjected the remark, "And yet this Lusanov, who professes to be an 'enlightened' landowner, a competent agriculturist, this Lusanov maintains that the Workers' food, the life blood of the Russian Proletariat, can be produced by a system which retains and conserves all the evils and injustices, all the barbarities and anomalies, of the old régime. . . ." If these histrionics did not provoke any great excitement, they at least secured attention. Some of the older comrades on the front bench nodded approvingly, there was a shout or two, rather feeble, of "Down with the bourzhui landowners!" The witness wiped the sweat off his forehead and plunged on. When he had finished, Anton asked his four questions.

"You disagree with everything in Lusanov's book on agricultural organization, to which you have referred?"

"I disagree, and every loyal Communist disagrees, with every word of it."

"You are a good French scholar?"

"No, I don't speak it, I don't need to speak it, only the bourzhuri have to talk French to hide what they're saying from the Workers."

"Who translated Lusanov's book for you? Some professor, I suppose?"

"What? Yes, I suppose so. Yes, it was Gortschakov at the university."

"Why was it necessary for you to get translated a 10-kopek pamphlet that was written in Russian and has never been published in any other language?"

The ready Doller had foreseen this danger two or three seconds before.

"It is past six," he said, "I beg to move an adjournment."

Anton nodded. "I agree," he said calmly.

But Zakharin would have none of it. I saw him glance at Bialo-

chevski and I knew why: he could not count on getting his man quite so screwed on two days in succession.

"There is a very heavy list for tomorrow," he said abruptly. "I consider it essential for this case to be concluded today. *I say, Comrade President, I consider it essential for this case to be concluded today.*"

Bialochevski slowly raised his head. "Scheffler is all right," he said indistinctly, "only he's all wrong about Grotius. I used to argue with him till I was tired, I doubt if he ever really read his Grotius."

"I quite agree!" Zakharin said promptly. "The President," he announced, "has decided that the hearing is to be continued."

Doller nodded, rather crossly. "Very well, I shall call——"

But Anton was on his feet and called across him, "Did I understand you to say, M. Zakharin, that the accused is in the building?"

I expected some interference, but Bialochevski only smiled indulgently, like the mother of many rowdy sons. Zakharin, finding that no rope was flung to save him, took off his spectacles, peered at Anton as if a stranger had appeared, and said shortly, "Yes, yes, of course, yes, he is in the building."

Doller sprang to the rescue. "I suggest that Comrade Scheffler is wasting a great deal——"

The intervention was ill-advised. As Zakharin turned gratefully to express his agreement, Anton walked up to the Clerk's desk. He said loudly: "You have no objections, Mr. President, to the accused being admitted to the Court at this point?"

Bialochevski beamed back at him.

"No, no, of course not, my dear Anton Antonovitch, by all means, by all means? . . . Grotius—all wrong, all wrong. . . ."

I thought that Zakharin would contest the point again. But Doller caught his eye, I saw a look of understanding pass between them, Zakharin turned to the usher.

"Tell Comrade Pishtchin that Lusanov is to be brought in now. *Lusanov. Yes, the prisoner!*—I take it, Comrade President, that we may proceed with the evidence in the meantime?"

"Proceed?" For the first time Bialochevski looked rather taken aback. But his good-humour instantly returned. "Proceed? Why yes, yes, I don't suppose it matters. Of course, yes, M. Zakharin, proceed by all means!"

The usher had stumbled off, murmuring to himself "Lusanov, Lusanov, Pishtchin to send in Lusanov . . ." and my eyes fastened to the door again: Konstantin, ill: what could he do, what could he say to help himself in this salmagundi of verbiage and falsehood?

But Anton, sitting with one ankle on his knee, showed no uneasiness. He had the air of one who has finished his day's work, and only his occasional glance towards Doller showed that he was still listening to the proceedings. Hardly anyone else seemed to be listening at all, the tide of coughs and chatter and scraping feet from the public area was steadily rising. The new witness, who seemed to be called Ghagov, was the best that Doller had had. He spoke rapidly and distinctly, in a voice of some education, his story was perfectly clear: he had accompanied the dead man and the previous witness on the fatal visit to the accused; they had arrived at about ten o'clock in the evening, as on previous visits; "the class-enemy Lusanov" had apologized for being in his night-clothes, saying that he had retired to bed with a slight headache after dinner but was now better . . . the servant, who was a man of immense physique, had held Nikolin by one arm only, standing at the side—not directly behind him; he, Ghagov, had tried to drag the servant off, while his companion (the first witness) had run to get help. . . . Cross-examined at some length, he could not be shaken on any point in his story, which, for all its general likelihood, held together well enough; and on the question of what had happened to Dromelin he refused to be drawn. Anton let him go. The usher had not yet returned. Another witness was called, an old man who asserted that he had heard the accused saying, as he stood in the Gostinni Dvor at Chaveschok, "I am going to shoot any Communist that comes near my house." Two men (who proved, on cross-examination, never to have been anywhere near Chaveschok in their lives) testified that Lusanov was a notorious and unscrupulous opponent of all working-class movements.

"And this," said Doller, addressing the Court at large, "is the man whom my friend Scheffler, over there, proposes to try and defend." He glanced at Zakharin, and added, "Yes, our comrade M. Scheffler, who has gained a considerable reputation for his adherence to the Workers' Cause, has voluntarily undertaken to act for this Lusanov. And he will try to prove to you that Lusanov is a benevolent personage who has the Workers' interests as much at heart as he has himself. From that we may be able to draw very interesting conclusions."

I saw what that meant and so did Anton. Simultaneously, I think, we both looked at Zakharin; who, with a great show of nonchalance, was rolling a tram-ticket into a spill.

"That concludes the evidence for the prosecution," Doller said.

A man who appeared to be a press-reporter got up and left the room. The noise of general restlessness increased again; nearly

everyone seemed to think that the whole affair was over. Just then the door I had been watching was opened from the other side, and I caught my breath.

No, not Konstantin: the usher was alone. He padded up to the desk and passed a note across to Zakharin. I tried to read Zakharin's face as he opened it, but his expression showed me nothing. I saw Doller turn inquiringly towards him, but Zakharin refused to notice anyone. He held the paper like a dealer valuing a postage-stamp, folded it over, folded it again, with an air of craftsmanship; and suddenly, as if he were tired of the thing, flicked it across to Druvalov. Anton was on his feet, leaning against the wall. Zakharin looked towards him and nodded.

"Mr. President," Anton said. "I shall not proceed further until the accused is in Court."

And sat down.

Bialochevski leant over towards Zakharin. "What was that? What did he say?"

Zakharin, without turning his head, shot a look of inquiry towards Druvalov. Druvalov had read the note. With a gesture so slight that few in the Court could have noticed it, he seemed to signal "All right!" Zakharin rose slowly.

"Comrade President, there are one or two observations that I have to make." He paused, he was picking his way, casting a sentence some distance ahead. "I have already made it clear that this case has been brought—has been pushed forward on the list—upon the urgent request of M. Scheffler. I myself have maintained—and I have repeatedly made this clear to M. Scheffler—I myself would have preferred, in the interests of the accused, to postpone the hearing for some time. However little sympathy we may have with a man of the Lusanov type, whose inveterate hostility to the freedom and welfare of the Workers found its final expression in the cold-blooded murder of a proletarian sociologist, I considered it important, for the sake of that ideal of universal justice which may be considered the foundation of Communist philosophy, that this man should be given a proper hearing in a properly constituted Court; moreover, I thought it essential that the hearing should take place when—and not until—the man Lusanov was in a physical condition to make what poor appeal he could for the Court's leniency. I was advised by the Medical Officer responsible for Lusanov that any attempt to hurry on the case might prove injurious to the prisoner's health. I represented this fact to M. Scheffler. M. Scheffler, however, would listen to no such reason. He wanted to defend this Lusanov, and to do it quickly. You

may, perhaps, wonder why a comrade of M. Scheffler's reputation should be so curiously eager to defend a man whom Comrade Doller has shown to be bitterly opposed to that new Order which, after centuries of misery and cruel oppression, the Russian people have established by the free gift of their own blood and tears. You may, I say, wonder why our comrade has been at so much pains to aid this sly reactionary, this common, callous murderer. Possibly—I merely throw this out as an interesting suggestion—possibly you may find the reason in a certain community of experience between the man Lusanov and his eager rescuer: both have slept for a long time on soft beds; both have had great possessions—or have married great possessions. I will not press the point. We are dealing with the case of Lusanov, and the evidence which Comrade Doller has unravelled before you is sufficient, I think, to show how impossible is the task that M. Scheffler has set himself. It is perhaps fortunate—for him—that he will not be required to attempt it. Comrade President: news has just been brought to me that, in spite of the devoted efforts of the prison doctor, the prisoner Lusanov died this morning."

My picture of the few moments following is fragmentary, like a photograph when a faulty camera has allowed the light to leak over part of the film. There is a fat man in mechanic's overalls pushing past me, whistling softly, as he makes for the door: there is Doller's head bent down as he lights a cigarette: Druvalov faintly smiling as if he has just remembered some private joke: Zakharin, white and intensely nervous, gathering up his papers. To those flashes there is no sound attached: I might have had a glass screen round me. Nor did I feel any grief just then.

I saw now that Anton was standing beside Bialochevski, who had bored a hole in his rubber and was squinting through it at the top windows. I saw Anton take that rubber and throw it away and seize Bialochevski's wrist and shake him. My ears were clearing, and the confused noises of the room came in as when a door is opened, the scrape of forms, the contented hubbub of those released from a long and tedious ordeal. Suddenly Bialochevski stood up, impressively tall, and thumped his desk. In a startlingly high, falsetto voice, he called out:

"Quiet! Quiet!"

The movement in the room stopped.

"My friend here," Bialochevski said, "my friend here—Count Anton Scheffler—my friend Count Scheffler—what was it you said? Oh yes—our friend wishes to make a brief, to hold a brief—no, to make a brief statement." He beamed. "Count Scheffler!"

Zakharin swung round. "Comrade President——"

A voice barked: "Shut your mouth, you swine!" I was surprised to find it was my own.

Standing with his legs crossed and his hands in his pockets, Anton let his quiet voice slip into the gap of silence.

"M. Zakharin has made a personal attack on me," he said tonelessly, addressing the whole Court. "He asks why I undertook to defend Lusanov. I shall give you the reason—there is only one: because Lusanov was an innocent man. I know that. You, Zakharin, know it. Doller, over there, knows it. And the rest of you—you who've been paid by Zakharin to listen to the crudest team of perjurers ever assembled in a so-called court of justice——"

Zakharin, childishly enraged, banged his fist furiously on the panel of Bialochevski's desk. "Mr. President, I protest against this bourzhui patterer—this traitor—being allowed——"

"Nonsense, my dear Zakharin, nonsense!" Bialochevski, smiling paternally, leant down and patted his shoulder. "Patience; little friend!" he said genially, "you were holding forth for hours and hours, you must let poor Anton Antonovitch have his turn. Very old friend—good friend—quite wrong about Grotius——"

Druvalov was up, his ponderous stomach swaying a little on his tiny legs. He coughed. "Mr. President," he said, with the incisive quietness of those accustomed to authority, "I suggest that—as the hour is late—there is no point in continuing discussion of a case which chance has finally disposed of."

Zakharin made a signal to the usher, the doors were opened, the hum of conversation was beginning again.

"Do you mean," Anton asked sharply, "that I am to have no opportunity for replying to——"

Druvalov smiled bleakly. "M. Scheffler, I have often listened with great pleasure to your forensic performances——"

"Yes, and you'll listen to me once again!" God! I had no idea that he could use his voice with that power and fierceness. It commanded silence as none of Zakharin's bawlings had done, none of Bialochevski's thumpings. "Yes, you Boris Druvalov, you who staged his pantomime! *Hold your tongue! Listen!* We have been engaged—some of you may be surprised to hear it—in a trial for murder. The man accused has not been in this Court. But the murderers are. You, Druvalov, and you Zakharin—and you—and you—stand bloody-handed. Lusanov was murdered to forward a piece of naked political chicanery. And you are guilty."

The quiet that his voice had forced upon the room stayed, like the smoke that hangs above a gun's breech, for a second or two after

his last words. In that space he bent down, tied up one of his bootlaces, and marched out of the room. Unthinking, I went after him, followed him down the stairs, out into the street. I came up beside him but he didn't seem to see me; and it frightened me, the dreadful pallor of his face, the livid fury of his eyes. Impelled to say something, I began: "You couldn't have done anything else—it was no good. . . ." He turned sharply and strode across the street, never looking to see if the road was clear. He said: "I can't talk now, not now! I'll come and talk later. . . . I didn't know. . . . I didn't know that Satan was as strong as that, I didn't think he had that cleverness—to squeeze that excremental filth from Russia's goodness, from all her bravery. . . ."

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I left him near the Krasniya Gate. He was going to see his Confessor, Father Ruel. I suggested that he had better see Yelisaveta first, she might have heard something and would be anxious. No, he said, he could not see Yelisaveta yet, "she wouldn't understand, it's not the kind of thing she understands." No, he must see Father Ruel first, he must have some spiritual refreshment. Later on he would go to Yelisaveta, and afterwards he would come to see me. He promised that. I offered to go with him to where Father Ruel lived, but he wouldn't let me. "I shall be all right," he said. I had to leave him leaning against a kiosk, looking as if he didn't know where he was.

Before I got home they were selling papers with accounts of the trial: Doller's opening speech in full, mixed up with odd remarks from Zakharin; editorial "guiders" interspersed: "In the presence of Druvalov, the efficiency of the Criminal Department is brilliantly demonstrated: A callous ruffian, notorious class enemy, thinks he can shoot down the Workers with impunity: He finds he is wrong, Comrade Doller's masterly assembly of witnesses proves every point against this impudent czarist peasant-sweater: The czarist lawyer Scheffler shows a curious lack of discrimination." There was nothing about Konstantin's death, no word of Anton's was quoted. "Once again," the report concluded, "it has been shown that Justice is supreme in the Communist Order: Justice, but not sentimental weakness. The Comrades of Lenin are just; but they are inflexible." I hurried on, dreading that this stuff might have reached Natalia, that I should find her already fearful and bewildered. And the slender memory of that urgent walk stays brilliant: the low sun over the roof of the Petrovski barracks, the air dry and dusty, crowds thick on the baked cobbles, people turning hostile faces at the tall, anxious

bourzhui who went at a limping run with the sweat streaming down his face.

The sun had left our narrow street, which was gratefully deserted; once more I felt a breath of happiness, as the ugly limb-of-a-house which I called my own came into sight, as I looked up to the little window and knew that Vava would be waiting for me there, Vava half-sitting up with his small, pale face alight with laughter. Then I remembered that this would be different from my usual home-coming.

I could not face her yet, I had made no plan; and the day's long fatigue had so dulled my brain that it served me badly. I went into the kitchen, where I started automatically to tidy up some things left about on the table. But presently my leg gave out, and I flopped down on the spit-boy's stool, and sat with my face in my hands, trying and trying to find the words that would strike her heart least roughly.

Her kiss on my forehead roused me, I hadn't heard her come in. That was an experience of momentary delight, for since her illness she generally seemed too shy to kiss me, only giving her lips to my own kisses. She was standing over me (so small—I always forgot how small she was) searching my face with an eager tenderness. She said: "He is tired, poor Alexei! Has he been in that stuffy room again, all day?" I shook my head; it was all I could do just then; but she did not seem to understand that, she said again, "Poor Alexei, so hot, so tired!" For a few moments I held her cool hands, and then she set about to find some food for me. There was a piece of a barley-cake that she had made, and some sauerkraut in a saucer, and a leaf or two of lettuce which she had kept for me. We went upstairs together, slowly, in silence, and she made me sit in the basket-chair while she attended to the samovar. Vava was shouting, "Batiushka! Come and see me!" but I couldn't answer yet, and Natalia called to him, "Batiushka's tired . . . presently!"

She sat and watched me as I ate, we were both silent and troubled. She said at last: "I've had some news—no, not good news. I wanted to wait till you'd rested. But I can't, I can't keep it."

I said: "You've heard, then——"

She was puzzled. "It's about Dr. Mishlayevski——"

"Mishlayevski?"

I thought she was going to cry, but her face stiffened and she swallowed painfully. She went to close Vava's door, and when she came back she had pincered her emotion. She said, as if calmly, "I had a note from him. . . . He doesn't know when he can come again. They don't like him leaving the hospital. He'll try, he says, but he doesn't know if he can come."

I remember answering her in the voice of a clerk answering the telephone. "Oh yes, I see. . . . He may not be able to come. Yes, I see. . . ."

It was better, I think, that I answered like that. For she, catching my dullness, said quietly, "We shall have to find someone else. Yes, there must be someone else who can do that sort of thing. . . . Perhaps Yelisaveta Akinievna will know—I don't like—yes, you must ask Yelisaveta, you must go round and see her. . . . Alexei, are you listening? . . . What is it, Alexei?"

I had forgotten everything, all the careful steps I had been planning. I said: "Natalia, I've got to tell you—about the trial. It came on today."

"Came on?" She looked both ways as if she didn't know where to sit down, like a shy man in a drawing-room. I offered her my own chair, but she said: "No, no, I want to be by the window, I want to do my sewing. Where is it—I can't see it—have you put it somewhere? Those trousers for Vava—they're nearly finished." But she found the sewing herself, took it over to the window, and sat there with her shoulder turned to me. "Came on? You mean—it's begun? . . . And ended?"

"Yes." I went over to stand beside her. "Beloved, I——"

"No," she said sharply, "you mustn't stand there, you're keeping the light off my work. . . . No, don't talk a minute, I've got into a muddle, wait till I've got it straight." Then she turned right round, so that I couldn't see her face, and for half a minute, perhaps, she worked rapidly. When she spoke again her voice was quick and halting, like that of old people going up long flights of stairs. "Yes, I thought that, I thought it would go like that, I've seen it coming. . . . You mean, those devils—you mean they're going to kill him?"

And still she didn't look round, sparing me. I knelt and put my arms over her shoulders, my hands on her limp breasts. I said: "It's worse than that—no, not as bad as that. They—he's dead, beloved, he died—he died quite naturally—this morning."

The little shiver, the little jump of the heart, I remember exactly how that felt. And the queer, tight voice, like a man's falsetto, that she used when she spoke again.

"Then he won't suffer—he won't suffer any more. . . . You must go to Vava, he was calling for you, you must go and see Vava now."

§

She was slow in her movements, absent; affectionate and gentle.

She whispered over and over again, "They can't hurt him any more, he can't suffer any more now." I put her to bed early, and sat by her till she seemed to be asleep.

I stayed up late, waiting for Anton, but he didn't come. And when I went to Mme Lenschitzi's house next morning I found that he had not been there.

I did not see Yelisaveta herself. Emelian brought down a note from her: "I know what has happened. God wouldn't let me have him. I can't see you now, I can't see anyone. He is mad, Alexei, he is a raving madman, and I am mad to love him."

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Mishlayevski did come again: twice more, or perhaps it was three times. On each occasion it was about three o'clock in the morning. He didn't come along the Muedenka, but by the little street on the other side; climbed over the fence there, picked his way across the waste ground and entered the house (as Anton had done formerly) through the kitchen window. I never knew when he was coming, and he managed his huge body so adroitly that even if I was awake I didn't hear him till he opened the door of my room. He would not let me light the gas till he had assured himself that the window was securely screened, with a blanket fixed up to cover any crack in the shutters; and he spoke to Vava and to me in whispers. Mostly, he was silent, and Vava, too accustomed to the treatment now to have any fear of it, lay hardly awake. It was curious to watch that scene, the yellow light on the little strip of flesh, the hairy giant kneeling astride it, his eyes closed as if he were fast asleep, his huge hands working patiently: with no sound but the whisper of his heavy nasal breathing. Once I said to him, "I'm afraid you're taking a great risk in coming." He only answered after a long interval, indirectly: "Seven —eight more times, by then we shall have made some progress."

§

I have become confused: I let my diary drop at that time, and I cannot be sure of placing events in their proper order. The memory of all those days is monochrome: crowds marching, crowds loitering hungrily in the dirty streets, always waiting for the next ration of intoxicating news; the soiled buff walls of the office I sat in for hours on end, trying to turn my mind away from my stomach; the daily flour queue in the Gierskaya.

It must have been about ten days after Konstantin's "trial" that Strubensohn came to visit me. I remember that it was a day of cold rain, almost like winter, and that we had for luncheon a tin of brisling which Yelisaveta had sent me. I think, too, that it was just after I had heard of Vassili's death. That news came to me first in *Pravda,* with an article on his career too brazenly mendacious to be worth my anger; and then in a queer, hysterical letter from Katie. ". . . It wasn't your fault, Alexei, I could do nothing to help him, nothing—he brought it on himself, he was blind and reckless, I warned him of what would happen, he wouldn't listen. What can I do when you of the old order are such fools, such reckless, obstinate fools! Darling Alexei, I'm so tired, so tired with all this work. But it's glorious, magnificent, I am *happy, happy, happy,* working myself right out at last, all my mind and strength, helping to build a world where no child can be born as a creature doomed to slavery. . . . Do not believe that I have become Vladimir's mistress. It isn't true—if it were true I might have saved Vassili. No, that was impossible, it was his own mad folly. Alexei darling I would like to see you, it's so long since I had a brother's warm hug. But you mustn't come, no you mustn't, *mustn't.* You must get out of Russia, you aren't safe here, you who cannot understand our Gospel. And remember I am not, I am *not not not* guilty about poor Vassili. . . ."

Yes, it was a cold, wet day, for I remember how bedraggled Strubensohn looked, with no coat or umbrella. When I heard the knock on the door I went to answer it myself and there he was, with the rain pouring off the brim of his hat, but his face polite and grave and smiling. "I think you must have forgotten me, dear Alexei Alex'itch! So long—so long since I had this pleasure!" He was thinner, much thinner in the face, and his clothes were worn and frayed. But they were still the right clothes, the high collar and Dournovo stock, the neat, dark suit, the glacé boots; and there was all the old ceremony in the way he placed his hat on the rickety stool in the passage, followed me up the narrow, creaking stairs, bowed himself about my tiny day-and-sleeping room.

"I ought not to have come without notice,'" he said humbly, "but I have found things very difficult, I didn't know until the last moment whether I could get away from Petrograd—and then the trains are completely unreliable now."

"But what has brought you to Moscow again?"

He seemed surprised by that question. "Why—I had the news nearly a week ago, the news about Anton Antonovitch. I have friends here, they write to me, I always hear anything of importance."

"Yes, but you're not——"

"Indeed, my dear Alexei Alex'itch, I shall do everything I can. The Countess Scheffler paid me a very generous fee when she first instructed me to take over her husband's case. That fee has never been earned—it was nothing to do with me that Anton Antonovitch escaped from the Vadorka prison. I can't repay the money, I have no money now—except what goes to pay for my wife's doctors——"

"But surely Kahn Abramovitch, you did everything you could! I know that, if no one else does! And this couldn't possibly be called the same case——"

He shrugged his shoulders, and released his rather feminine little laugh. "I have so often been called pedantic," he said, "I find it a pleasure to accuse someone else of pedantry! What are the facts? I was paid—a lot of money—to get Anton Antonovitch out of prison. I've never done that. It's a great wound to my professional pride. He is in prison again now. Well——"

"Even that isn't certain——"

He waved his hand rather impatiently. "It may not be called a prison, it may be called a hydropathic establishment for gentlemen in poor political health: whatever it is, it's a place you cannot get out of. . . . Now listen—if you will be so good! We shall have to go slowly, to be very patient. At the present moment it is much better that Anton Antonovitch should be forgotten; it is dangerous for him to be remembered. A street-corner speech in his favour—a paragraph or two in the newspapers—and the powers-that-be will take fright; it needs very little in these days to alarm them. And when they are frightened they—remove the cause of their perturbation. That's what is happening all the time. (I myself—well, that is another matter.) No, for the time being we can only be patient and watchful. But I have made inquiries here and there, I have found out approximately how the forces are placed. It appears that Druvalov is the man chiefly responsible. Anton Antonovitch had other enemies, of course; there is the man Zakharin, for instance—but he counts for very little, he is entirely a tool of Druvalov's. So long as Druvalov holds his present position nothing whatever can be done—if my understanding is correct. But how long will he hold it? I know Druvalov: he is a clever man but not brilliant, he is what I call a short-term thinker. In time he may make a mistake, as so many have done already. We must know about that, we must know about it early; and we must know who is the new David who is hunting about for five smooth stones to put in his sling. That will be the time. We shall whisper to this David that Druvalov acted against the general feeling of the Party when he gave instructions for the arrest of the popular Com-

rade Scheffler; we shall accuse Druvalov of having secretly destroyed him. . . . You see what is the line of procedure? Of course I have no longer any position, I can only work through my friends. And politically I have none of those. But there are my Co-Religionists—sometimes I can appeal to our racial sentiment. . . ."

He was with me for about an hour, talking almost without a break: of the new methods he had to practice, of the personalities that had to be reckoned with, the influence he hoped to enlist at Petrograd. He spoke with his eyes closed, his hands moving like those of a telephone operator; as if he had before his mind's eye a huge diagram, with names linked by arrows and the value of each one marked in standard cyphers. His voice was quiet and confident, untouched by the tiredness that his face showed. I remember saying:

"It's all no good, Kahn Abramovitch! You can't help him to escape from the current of his own resolution."

And his answering, with a little, puzzled smile, "His resolution? Why, that's all right so long as he puts nothing on paper. And Anton Antonovitch is far too experienced for that!"

He would not stay to share our brisling. It was very kind of Mme Otraveskov to invite him to luncheon, he said, but he hoped to start back to Petrograd by an evening train, and he had a great deal of business to clear up first; he always preferred to eat nothing till the day's work was over. "It has been a great happiness to me," he said as we went downstairs, "to meet you again, and to renew my acquaintance with Mme Otraveskov, and to find myself surrounded by the charm of a happy family. There is so little of that in these days. . . . I may rely on you, then, to let me have word instantly if you see or hear anything to suggest that Druvalov's position is weakening?—the smallest indication is worth investigating. And for my part, if there is any legal matter in which you think my experience—such as it is—might be of service to you, you will not fail to advise me? It would give me so much pleasure to show a little of my gratitude in that way, my gratitude for all you have done to help me, all your patience. . . ."

I only realized what my promise implied when he had gone. To keep a watch for those straws, that meant staying in Moscow. Well, I should be here for another five—six weeks; by then Mishlayevski would have done all he could, or so I reckoned. From that time I must give the responsibility to Yelisaveta, who could watch the news almost as well as I. Tatiana was talking about leaving Moscow now, but I knew that Yelisaveta would not go.

§

It was perhaps three weeks after his visit (the day, I think, when Rakshevin's headquarters were blown up by counter-revolutionaries) that my arm was roughly seized as I was crossing the Arbatskaya and I found Yevski beside me. He said peremptorily, "You come with me, barin!" and I followed him to the little street that runs behind the Conservatoire of Music. There, after taking one of my cigarettes, and spitting copiously into the roadway, he said from the corner of his mouth:

"Well, your friend Scheffler, he's on the gridiron this time, all right. There's a dropped calf for you—did he think he'd have the better of a bastard like Druvalov, Druvalov that lived for five years on Comrade Lenin's tits! Mother of God, how I laughed when I heard——"

I had no control of my temper in these days, when I was physically so feeble; I said angrily: "You don't amuse me, Yevski, you or your murderous friends. I've got no money for you, you can go and tell your bawdy jokes to someone else."

And I should have gone away, but he caught my arm again.

"Listen, barin, don't you be an aborted suckling like the rest of them! What are you thinking of, you cuckoo-head, staying about this town with nothing but the bloody Communists all round you! Do you think no one saw you that day in the Weigh-House? Do you think no one knows that you and that Scheffler were like two yolks in a duck's egg? Don't you realize——?"

I said shortly: "I have reasons for staying in Moscow——"

"And better ones for getting out!" he retorted. "Listen, barin, I'm not spitting on your quarters, I know things, I hear what's going on. I tell you you can't stay here, you'd be safer sitting on a bomb-dump. Look now! I know people that can get people out—papers, everything. No, it's not roubles I'm after—you've got none, I know that, I'll find those myself. You can pay it back sometime—when you come back, when the Revolution's over. You just tell me what night you can start, Yevski will tell you where to go, he'll get everything worked out all right. Only it's no good your sitting on one haunch after the other waiting to see who'll get the crow-droppings next. . . . Well, you needn't believe what poor old Yevski says!"

And suddenly losing patience, he turned his back on me and started to swagger off towards the Nikitski. I called him back. It was always difficult to assess his truthfulness when, as now, he was a little drunk, but I couldn't altogether disregard him. I gave him the rest of my cigarettes as peace-offering.

"Tell me," I said, "do you mean it's dangerous for me specially, or just for people like me?"

"Everybody like you!" he said sulkily. "We've no room for your sort in this place. This place belongs to the Workers, we can't do with stinking parasites."

I tried to make him tell me whether he had heard my name mentioned, but he became evasive. "I tell you, I hear things at the soldiers' club I go to"—that was all I could get out of him. He was nervous now, he kept glancing all round him; afraid, I suppose, that someone he knew would see him talking to me; and presently, without any ceremony, he slipped away.

Walking on slowly to the bureau of the Latvian Commission, I tried to persuade myself that the fellow was not to be taken seriously. It was only by chance that he had come across me in the street, and he was one who could never resist an opportunity for showing-off. Obviously the gossip he had heard was the usual chorus of class-hostility, it had served to indulge his taste for being mysterious and that was all. . . . And the question of leaving Moscow at once did not arise. We had come here, Natalia and I, to give Vava his only chance of finding full manhood, of being as complete a man as these factory-hands who were trudging past me. We could not go away with that purpose unfulfilled.

But Mishlayevski had not paid us a visit for nearly a fortnight now; that was much longer than his usual interval. And when I telephoned to the hospital, using the name of a party-secretary, I was told that Dr. Mishlayevski would be "away for some time to come."

§

At any rate we were all ready to get away.

Hardly any of the furniture we were using belonged to us. Such clothes as we had left could be pushed into one trunk within half an hour, another trunk was already packed with my sketches, journals, private papers. We should have to take Natalia's jewellery (at present hidden behind the bricks of the bread-oven), since that would be our means of subsistence on our arrival in Europe. Our other valuables I meant to leave, selling them if I could; in a journey through the hands of countless officials they would only be a nuisance. Following Vassili's advice, I had manufactured various sets of papers; I could travel as a bolshevik propagandist, an agent of the Pittsburgh and Ohio Banking Corporation in Petrograd, a Trotskyist officer—as occasion seemed to serve best. I had gradually collected a little fund of the bearer-notes issued by the Moscow Soviet, and this, I hoped, would serve for my expenses to the border, with things like my gold watch to help it out. The route at present favoured by refugees was

through Duvrotebsk, and I had forged railway passes to that station with the dates left blank. The Latvians with whom I worked were friendly, in the impulsive, rather childlike fashion of those people; and the senior secretary, whom I took into my confidence, promised to help in every way he could when the time came.

I sent a letter to Strubensohn (foolishly, no doubt, through the public post) telling him that I might at any time be leaving Russia suddenly, but that Yelisaveta Akinievna would continue to keep a close watch on the Moscow press for anything that might enable him to intervene on Anton's behalf. To Yelisaveta I wrote: "You know that Anton has been much more than a friend to me, that he saved my leg if not my life, that his friendship preserved my sanity when everything else would have destroyed it. It would be impossible to love another man as I love him, it would be impossible to describe the pain I have had in losing him again—even if it seems small by the side of your pain. But I believe you will understand that my duty is to get Natalia out of Russia as soon as I can. I cannot find out what has happened to Mishlayevski. I may let another week go, perhaps a fortnight, to see if he turns up again. I dare not risk more than that on the mere chance. I shall try to see you before I go—if you are well enough to see me—and I mean to bring Vava with me. I want to try once again to thank you for what Vava owes to you." I should have liked to add some word of courage; but it wouldn't come from me.

§

I had a brief reply: "Of course you must go! Unless Mishlayevski turns up again. I am getting some friends to make inquiries. I am still in bed, fairly ill, but I hope to be fit to see you next week. Don't, don't be a fool, Alexei, don't have any mad ideas that you can help him or us by staying. Blessings. Y." A few days afterwards I went to call on her, but she was still not well enough to see me.

§

My anxious perplexity increased. My Latvian friend Galaminis told me that he was sending one of his secretaries back to Riga on the following Thursday; he hoped to reserve a special compartment for this man, and if he were successful he would be pleased that I and my family should travel in it. The offer was a very good one: I should hardly get such a brilliant chance again. But what of Vava's chances—was I to throw the last of them away? Galaminis

said it would be sufficient for me to let him know my intentions on Wednesday night.

On the Tuesday I was still undecided. I rang up the hospital again, a rather petulant woman told me that she had no information as to when Dr. Mishlayevski would return. At the Harvey Institute, where I had one or two friends, there were rumours that the Em-Tcheka was holding him for a month or so in what was called "admonitory detention": but those rumours were quite unreliable. The anxiety was so great that I lay awake until two o'clock in the morning, getting no nearer a decision, simply balancing with a weaker and weaker brain the weight of two uncertainties. It was a night of heavy heat, promising thunder. Tired of trying to roll the burden off my forehead I got up at last and sat by the open window. The city was quiet. The footsteps of someone walking along the Dresnikaya seemed as sharp as the little creaking sounds from Vava's room. I heard distinctly the clock of Arkhangelski striking the quarter.

I had been there for some twenty minutes, and was about to get into bed again, when I heard the noise of wheels coming into the street from the end I couldn't see: wheels, but not the sound of a horse's hoofs. That pricked my curiosity. I went up to the attic loft, which had a bull's-eye window on to the Muedenka, and from there I saw that it was a little handcart of the kind the Ural Cossacks used to have for bringing fodder up to their lines. It looked as if a man and woman were pushing it together, while someone else—I couldn't see if it was a man or woman—was leaning heavily on one side. They stopped just beneath me.

There was a sharp knock on the door and I went down to open it. Tatiana Vascovna stood there, coatless, in the semi-evening dress that she always wore now. As the candle I carried shone on her face I saw that there were tears in her eyes, but she was smiling brilliantly. "Alexei dear" she said, "I know this is a ridiculous time to call, you'll think it absurd of me, but I'll explain to you—can we come in?" Then I caught sight of Emelian standing behind her, with Yelisaveta leaning on his arm. I said, "Why of course! come in, of course!"

I led them to the kitchen, there was no other room downstairs. There Yelisaveta sat down on the only chair with a back to it; and Emelian, after regarding her anxiously for a moment or two, went back to the street. Standing by the pot-rack, Tatiana lit one of her cigarettes and glanced about her with the swift appreciation of an amateur inspecting a house for sale. "What a dear little kitchen it is!" she said. "You never told me you had such a charming little house—I think these old kitchens are among the few really delightful things

you find in Moscow. Do you mind if I take off my shoes?—they're hurting me dreadfully—we've walked all the way—I really had no idea one could outrage one's feet so much by just walking from one part of Moscow to another."

"You'd better tell him why we've come!" Yelisaveta said. She had her face in her hands, her voice was like that of one just roused from the heavy sleep of early morning. "It's no good wasting time."

Tatiana sat down on the edge of the table.

"—No, it's all right, I'm quite comfortable here! . . . Yes, I ought to explain, but it's so difficult. It's Va'isha Lvovna, she's really the dearest of women, but quite unreasonable—it's not that she ever means to be unfriendly, but God gave her the brains of a sheep, poor dear, and there's nothing to be done about it. I've told her again and again that as soon as Akiniev finds his feet we'll be able to settle with her for all her hospitality, but she just cannot understand that. And now she's insulted because of some quite harmless joke I made about the Lenschitzis all being champion wine-bibbers—well, they are!—everyone knows that Stepan's father drank himself to death, and his grandfather was so debauched that his serfs used to nail up the doors of their houses whenever——"

"You may as well tell him," Yelisaveta said in the same lifeless voice, "—Va'isha Lvovna has thrown us out."

I could not let her go on sitting like that, looking as if she would fall unconscious on to the floor. I said: "We must go upstairs, Yelisaveta can lie down there——"

She did not resist when I took her arm. Tatiana came on the other side, together we got her on to her feet and dragged her sideways, the three of us all squeezed together, up the narrow stairs. "It's the thundery weather," Tatiana said, "it always makes her feel out-of-sorts. . . . The difficulty, you see, is that there seem to be no hotels you can go to nowadays. What hotels there are seem to be all full of these tedious Kommissars and people, or else the commercial sort of foreigner. . . . Stop, just one minute! I've got my dress caught on a nail or something—what funny little stairs these are! . . . If it weren't for that we shouldn't have thought of coming and bothering you, late at night like this. . . ."

The noise had roused Natalia, and as we came into my room she appeared at the other door. I said quietly, "Adorée, the Princess and Yelisaveta Akinievna have come to spend the night with us, they couldn't find a hotel. . . . Yelisaveta isn't well."

"It's only just till we can find some other place to live in," Tatiana added. "Dear Natalia Konstantinovna, I feel so ashamed, to be interfering with your night's sleep——"

Natalia gazed at her, bewildered. "It's all right!" she said sleepily. "Yes, yes, you can have this room, Alexei can move his things into Vava's little room and sleep there. . . . I'm afraid there's only one bed here for you both. . . . You've got your things—some night-things——"

Tatiana nodded. "I don't know how to thank you for your kindness. . . . Such an amusing little house, I find it delightful!" She went over to the open window and called down, "Emelian! Mme Otraveskov very kindly says that you may bring up our things."

Yelisaveta lay like a dead body on my bed, while we set about to move my things into Vava's room. Tatiana ran about after us, gay and wistful, offering to help, continually chattering. "All my life I have loved small houses. We used to have a cottage in the Crimea—perhaps we still have it, I must ask Akiniev when I see him again. . . . Tomorrow you will let me see Vava, won't you? I shan't go in tonight, I might disturb him. . . ." Emelian staggered up with a continental trunk on his back and went off for another. Now that I had given up my search for sleep I felt desperately sleepy. And in recollection they stretch to an hour or more, those minutes when I passed confusedly between the rooms, carrying a shirt, a chair, constantly colliding with Natalia, trying all the time to show a measure of politeness to Tatiana's causerie. Box after box came up—I think there were eight in all—and as each arrived Tatiana opened it, pulled out an armful of bedclothes, brushes, photographs, looking round in a puzzled, genial way for somewhere to put them. Yelisaveta had raised her head a little and half-opened her eyes. "Mother, why don't you leave that case alone! There's nothing in that one except winter underclothes. . . . I've told you, your nightgown's in the green case, that one over there. . . ." Dead with sleep, Natalia came in again from her own room, dragging a little table, and sent me down to the kitchen for a water-can and basin. Vava had woken and was frightened, she went in to soothe him, stopping at the door to mention something she had just thought of. "Carpet—I'm sorry—there's no carpet—I'm so sorry. Tomorrow I'll bring in the little carpet from Vava's room. . . ." Downstairs I found Emelian waiting to see if there was anything he could do. I told him he could sleep in the kitchen, but he would not do that: no no, he would find somewhere to sleep—there was an orchard, he thought, close to the house, he could sleep quite comfortably there if I would allow him. "And in the morning I shall get the doctor for the Countess—you will let me bring him here? You see what it is?—with so much trouble in the heart, and so little food."

Returning upstairs, I found that Natalia had gone back to bed.

But Tatiana's spirits were gradually rising. Leaning against the wall, she smiled at me gratefully. "Really one ought to be sorry for poor Va'isha," she said again, "the poor muddle-headed creature that she is! But really I can't help laughing when I think of it! Half her hair had come down, and she looked exactly like one of those little fat French innkeepers, stamping up and down on her podgy little feet, whining and spluttering, *'I will not stand it, Tasha Vascovna, I won't stand it any longer, you nest in my house, you eat up my food, you insult my guests, you tell abominable lies about my late husband'*—and really it was all such nonsense! I said, 'My dear Va'isha, do let's wait till the morning, and then we shall feel a little bit calmer and we can talk it over. After all, what have I eaten, except two or three little tiny pieces of veal that tasted like the leg of a cheetah?'—but it was no use, she kept crying and bubbling and boiling and stamping about, making herself look more and more undistinguished, and shouting *'Out you go, out you go, at once, at once, I won't stand it any longer!'* and poor little Nikolas Branislavovitch was walking up and down all red in the face saying 'You leave it to me, Va'isha, you go to bed and leave it all to me, I'll look after everything'—when it was so perfectly obvious that he'd never in all his life have the resolution to wring the neck of a canary! . . ."

It was some time after three o'clock, and the daylight was showing faintly, when she covered a little yawn, smiled, and thanked me again for my kindness. Yelisaveta had long been asleep. I said goodnight and went to Vava's room, where Natalia had arranged some cushions on the floor for me. It was not much of a bed, but I didn't need that. Vava, still half awake, was talking drowsily, asking who the lady was that laughed so much. But I fell asleep before I had answered him.

§

I seemed to wake again at once, though the light was so much stronger that I must have slept for an hour. A man in uniform stood beside my bed. I remember his face very well; curiously, because I never saw another face with so little expression: as white as that of a man under shell-fire for the first time, the upper lip black with the earliest stage of a moustache, the rest well-shaved; the face, I had said, of one belonging to the intelligentsia and ruined by reckless living. He was saying something, but I couldn't collect the wit to understand him. I told him he must come some other time and I would talk to him.

But he wouldn't go away. He stood there patiently repeating what seemed to be one sentence. I gathered at last that it was something

to do with papers, some papers he wanted to see. I got up and drank some water and put on a coat.

"My papers are all in the attic," I told him.

He nodded. "If you please!" and I took him up there. I saw, passing the top of the stairs, that two men were waiting below.

Accustomed to this procedure, I sat down on the floor of the loft. I said, "Everything is over there." He went straight to the trunk I had packed with papers and sketches, cut the rope in three places, opened it, tipped the whole of its contents on to the floor. He shouted: "Luka! Come up here!"

Besides the trunk, there were several wooden boxes standing about, filled with stuff I had collected over several years: books, warmaps, art magazines; most of it worthless: piles of newspapers all over the place. The two men set to work, rummaging, shaking, scrutinizing. I watched them silently, only complaining when one of them put his heel through a small canvas I valued. The papers that mattered—forged identifications and tickets—were all hidden downstairs. They found a photograph of Anton and asked me who it was. I told them. The senior put it in his pocket.

In one corner I had placed inconspicuously a small strong-box of the kind that naval officers used to keep in their cabins, fastened with heavy clasps and padlocked. It contained nothing but letters sent to me by my mother many years before, and I kept it specially for such a search as this. (I had learnt that ancient trick in the days of my Dombrowa-Radzikov activities.) In time the man Luka caught sight of it and demanded the key. I said that the box contained private letters of an intimate nature, I was ready to swear that there was nothing inside which had any political significance. The other man said over his shoulder, "You will open it, Luka."

After further protest I agreed to get the key. I went back to Vava's room, stayed there for ten minutes, and returned to say that I couldn't find it.

"I can assure you," I repeated, "that there's nothing in that box except private letters."

The man who had woken me nodded. "Very well, I shall take the box away. When you have found the key you will please bring it to my headquarters—the Tchernigov hotel in the Rozhdestvenski Boulevard."

I promised to do that; and presently, as I had hoped, they went off, taking the box with them.

I nailed a piece of board across the street door, which they had forced open, and went to lie down again. In the morning I should send the key round by a messenger.

But I was not to be allowed to rest. In twenty minutes there was a furious thumping on the street door, I went down and found that the man Luka had come back. He said he was sorry to trouble me, but Comrade Charkov requested me to attend at his office. I said, "It's the key he wants, of course—I found it just after you had gone. Wait a minute and I'll get it."

"I'm sorry," he said, "but I must ask you to come yourself."

He would listen to no protest. In the car which had brought him there were two men beside the driver, and I saw that one had a rifle between his knees. "All right!" I said. "You want me to get the key?"

"Yes, if you please."

He followed me upstairs. I picked out the key from the box where I always kept it, he took it from me and put it in his pocket.

"You will let me put on some clothes?"

"No, I'm sorry, I have to hurry."

I thought of contesting this but it seemed better not. I said:

"I must just see my wife and tell her where I'm going."

"I'm sorry," he repeated stubbornly, "I have to hurry."

Vava had woken, and wanted to know what I was doing. I said that I was going out for a few minutes, kissed him, and told him to go to sleep again. Then I shouted: "Natalia!"

"I can't wait!" Luka said rather angrily.

To my great relief she came out of her room just as we were starting down the stairs. I turned back and said:

"Adorée, I'm going along to the Tchernigov Hotel for a few minutes. There's been a muddle over some papers."

She said: "The Tchernigov Hotel? Oh. Oh yes."

She was very sleepy.

"Hurry, please!" Luka said.

I had a stupid impulse to go back and kiss her, but I didn't do that. I went down and got into the car. Just as the driver was changing into second gear I heard a shout of "Alexei! Alexei!" I looked through the back window and saw Natalia, with nothing over her nightgown, standing in the street. I said: "I want to stop, please, I've left something. It's important, I must go back!" But they wouldn't stop. No, they wouldn't stop.

The weight of the threatened storm had lifted, it was a fine, clear morning.

At the Tchernigov Hotel I was led up to an empty bedroom. When I had been there five minutes Charkov appeared. He said: "I shan't keep you long, I have just to run through your papers, it's a matter of routine." Ten minutes passed and another man came with a

chair and a French illustrated magazine, rather dilapidated. "Comrade Charkov has sent this, he thought you would like something to amuse you while you were waiting."

I can still visualize most of the pictures in that magazine, and I even remember some of the text: "Annette will not be satisfied with last summer's coats when the captain with his splendid moustaches takes her for a little walk, a little chat, a little you-show-me-and-I'll-show-you in the Tuileries Gardens. No no! The new coat is smaller, it's daintier, more daring, more swaggering, more appetizing, more everything-that-pleases to a little lady who does not quite understand the really important things just yet. . . . Now the shoes, made all of feathers if you please, the heel not quite so high this year, but Annette's heel for five-o-clock must still be as high as a grasshopper can jump. . . ."

Annette will not be satisfied.

Annette will not be satisfied.

I found that the door had been quietly locked. The window was some thirty feet above the courtyard, with nothing in between. Ten o'clock. Eleven o'clock.

Annette will not be satisfied.

Annette will not be satisfied.

Not be satisfied.

50

My worst period in the winter following was those nine weeks, starting I think in January, when I shared with five others a room in the Logis des Hyacinthes, a little house which Prince Overtskov had built for his Italian mistress. The room allotted to us was this woman's boudoir, and the decoration probably expressed her taste; I have seen nowhere else such a wealth of the worst rococo crammed into a space of seven by four metres. In furniture, the signorina's fancy had run to Louis Quinze, and most of it was still there: the only chairs had tapestried seats too small to give a child much comfort, with backs fantastically carved; we took our meals at a long toilet-table in which some German carver had done his best to follow Gouthière. The best sleeping-place, for which we drew lots each night, was a couch shaped like the sole of a dancer's foot; you arranged your clothes along the back to protect your flesh against the chisel-work and then secured yourself with a belt of shirt and vest linked by the arms. The carpet had been taken up. At one end of the floor there was a considerable pile of empty bottles, fish tins, the twisted remnants of a baby's cot.

The mirrors were a worry: a vast one at each end tremendously benymphed and gilded, in which you saw yourself as part of the draggled company, your own long hair and dirty, hungry face repeated and repeated. In the stable where they had kept me before I had at least been spared mirrors.

But the main source of our discontent was that in those nine weeks we had no change of personnel. Hitherto, there had always been some new recruit arriving; and whatever he was like he brought fresh news from the larger world; bad news, as a rule, but news of some sort. Here, no one came from outside, except the frightened, kindly, baby-witted giant of a Caucasian who arrived twice a day to bring our food and twice at other times to escort us to the toilet. All the news this man had was his own: the vegetables in his little garden at Povosk were doing well, but his wife seemed to have an ulcer in the belly; his little boy Gaeva had scalded himself and screamed all night. When we asked about political affairs he said that Comrade Lenin had made a speech: it was wonderful, magnificent: but he couldn't remember what the speech was about.

The window facing the street had been boarded up from the outside. The other one, very small, looked on to the back of a technical institute. We had the electric light on all day long.

A boy called Vrugov was a disturbing element. I think he was about seventeen, he belonged to Ichnoyovka, where he had a wife and two children, and spoke a kind of bastard Little-Russian which was very difficult to understand. That separation of speech made him lonelier than the rest of us. At first he talked a great deal about his grievances: it seemed that he had hidden four sacks of something ("I tell you it was only four sacks!") in the roof of his goat-house, and later on his friend Danilov had asked him to put his mark on some piece of paper—he didn't know what it was, something to do with the rights of the muzhiki—and then they had come and locked him up in the old block-house and afterwards they had taken him to Moscow; now they said he was a dangerous social-revolutionary. We listened sympathetically; but by the time we had pieced it all together we were bored with the story and we couldn't answer the remarks he flung at us. After a week or two he gave up trying to make us understand him, he became apathetic and morose. One of our number, an aged priest of the Stranniki persuasion, tried hard to show him some kindness; but the response was less and less encouraging, even he gave it up in the end. After that the boy sat on the floor in one corner all day long, watching the door, shrinking back whenever it was opened. Sometimes he buried his head and made a noise like laughter—it went on for hours together and was trying

to our nerves. Occasionally, seeing himself in one of the mirrors, he got excited, flung his arms about, furiously harangued his own reflection. At night he never seemed to go to sleep; he wandered about the room, and I became accustomed to finding his face pressed against mine, his big, powerful hands holding my neck. "Wake up! Wake up!" he would say hoarsely. "I heard something, I tell you I heard something!" He did that once or twice to Bunyin, a young Communist who had got into trouble for some political indiscretion, and got a mighty cuff on the ear for his rashness. But it didn't cure him.

Obviously he had been frightened, and I learnt the reason from Tatislov, the little, mild-eyed schoolmaster whom I found the most sympathetic in that group. Before coming here Vrugov had been in the St. Esthenia monastery, which was used as a prison chiefly for convicted counter-revolutionaries; Tatislov had been there for a short time himself, and had found it very unnerving; the habit in that place was to call people out in the middle of the night, and the shooting was done in the ambulatory beside the chapel, where everything was audible in the dormitories; sometimes you heard a man squealing for twenty minutes or even longer, and that gave you bad nights.

"It's much nicer here," he added, pushing his thumbs into the arm-holes of his ragged waistcoat and flapping his fingers cheerfully. "This place, what's wrong with it?—you're fed twice a day, no draughts, you've got all this to look at—I like beauty, beauty is the chief necessity of this life, Horace said so and he was perfectly right."

And, indeed, the decorations did give him pleasure. He was always fingering the bosom of an execrable Venus in bas-relief which adorned one of the commodes. "Very good work!" he would say. "Beautifully conceived! It takes a real artist to put out this sort of stuff." Then he would gaze disapprovingly at the penknife scratches with which a former occupant had completed the nude figure, crudely but with physiological fidelity. "No good!" he would say severely, "the fellow wasn't an artist—no perspective.

§

But even Tatislov was not always in good humour. When we had played Baron-and-Slave with bits of matches for a couple of hours he would suddenly accuse me of cheating, throw all the pieces in my face, jump up, and begin to pace the room, saying under his breath that there was no honour left in Russia. When his fury died

down a little he began to repeat the conjugation of Latin verbs, till I in turn lost temper and roared at him to be quiet. That started Vrugov on a fit of weeping, and Bunyin, who had been quite happy for days together tearing little pieces out of the mural tapestry, would swing about and cannonade us with round after round of curses, asking if this place wasn't hell enough for a decent working man without the eternal bloody brawling of a gang of lazy criminals. On the other days it was the priest who set us off. He had a habit, which he could not master, of whispering his devotions audibly; one became aware first of the annoyance, gradually of its cause; and though I find it hard to recapture the feeling now, I know that in those days the sibilant mutter seemed a noise more devilish than the vilest aberrations of a bad soprano. As a rule it was Tatislov who broke out first. He would suddenly slap his hands on his ears, and kick the nearest bit of furniture, and scream in a strangled voice, "Must he—must—must that fooning God-boy mumble his prayers all bloody morning!" At that suggestion Bunyin would reach for a chair, and in a business-like fashion, like a sailor obeying an order, hurl it at the Father's head. Vrugov might react in one of two ways: he might fall down and bury his head, whimpering with fright, or with naïve and stolid cruelty he might run at the Father and deliberately kick his legs. Once, when he did that, I caught him by the collar and tried to calm him; whereupon he turned, broke free and sprang for my throat; he might have killed me if starvation hadn't weakened him. Only one man took no part in these breezes. This was a very old gentleman who always sat on the same chair, with a certain dignity, as if he were waiting for a royal audience in an ante-room at Tsarskoe Selo. He did not talk very much, but would always reply politely to any question. He alone had a watch in going order; and as time is most important to those who have too much of it, he had to tell us the hour a hundred times a day. We had lived together two or three weeks before I discovered his name, and then I realized why his eyes had seemed familiar whenever they turned to me directly: it was Krishnienko; we had faced each other at the Skoropadski Palace ten years before.

§

In a way, we all resented the old man's presence. Even Father Galadixio's belonged to us; made little jokes sometimes: Krishnienko didn't. Bunyin sometimes showed his resentment with outbursts of heavy sarcasm. "Don't make such a row, Otraveskov, you'll disturb our Gentleman! . . . Perhaps our Gentleman would let us move his

chair a little way. . . . Do you think he ought to be dusted? . . ." But although I shared this fitful exasperation I think of Krishnienko now with a kind of gratitude, for he alone suffered no deterioration in that confinement, and it gave me some courage to see one spirit strong enough to withstand it. His appearance declined, of course; he did his best to keep his white hair and beard in order, but his face grew thin and a rash spread over his forehead, his collar got limp as paper and indescribably dirty. Yet his mind didn't seem to alter: he never jumped when I spoke to him, as the others did, he was always courteous, he showed no apprehension about the future. He must have been the loneliest of us all; and yet you could not ascribe the sense of loneliness to one so remote, so self-contained.

Like the rest of us, he drew for sleeping on the couch, and smiled when he was lucky. On other nights I suppose he slept on the floor as we did, but I don't remember that. As I recall those days, it seemed that when I woke in the mornings, finding that Bunyin had already switched on the light, Krishnienko was always sitting upright in his usual place; sometimes attending to his nails with a little pocket-knife, sometimes idle but with an air of attention, as if he were listening to interesting discussion. If I caught his eye he bowed, and smiled, and wished me good-morning. At that hour I did not resent his presence at all. The familiarity of everything which filled my narrow boundaries, the bottles, the hideous mirrors, the dishevelled upholstery, was as much an affliction as the sores which overran my thighs and armpits. But that statuesque figure, haloed like Lear, those quiet eyes, made me believe that a human mind could resist decay at least as long as wood and plaster. He had not changed: why must I?

§

I go back reluctantly to those nine weeks, the electric light, the mirrors, the smell of human staleness; frightened, as when, after years, you pay a visit to a house where you were a child and unhappy. But I must go back sometimes, as if to search for something that I vaguely remember to have left there. I must try to recall Tatislov's face, though I realize I have lost it. I search for Vrugov, knowing that I could have done much more to help him; feeling that if I could see his eyes distinctly they might release me.

Yes, I can get back to that room. Sometimes I keep on working till the light goes, and then drop down on my canvas-chair, and keep quite still, listening to the throb of traffic along the avenue Grammont, feeling the leg-pain gradually abating. Then, unexpectedly, the room in the Logis des Hyacinthes takes shape, flamboy-

ant moulding, broken guéridons, Vrugov hunched on the floor, Tatislov and Bunyin playing their eternal game with corks and buttons: a picture separate from time, like the glimpse of a family at supper that you get as the suburban train rattles you through Les Batignolles. It is hazy, like a lantern slide just before the focus is adjusted; but the mirror at the rubbish end is always there, and in the mirror a tall fellow with desolate eyes standing by himself, a man with a week's growth of beard, wearing a soldier's coat that they found for him at the Tchernigov Hotel.

I get no nearer than that: thank God, I get no nearer. I have tried this evening, it is late now, I am all alone and very drowsy. I thought that if I stayed up late, writing by a table lamp with the rest of the studio in darkness, with the noises of the street all hushed, I should get one last, one vivid glimpse inside the prisoner Otraveskov. No, it won't come back, God spares me that. I see the hollow face and the wretched eyes; I know, as it were by each square inch, the way that mind was shaped and stretched. But I cannot feel it.

At Krozkohl one endured time passing in a kind of hopeless apathy. In the Logis des Hyacinthes my mental state was far removed from that, it was never passive, I had always to be struggling. I do not mean that I was frightened. Perhaps the spectacle of Vrugov's terror worked against my own, perhaps I had used up my capacity for being afraid. No, I had only one thing here to fight against: the drag of mental vision backward, to where Natalia stood in the street, calling after me; back further, to the cot by the window . . . Vava. I do not suffer from giddiness at heights, but those who do have told me what it's like: when crossing a high bridge you dare not look over the side for an instant, knowing that the impulse to throw yourself down would be irresistible; and yet at every step, conscious of that danger, you are violently tempted to take one look, to test yourself. I cannot describe what I went through in better terms than those. I seemed to carry between eyes and lungs a piece of earthenware, heavy yet infinitely fragile; and against the continuous horror of letting it break was matched the dreadful burden of guarding it. At Krozkohl there had been some work to help me through the days, the laundry, the long tents where my countrymen lay so patiently; there one's private trouble took a proper place, a dot of red on the map of general suffering; there, if there was nothing to read, I had Anton's mind to draw on. I discovered no such mind in the signorina's boudoir, no books, no papers. Some of the bottles still had labels on them and I read the labels through, I found a sheet of directions for oiling a sewing-machine and I read those hundred words again and again. I took measurements of the

room and set myself to calculate its volume, I tried to remember passages of Latin verse I had read as a child. That kind of thing will last you for an hour or two if you work to keep it; after that the brain revolts, as the stomach does against a diet of slops, you find the emptiness still there and the dangerous thoughts crowding against it. I would talk then, talk to the heedless Vrugov, to anyone who didn't bark at me to stop; about the room, the filthy food, about our warder and his family, anything that would rise from the mind's surface; knowing all the time that they hated my chatter. There was nothing we could talk about, nothing that mattered. We had no present and no future, what mattered most to each of us would not go into words, certainly no words you could say with three or four men listening.

Sometimes I tried to make Bunyin tell me about his life; I knew he had worked on the Zvanka-Murmansk railway, and had been sent to Usolie for organizing strikes; but when I questioned him about his experience he was first evasive and then obstinately silent. (Later on I realized why.) Galadixios could talk only of his major trouble—he was suffering from cystitis, and on some days would be bellowing for the warder every twenty minutes. In the first few weeks Tatislov would sometimes enlarge on his private sorrows: ten years before he had hoped to be appointed master of a little school in Vechenis—some eighty miles from Kostroma—a nice school belonging to the Zamoyski family, with a splendid stove in it; but the priest at Vechenis had used his influence to get the post for his son-in-law, and Tatislov had had to stay in the same school, where the stove smoked horribly and gave no heat at all. "Yes, you know nothing of that!" he would say. "You don't know what it is to have a great ambition and to see it destroyed at a single stroke." And suddenly he would lose his temper, and shout, "You're not listening, you don't listen to anything I say! Because you're a rich man you think I can't say anything worth listening to, the nobility have always despised education, you despise me because I'm a savant, an artist, a philosopher." Then he would appeal to Bunyin, "Look at that man, look at him standing there, what does he know about us, about our lives, our poverty!" And for two or three days he would be sulky, and refuse to speak to me at all.

Once we argued about the date. Bunyin said positively that it was the eighteenth of March; he knew because he had kept a mental reckoning. I thought it was a few days later than that. Galadixios and Tatislov agreed that it was quite early in March—about the fourth, they said—and Tatislov chose to be indignant with my difference of opinion. "It's no good arguing with M. Otraveskov, he

belongs to the nobility, he's got to be right!" Krishnienko settled the matter by announcing in his gentle, authoritative voice that it was the twenty-sixth of February. I remember feeling hurt and angry that Tatislov had been so much nearer than I.

§

The morning meal. Idleness. The evening meal. Idleness. Sleep, shallow and stormy with dreams. The torn tapestry, the mirrors. *Annette will not be satisfied.* Nothing altered, nothing could ever alter.

But at last Galadixios brought us change. He was groaning a good deal one evening, and next morning, waking early, I heard him muttering, *"In manus tuas. . . ."* He didn't move that day, and Bunyin, after kneeling down to look shrewdly at his face, shrugged his shoulders. I believe that our warder got into some trouble over that—it appeared that Galadixios had been kept to incriminate one of his superiors. "But how was I to know?" he said. "The old fool never told me he was dying!"

And a week afterwards Vrugov left us. The death of Galadixios had upset him, for a few days he would eat no food, he lay flat on his stomach perpetually whimpering like a dog that's been beaten. Then one morning, when the warder came in, Vrugov jumped up and rushed at him, screaming, got hold of his hair and banged his head against the door. The violence of that attack would have killed a man of less gigantic physique. Two men came up from the floor below, one of them pacified Vrugov with the butt of his rifle. An hour later they carried him off, unconscious, but I think still alive. I don't know where they took him to.

That incident had a curious effect on me. I watched the whole thing quietly, as a blasé Spaniard watches a bull-fight. But almost as soon as it was over I was taken by a furious desire for violence, such a desire as a leopard must feel when an antelope breaks cover, a straining of body rather than mind. It was not, as I reflect on it now, born of any pity for Vrugov, or anger against our gaolers; it was rather a blind impulse to follow Vrugov's lead as one sheep follows another over the cliff. I remember the moment as clearly as any in that period, the men about me small and maddeningly still, senseless as waxworks, my own white face in the mirror the face of another man. I took a chair and flung it with all my strength against the pile of bottles, and found an instant's ecstasy in the sound of shattering glass. Tatislov caught my arm but I flung him off. My teeth set fast, I ran at the door and hammered on it with my fists, rejoicing in the pain it gave me. Tiring of that I turned about for something

else to do, saw Krishnienko's solemn face, foresaw the delight of smashing it, walked slowly towards him.

It was Bunyin who saved me. He came behind and got my arms in the grip they use for holding the insane, held me like that for a full three minutes while I struggled and yelled. Then, when my voice gave out, he started talking in my ear, "Fool, Otraveskov, bloody old fool, crazy fool!" and twisted my arm till the pain was agony, and repeated, in a quiet voice, almost soothingly, "Bloody, bloody, bloody fool! Losing your temper, silly child, silly baby, silly old Otraveskov!" When he let go I fell on the floor, and then he stood over me, took my hand gently, petted me, laughed and talked as a man does to his dog. "What's the matter with you, Otraveskov? Do you think they'll hurt you, do you think they'll hurt a quiet, sensible chap of your sort. Why, I wouldn't let them—look at me, look how strong I am, I fought six Tartars in the Usolie and got the better of them. . . ."

After that I grew calmer, with a feeling of rather pleasant fatigue. And having drawn the couch I slept well that night, not dreaming at all. But from that day they watched me, Bunyin and Tatislov, I knew that their eyes were constantly upon me; and if I lost my temper over some small thing and began to shout or cry, Bunyin would move closer to me, alert and resolute.

In a way I was happier then, for my little house in the Muedenka had become more remote, loosened in memory. I was often in tears, but the tears flowed easily as children's do.

Then at last I too was moved.

§

They took me—by night as usual—to a prison known as Volter's Sheds, and there I spent three or four weeks. It was a good prison. The buildings were damp and very cold, but we slept twenty to a shed, we were free to walk about in the central yard during most of the daylight, and were made to work a good deal, getting our own water, chopping wood, sweeping up the snow. Most of the prisoners were artisans, already sentenced for offences like "class-disloyalty"; nearly all were certain that a month or two would see a counter-revolution, and that in some miraculous way they would instantly be restored to freedom. I got on well with these companions, and with the rough life I found my health improving. Before I got bored with it I was shifted to a place on the other side of the city, and then again to the camp at Kittanoi which had formerly been used for Germans and was now inhabited by two or three hundred politi-

cal offenders, the majority belonging to the intelligentsia. Before each of these moves I was medically examined and also questioned (always the same questions, about my ancestry and previous history) by a political officer. It appeared that someone was still taking an interest in me; and although a rational man might have found that sinister, it came to me, after those weeks in the Logis des Hyacinthes, as a comforting phenomenon.

At Kittanoi I stayed for a fortnight, perhaps a little longer. And while I was there something happened which at the time seemed fortuitous, an encounter which might have raised my spirits high but in fact only depressed them: I found Anton again.

It was on what proved to be my last morning. I was on my way back from the wash-house when Drevinyevitch, a Jewish scientist with whom I was friendly, told me that there were new arrivals in the "villa"—that was an old cottage which served as the camp's headquarters and as dormitory for a few of the prisoners. As new arrivals were always a welcome event, we went straight off to see them. In the front room, used chiefly as a store for tools and equipment, a prisoner was chatting and laughing with one of the guards. I glanced round to see if there was anyone else, and caught sight of a man sitting all by himself near the window. His back was towards me, but I recognized him at once.

When I put my hand on his shoulder he looked up, saw me, recognized me. But he didn't smile. I shall never forget the shock of that. He just said, like a child who has learnt a new word, "Alexei. It's Alexei." Then he turned his eyes away and went on looking through the window.

I said, "You want some air, Anton, you can't sit here all day, lazybones!" and by degrees I coaxed him outside, the guard watching us with sidelong interest. I had my arm round his back and my hand in his armpit; like that we walked up and down in the snow, as far as the end of the huts and back again. He said, presently:

"I'm in an awful muddle, they've got me all muddled up." And then, after another turn, "They want me to say—they want me to say Lusanov made a confession. I can't remember that—my memory's got so bad—I can't remember seeing him at all. They want me to say I took the case just to discredit Zakharin. . . . And Karamachik comes into it, it's very confusing. . . . I can't walk any more, my feet are bad—this cold weather, it's bad for me."

I took him into my own hut, which fortunately was empty, and he sat down on my bedding. I went out and begged a cigarette for him from one of the smugglers, he put it in his mouth but didn't seem able to smoke it.

"I saw Druvalov," he said, still speaking quite impersonally, rather as a schoolboy who is trying to learn something by heart. "Yes, Druvalov came to see me, he was very nice. He said there had been a misunderstanding, it was Zakharin's fault, Zakharin wanted to get rid of me. Yes, I think that's what he said. Druvalov wants me to be a Judge, he says he can work it. He says he's angry because the judges are all so bad; they're a stupid lot, he says; he wants an experienced man who won't tolerate coercion. . . . I don't know, I don't know."

I couldn't think how to answer him, I was too tired, my brain wouldn't bite on new ideas. I said: "You could try it, I suppose. There'd be no harm in trying it."

"No harm?" he said, his voice a little surprised. Then, "He was very nice, Druvalov, he gave me cigarettes, he said he wanted to help me."

Suddenly his smile broke out. "It was very amusing, it made me laugh! Druvalov, you know, he's got a little twitch, a funny little twitch under the right eye. And when he's lying the twitch works twice as hard, you'd think he had a little frog under his skin, jumping with anger." But the smile died out. "Where's Mittendorf gone?" he asked sleepily. "He used to be in this hut, I liked him, he had an ulcer, poor chap. . . . I get frightened. They ask me questions and I'm afraid of saying the wrong thing. I have to keep saving myself up, like a jockey saving his horse for the last hurdle. . . ."

I was called away then, to join a fatigue party mending the boundary wires. In the evening I saw him again in his own quarters, and this time he smiled faintly when I came to him; but he was still lethargic, distant, as a man raised from the dead would be. We sat side by side with our backs against the wall, quite private, for the other men in the room were all intent on discussing some piece of news that had filtered in, something about the movements of Trotski's army. Most of the time his eyes were closed; whenever he opened them he seemed surprised to find me there. More than once he said, "I feel very—very watery. I'd feel better if I could hear Mass. They won't let me do that, they won't let me have a Priest, I haven't seen a Priest for months." And a few moments afterwards, "When I'm better I shall write to Yelisaveta. Perhaps you can arrange to get it to her. It troubles me. I feel—it troubles me all the time, I've never been fair to her. It was so difficult, so difficult, I don't understand what women are like, I don't know—I don't know how you can show your love. It troubles me, that, I feel I've—not done enough, not enough. If I could only see a Priest he'd help me."

I could see that he thought I had only come to visit him; he didn't

realize that I was a prisoner like himself. Once or twice, smiling rather tearfully and touching my hand, he said: "You were good to come, Alexei, you were good to come!" And when we had been sitting for half an hour or so, he said suddenly: "You must go now, they won't like you to stay late, you must go now!" Seeing how tired he was, and supposing that I should see him again in the morning, I did as he bade me, promising to come back. But when I was twenty yards away from the villa I heard him calling, and to my astonishment I saw him walking towards me, with no one to support him. He came up to me and caught hold of the ragged coat I was wearing. Rather breathlessly, as if I were hurrying to get away from him, he said:

"Listen, Alexei, listen! I'm not quite myself, I'm not—I forget things. Listen! The little boy, Vava, that boy of yours, you ought to get him away. Out of Russia, I mean. About us—it doesn't matter. It matters about him, he ought to have a chance, he oughtn't to be caught in all this. It's the future, you see, I'm thinking about the future. There's got to be someone, I want to think of someone growing up away from all this. You'll do that, won't you? For me, I mean. I've loved you so much, so long now, I want you to do that for me. Alexei, promise me that!"

I don't remember what I answered. I remember how light his body felt as I carried him back to his quarters, and what his face looked like as I put him down on the dirty sacking, half of it shadowed by my body, the yellow kerosene light across the forehead: the forehead and cheeks so scant of flesh that it might have been the head of a skeleton wrapped with a sheet of grease-proof paper, the hairs stuck on with spirit-gum; but the muscles taut, the lips still working. An undersized creature, in a peasant's blouse and a very dirty pair of linen trousers. One of the men who shared that dormitory, a big, kindly muzhik, promised to look after him.

I couldn't go back next morning; for, a little after midnight, I was woken and made to put on my outer clothes, and once again a car was waiting to take me to another prison.

51

The car had brown paper pasted over all the back windows. I was very sleepy. I did not realize till the following morning that I was back in Moscow.

This, officially known as the Moscow Peoples' Judiciary Detention Establishment, and colloquially as Druvalov's Pit, was the most respectable of all the prisons I inhabited that winter. It was a new

building, one of Schützegilde's first architectural achievements, and was destined to be the last residence of such famous détenus as Zinedov and Nuvogrudzki. I believe it has five storeys now, but I do not suppose it had so many when I was there. Two storeys are below the ground level, and my cell was in one of these, I think the lower one. An effect of building below the ground is to make the inside noises curious; at least, it was so in Druvalov's Pit. The corridors had stone floors, and all the footsteps were echoed with a peculiar hollow ring; I have only heard similar echoes in the alleyways of a battleship.

I suppose those corridors are not really so very long, but when I walked down one of them, half asleep, on the night of my arrival, its length seemed almost infinite. Electric bulbs were hung at intervals of about forty paces. The doors of the cell were about ten feet apart. Mine, I remember, was numbered D. 38.

The cell was nine feet by twelve-and-a-half, according to my arm-span measurements: high, clean, warm, excellently aired. The walls were distempered in a high white—the white known to pigment-mixers as Yellow E. 3. There was, of course, no window, but the room was brilliantly lighted by a powerful electric bulb close to the ceiling. The narrow bracket-bed had a good mattress. There was a toilet-table and even a small mirror. On the first night I slept extremely well.

Next morning I was put through the usual questioning and afterwards medically examined by a Polish doctor who knew his job: he ordered me a bath, treated my sores, prescribed a tonic for me. A little later an elderly man who appeared to be the superintendent of the prison paid me a visit and gave several orders to the guard who attended him: a second blanket was to be provided, also a better towel, one of the bed-brackets was to be mended, M. Otraveskov was to have a clean shirt and a decent pair of trousers. Another official came in the afternoon and complained sharply to an orderly because my slops had not been taken away. All day long one heard brisk footsteps ringing in the corridor. The place sparkled with efficiency.

The observation window, about four inches square, was high up in the corridor wall. The corridor guard looked through it by standing on a special ledge outside. The intention was that the prisoners should not see out, but having more than the average height I managed to do so by rolling my mattress into a cylinder and standing on one end of it. That gave me a little interest and some excitement—it was important not to be caught at the game.

But for most of the time I lay and dozed, grateful at least for the

comfort. I was weaker than I had hitherto realized, my legs had become very unreliable, I went through bouts of nausea much like seasickness. Looking back, I am thankful to have been like that. In solitary confinement the mind does best when the body occupies it—or so it was with me. I existed in a state of acute self-pity, pity not for my real troubles but for my feverish head and stomach. I walked about a little, and then lay down, always enjoying a fresh sense of release. Sometimes I heard a sound like a dog's howling from one of the neighbouring cells. I suppose the man who made it was suffering from the sense of being buried alive—many who occupied those lower storeys have been unhinged in that way. Had I been in good health that horror might have attacked me too; as it was, I felt it only intermittently—being buried alive did not seem to matter so much to a man continually suffering from his stomach.

At the end of four or five days I was better, and correspondingly my depression increased; the warfare against memories of the past which I had waged in the Logis des Hyacinthes began again. The chief trouble was that I had poor nights. With no exercise, there was nothing to make my body tired. The light was never put out—when I complained about it I was courteously told that regulations forbade the turning-out of lights I found myself getting to sleep only in the early hours of morning (as the clock had it—there was no difference) and then I was constantly roused by the guard coming in. He would shuffle about the room, whistling, with no apparent purpose, go away, and come back in a few minutes to do the same thing again. Sometimes he shook my arm, and asked, "Are you all right? Get down a minute and I'll turn the mattress over for you." Or he would bring a paper and say, "I've got to fill this up," and proceed to take down my name, my birthplace, particulars of my history, all the information which I had given to one official or another dozens of times before. Sometimes he seemed to be trying to trap me. "Kursk?" he would say, "you tell me you were born in the Government of Kursk? Surely that's a mistake, I understood you came from Tula. . . ." I thought it was a foolish game: I could have answered any of his questions correctly without waking up, if he hadn't been resting his heavy arm on my chest. When he left me he tucked me up in quite maternal fashion, folding the blankets well away from my face. Afterwards I pulled the top blanket over my eyes, but he always came back and pulled it down again, saying, "You mustn't have that over your face, it's not good for you." In those days I doubt if I ever got an hour's continuous sleep.

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But just when the loneliness of that existence was becoming unendurable another man was put into my cell. His name was Kozlovitch, he told me that he had served in the war with the rank of Colonel. He was not a man I should have cared for in other circumstances: young, weedy, watery-eyed, he had the voice and all the mannerisms of a Polish money-lender's tout: but he was vivacious and immensely friendly, and after those days of solitude I was as glad to see him as if he had been one of my oldest friends.

He arrived blazing with anger. He had been engaged with international monetary operations on behalf of the Council of Kommissars, the work involved had been enormous, he had not had a kopek out of it for himself; and now he had been arrested without any explanation whatever. With a fine fluency he proceeded to damn the Communist Party from Lenin downwards, devoting a special commination to Zakharin, whom he suspected as the instigator of his arrest; he had a gift for blasphemous and obscene invective which Yevski himself might have heard with respect. I thought him foolhardy to talk like that, when a guard might be standing just under the spy-hole, but I didn't stop him. It refreshed me to hear the subject treated with such virtuosity. Presently he calmed down and began to ask me about myself: what was I charged with, had I been here long, had I managed to see a lawyer? When I told him that I knew of no charge, and that the practice of seeing lawyers did not obtain in these establishments, he said that he was not going to submit to such treatment himself. He would have a lawyer, he would have a lawyer within twenty-four hours; and the lawyer would attend to my case as well as his own. There was so much force in the man that I almost believed him.

There was only the one sleeping-berth, and all Kozlovitch was given to sleep on was a palliasse, meagrely stuffed. I proposed that we should take it in turns to have the berth, but he wouldn't hear of that: he could see that I was ill, he said, the palliasse was good enough for him.

For a man of his type he was surprisingly considerate and courteous; he behaved as if I, being the earlier occupant of the cell, had the right to dispose things as I liked, he being a visitor on sufferance; and after his first outburst he seemed far readier to hear of my misfortunes than to recount his own. Yes, whatever he may have lacked in personal attractiveness, he was a patient listener. After those days of solitude I found it indescribably soothing to let some of my troubles—those that were less intimate—go out in speech; and no doubt I talked with monstrous egoism; but he never seemed to be bored, his face was always attentive, his eyes sympathetic, he

asked me questions. Of himself he said very little, speaking of his own affairs with a rather Oriental disdain. "Oh yes, I've knocked about a great deal, I never stay long in the same place. . . ."

I think it was on the day after his arrival that I mentioned Anton's name, and Kozlovitch said he knew him personally.

"And you have known him—how long?" he asked.

Since the spring of 1917, I told him.

"Ah, it was before that that I knew him intimately—some time before the war. We had business together, I helped him to collect evidence for a man he was defending—that was in connection with the Tchervovka riots. Yes, I got to know him very well at that time, and to admire him intensely. I don't think I ever met a man who commanded my respect so much. . . . I was sorry, I was very sorry indeed when he got mixed up with the Kurotskists."

"The Kurotskists?"

"Yes—didn't you know about that? Kurotski was an agent the old landowners were employing to upset the Bolshevik plans for rural expropriation—he may have been sound in his intentions, Kurotski, I can't say—but his methods were quite ruthless; he was plotting to starve the towns into accepting a rural dictatorship, that's to say, a dictatorship of his own backers. Well, he persuaded Scheffler to support him. I don't know quite how he managed that—Scheffler may have misunderstood his intentions—I know there was a good deal of money in it, and Scheffler, of course, was very hard up——"

At that point I interrupted him. I said: "I know Scheffler—perhaps better than you do—and he isn't the man to take money for anything he doesn't believe in——"

He nodded the point away. "Ah—well—I may have been misinformed about that. All I know is that one of Kurotski's underlings murdered a Bolshevik propagandist in cold blood, and Scheffler undertook his defence. It may not have been a question of money——"

"What was the name of this man," I asked sharply, "this underling of Kurotski's?"

"It was a man called Lusanov. He was well known as a writer on——"

I stopped him again. "Perhaps you'd like to hear the true story," I said. "Since Lusanov was my father-in-law, I know more about him than most people, and I happen in particular to know all about the murder he was supposed to have committed. . . ."

He listened quietly while I gave him a complete account of the episode, of the way the charge had been brought, how the "trial" was conducted. At the end of that he said carelessly:

"Oh, then the Lusanov I was talking about must have been another man of the same name. I know my facts are correct, because I got them from a brother of Scheffler's——"

I said: "A brother? I didn't know he had a brother——"

"No? Well, I imagine Anton Antonovitch would have kept rather quiet about him in recent years. You see, on one occasion—that was just before the war—there was some trouble over the administration of a trust. Anton Antonovitch was rather—in the shadow, as they say. But it was his brother Leonid Antonovitch who went to prison for nine months. The general opinion was that Anton Antonovitch had rather more influence. . . ."

I found my temper going and I was about to contradict him violently; but I remembered just in time what had happened in the Logis des Hyacinthes and I managed to control myself.

"I should prefer not to discuss that!" I said curtly.

"I beg your pardon? But of course!" he said, "I quite understand, yes, of course I understand—a war comrade, one has special feelings in regard to those, it was dishonourable of me to tell you—to talk about Count Scheffler at all. You must forgive me—I let my tongue run away with me—I had no intention of being so tactless, I do assure you."

Angry as I was, I thought it best to let the matter drop. We were silent for a few minutes, and then we talked of other things.

Conversation seemed to give me the kind of fatigue I wanted. I fell asleep quickly that night, and was undisturbed till about three o'clock. Then it was not the guard who roused me, but Kozlovitch. I woke to find his moist, pale eyes staring into mine from about six inches away.

"I'm sorry," he said, "I'm awfully sorry to bother you, but I can't sleep, it's been getting on my mind, I keep puzzling about Scheffler and this man Lusanov. You see, I'm interested in a little banking business—it's just a hobby, one has to make a little money somehow—I look after people's money affairs, just a few people, people who want a man of experience to handle their business. And I held Kurotski's money—all his money business went through me——"

I said, "I'm sorry, but I'm very sleepy, I'd rather talk about that in the morning if you——"

"No, but listen, this is the interesting part! All through 1917 I was sending money to Lusanov on Kurotski's account, the equivalent of three hundred Nikolas roubles a month. I remember quite clearly now, I had a standing order from Kurotski, I used to send current-exchange-drafts with a little slip which said 'for literary

and other services.' I remember that, because it struck me as a curious term. And I always had a receipt, which I sent on to Kurotski."

Taking the easiest course, I said, "Indeed, yes, how very interesting! Financial business must be most interesting—I've never had any head for it."

I turned over to face the wall.

"No, but this is more curious still," he persisted, leaning over me and talking right into my ear. "In June last year—yes, it was the eighteenth of June, I remember the date—Kurotski told me to send Scheffler a draft on Schettelheine, a draft for sixteen thousand Swedish krone, and to say it was an advance for 'extrication of K. V. L.' That's all very clear in my mind, because there was a bother about the receipts—Scheffler didn't want to put his name to anything that might connect him with the Kurotskists."

The man's voice had the quality of a piano just out of tune, you could not help listening to it. I said with dwindling patience:

"Count Scheffler took up Lusanov's case partly as a personal favour to me, and partly because the charge had been scandalously engineered. The fact that someone else was anxious to reward him financially is of no interest to me whatever."

"Of course not," he answered mellifluously, "of course not! . . . But what puzzles me is that Kurotski should have taken it all so calmly. I wrote to tell him I couldn't get a receipt out of Scheffler, and he wrote back that I wasn't to bother about it. He said: 'Scheffler's quite all right, he does a lot of work for me.' I wonder what that meant! The only work Kurotski ever arranged, as far as I know——"

"I'm afraid I can't help you!" I said violently. "And will you please, for God's sake, let me get to sleep!"

"I'm sorry," he said, "I didn't realize I was disturbing you."

He was still more apologetic next morning. He had been awake for hours, he said, he had found the cell getting on his nerves and felt that he simply must talk for a bit to calm himself. He hoped I wouldn't remember anything he had said: he had been most unguarded: what he had told me was strictly confidential information, and he would never have thought of passing it on if his mind had been working properly. . . . I told him there was no need to discuss the matter any further.

He was very kind to me that day. As the doctor hadn't come he got the guard to bring him bandages and ointment and dressed my sores himself, working with gentleness and a good deal of skill; he had done that kind of work at one stage in the war, he said. He went on to tell me that he had once intended to be a doctor; the relief

of suffering was what he felt to be his real vocation; but his father had died just when he was beginning his medical studies, leaving an estate heavily mortgaged and a large family to be provided for; he had been obliged to turn-to and make money by any means he could find. Yes, he had had a hard life. . . . Except for the faintly obsequious tone which coloured everything he said I found him—in himself—a rather sympathetic personality.

Later on, we began talking of our war experiences again, and he surprised me by saying that he had been quartered for a time in the clearing station at Mariki-Matesk. Comparing dates, we found that his period there had been a little after mine. When I spoke of the men I had known there he told me that he had been intimate with Virchov and Grassogi, he had also known the senior doctor, Bestushev, and, of course, Colonel Vestil. "It was lucky for me that I was moved before the final riot," he said. "I believe only one or two officers came out of that alive—I know Bestushev was one."

"What about Virchov?" I asked. "Do you know if he was killed?"

"Yes, poor old man, he was."

"Old? Virchov?"

"Well, he was getting on, wasn't he?"

"About thirty-four," I said.

"Oh surely more than that! I should have said nearer fifty."

Virchov: had I got the name wrong? It bothered me for a moment, but I didn't pursue it: in those days my will and mind were working like two wheels with the cogs badly worn; if one drove hard it lost grip of the other. And I was very sleepy. I said:

"I'm sorry about Virchov. But it was bound to happen—the way that place was run."

He nodded decisively. "That business about Karamachik—it wasn't forgotten! . . . So that was where you first came across Scheffler?"

"No, before that we were prisoners together, at a place called Krozkohl."

"Ah yes, Krozkohl. Yes, now I come to think of it, Virchov told me that Scheffler had been there. It was Virchov who told me all about the Karamachik affair—how it was really worked. Of course the whole thing was a calculated stratagem—you realize that? Oh yes, Karamachik was a perfectly inoffensive person, he was a mild theoretical socialist in private life but he never had any intention of causing trouble at Mariki-Matesk. That was what was wrong, from Vestil's point of view. You see, Karamachik had been marked down by the Okranha long before—I forget why, it was some rather heterodox pamphlet he had published. He'd got away from them by

joining the army, but the Okranha hadn't forgotten him, they were going to get him somehow. So Vestil had his instructions, he was to catch Karamachik over some military offence—anything he could think of—and then make hell for him. Unfortunately Karamachik wouldn't fall in with this plan, he was an exemplary soldier, never in trouble of any kind. So Vestil had to make him get into trouble. . . ."

Sleepy as I was, and my memory clouded, I realized from this point that Kozlovitch was gifted with a lively imagination; or else (which seemed unlikely) he was the must gullible creature that ever wore epaulettes. I had never had much regard for Vestil, but the idea of his elaborately plotting the downfall of a common soldier to satisfy the civil police—whom all soldiers hold in the utmost contempt—was right out of character. My friend's voice was becoming very tiresome, and when he went on to suggest that Anton might in some way have been privy to Vestil's designs I could put up with it no longer. I said:

"Listen, one moment! As I was at Mariki throughout the whole episode I think I know enough about it to have my own opinions. And as your view of Count Scheffler's character differs from mine, I think we had better avoid any more reference to him."

If there had been anything in the cell to read I should have picked it up and read it. But there was no such refuge. I went to the berth and lay down.

He followed me, stood beside the berth with one hand on my shoulder. "I know," he said, "I know just how you feel! This place, it cracks up your nerves. And you don't want to think about the other hells, places like Mariki-Matesk."

I said, "Yes, exactly. And now I think I'll sleep a bit."

But now that I wanted to hide myself in sleep it would not enfold me. Drowsy but conscious, I returned to what he had told me the night before. He had given monthly payments to Konstantin. No, that was unthinkable—it must be some other Lusanov of whom he was talking. But then, the payments to Anton: Kurotski's statement, "Scheffler does a lot of work for me": could that be pure invention? And why should he trouble to invent so elaborate a story? Certainly Anton had appeared to have a little money after his release from the Vadorka. . . . The cogs were slipping again, I was tired, so tired. At some time after ten o'clock I fell asleep, and at twelve he re-awoke me.

"Look here, I must talk to you!" he said. "It's worrying me; I know you think I've been unjust in what I said about Scheffler, I want to explain——"

"I don't want to hear it—you can tell me in the morning——"

"No, listen, you must listen, I've got to get it off my chest."

I pulled the blanket over my head but he only pressed his mouth against it where my ear was.

"Listen!" he repeated. "Do listen, it's very important! I don't like spoiling your faith in Scheffler, but I think you ought to know this. He was paid for what he did at Mariki-Matesk. I got to know that, because I was sorting Vestil's papers for him and I came across the receipts. Vestil hadn't meant me to see them, it was just an accident. And then Virchov told me the whole story. Listen, Otraveskov, you must learn the truth about this!"

Listen! I should have thanked God for taking away my hearing. Sharp, insistent, the voice went on:

"Scheffler was a paid man. He'd done a lot of work for the Government before the war, he had the confidence of the revolutionaries and he used to inform against them. When he got to Mariki-Matesk the Okranha were in touch with him again, he used to go among the men and find out what was going on. Then Vestil told him to get his clutches on Karamachik. So he got friendly—listen, are you listening?—he got friendly with Karamachik and persuaded him to organize a campaign of resistance. He promised Karamachik that he would help him and take the main responsibility, he made him believe that he wouldn't get into any trouble. And of course it all worked beautifully—he is a very clever man, Scheffler, very skilful at influencing inferior minds. Karamachik got shot, and Scheffler got seven thousand roubles."

"Scheffler was sent to prison," I said dully.

"—Where he lived in very great comfort, with as much leave of absence as he wanted!"

I threw off the blanket and turned on him.

"Will you stop telling me all these devilish lies and let me get to sleep!" I shouted.

"Are you calling me a liar?" he asked, dangerously quiet.

"Yes, I am!"

"Well then, listen!" His face was murderous, I thought he was going to jump on me. But he seemed to think better of it, and suddenly turned away. "All right, we'll argue that in the morning!"

But an hour later he was at me again.

"Tell me, Otraveskov, tell me this! Why do you think Scheffler went on losing case after case, before the war, if he wasn't paid to lose them? Do you think he's a fool? I shouldn't have thought so myself, I should have thought he was less a fool than any man in Russia. Where do you think he got his money—do you think his

clients paid him? Or do you think he lived on his wife? You know he hadn't any property, everyone knows that! . . ." He had his hand on my arm, he was gently shaking me; and fast as I fled towards the covering darkness of sleep his hammering voice pursued, kept pace with me. "You see, it's not very pleasant for a man like me to be called a liar! How do you know, how do you know that Scheffler's what you think he is? He's deceived dozens of people, men as clever as you are—how do you know he hasn't deceived you? Did you know that Scheffler always called himself a pacifist? Then why did he take a commission as soon as the war broke out—did he ever explain that to you? I'll tell you why—it was because certain Communists in Petrograd had got wind of his connection with the Okranha and he had to get away for a time. Yes, that was why! And do you know why Boltikov and Sasurin the Ninth Tikinski Brigade were shot for subversive propaganda? Did Scheffler never tell you that they were particular friends of his? No, I don't suppose he did! But they were friends of his—poor fools—they became too friendly. . . ." I tried, I tried to collect in mind the facts that would refute all this, but they wouldn't come to me. I could only repeat and repeat:

"Go away, for God's sake go away, for God's sake let me sleep, go away, *go away!*"

Of the next day I remember very little, except for two things: that my mattress was taken away—for cleaning, the guard said—and that when our evening meal was brought in I caught sight of a big, bearded man being led along the corridor. I saw this man's face only for a moment, and then in profile, but I thought I recognized him; and when I asked the guard who it was he was kind enough to tell me: "That man? That was a doctor, a counter-revolutionary. His name was Mishlayevski."

In the evening my mattress was brought back. And as soon as I lay down, Kozlovitch, himself very tired but unflagging in purpose, began again.

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Three nights—or was it four nights?—that went on. Sometimes he let me drop asleep, only to wake me again a few minutes later. Sometimes I struck out at his face, but it was easy for him to dodge that, and by way of reward he would hold my ears and shake my head rhythmically from side to side, repeating in his tireless, marcato voice, "Listen, Otraveskov, listen to me! I only want you to admit that I may be right, I only want you to say that Scheffler may have been a czar-paid man. After all, it's possible, isn't it, consider-

ing what I've told you! It's possible, it's possible, isn't it, isn't it, isn't it? . . ." And then one morning—I think it was morning—I can't be certain—I became aware that his voice had stopped; and when I opened my eyes he had gone, there was nothing but the brilliant white of the walls and the electric light burning.

An hour later, or perhaps next day, I heard the door opening and looked up in horror, expecting to see him come back. But it wasn't Koslovitch, it was a dignified old gentleman, very neatly dressed. The guard came in after him carrying two glasses of tea, and he gave me one of them. Two chairs were brought in.

I sat sipping the tea. It had a peculiar and rather unpleasant taste, but I found it refreshing; my vision grew clearer, the muscles supporting my eyelids seemed to be strengthened. The old gentleman, holding his own glass in a delicate, white hand and sipping in a ladylike way, smiled at me encouragingly. By degrees I began to understand what he was saying.

". . . acting for Count Scheffler. Yes, I am a lawyer, I am acting for Count Scheffler, Count Scheffler has instructed me to act for him. . . ."

I leant forward and looked at him closely. I said:

"Strubensohn? Are you M. Strubensohn? You don't look like him! No, you can't be Strubensohn!"

"No," he said patiently, "no, I'm not M. Strubensohn, but a friend of his. My name is Djebraliev, *Djebraliev*—I expect Count Scheffler has told you about me, we used to work together. . . . Please finish your tea, we've plenty of time, plenty of time."

I felt a great thankfulness to have this kindly creature sitting opposite me instead of Kozlovitch. I finished the tea and wriggled in my clothes, collecting my faculties. This was a visitor I ought to be polite to, I must try to understand him. He gave me a cigarette and lit it for me. That helped. If I kept my mind all together, if I held it tightly as a man holds a restive horse, I could follow what he was saying.

". . . to get permission to come and see you. I promised Count Scheffler I would see you if I could, but it was very difficult, Zakharin wouldn't give me permission. Fortunately I know the Superintendent, I know him personally, he has been willing to waive the formalities. You understand, it was very important in Count Scheffler's interest that I should see you—I promised him I should do my best, even if it meant taking a certain amount of risk. . . ."

"Yes, all that was clear, quite clear.

"You must understand that Count Scheffler's position is very serious. I had hoped—I had hoped all along—that we should be able

to cover up the fact that he was working for the Kurotskists. Scheffler told me that he thought he had covered his tracks. But I'm afraid now that Zakharin has got evidence on that matter—I don't know how he got it, but the fact that he's ready to bring Scheffler into Urdin's Court seems to show that he has definite proof. Well, I think we may be able to get round that, we may be able to plead that Scheffler was ignorant of the counter-revolutionary nature of Kurotski's activities. But then there's the affair at Mariki-Matesk—that is really more serious still. Scheffler says he would never have undertaken to destroy Karamachik if he had realized the esteem in which Karamachik was held by the Moscow Soviet. But that's an argument that won't have any force before a judge like Urdin. No, as it looks to me now, all I can do is to represent Scheffler's action as an indiscretion committed under overpowering influence—the influence of Colonel Vestil. That's the only way out. I shall have to try and reconstruct an interview between Vestil and Scheffler, in which Scheffler was reluctantly persuaded to act as czarist agent-provocateur against his own better feelings. Then I can appeal to the Court's mercy. I must repeat, Scheffler is in a desperate position and that is the only way out. . . . This is where I want you to help me—I know you'll do anything you can to give your friend his one chance. I want you to try and remember any interview between Scheffler and Vestil at which you were present. There was such an interview of course—more than one? You see I'm not asking you to commit yourself to any falsehood. I think if you cast your mind back you'll remember an interview at which Vestil said, 'That means that we're going to have Karamachik up against the wall'—or something like that—and Scheffler said, 'Well, I suppose Karamachik has got to stand against the wall, anyway.' Now think, will you try and think, throw your mind back!"

I tried to do that. Two things were clear: that it rested with me to save Anton, that in order to do this I must recall to memory the interview—that last interview—in Vestil's office. But my mind dragged on the chain, pulled sideways. Who was this, who was this talking to me? Spectacles, spectacles without rims—what were those called, what was the word for spectacles without rims?

"Now try!" he was saying, "try and remember that last interview! Weren't you sitting just two or three feet away from Vestil —someone in between you? Wasn't Scheffler standing opposite Vestil?"

Yes, that was right, roughly right: I couldn't be quite sure. And Vestil had said something like that, "Then we'll have Karamachik up

against the wall,"—not exactly those words, but something very like that.

"It's no good!" I said at last. "I'm sorry, I'm too sleepy, there was a man in here who kept waking me up all night. Tomorrow—if you'll come back tomorrow I'll try and tell you."

"You must try now," he repeated, with a shade of severity. "They won't let me come back tomorrow, they're too sharp for that. Surely it's worth making a little effort, when it's a matter of life or death to Scheffler! Listen now, listen carefully! I'll try to help you, I'll try to get it back for you, that last interview with Vestil."

Listen . . . Listen . . . everyone said that! The tea was losing its effect now, and the will as well as the power to listen was sinking. He meant well, this old man, but I couldn't follow him, I only wanted him to go away. I hardly cared any longer, about Anton, about anything at all. They had taken me away from everything I cared for, I should not find my loved ones again; they might as well have Anton too, nothing mattered.

M. Djebraliev was holding my hands, gently but firmly.

". . . all of you looking at Scheffler, waiting to see what he would say . . . and then Vestil said, 'I expect you to do your duty, Lieutenant,' and then Scheffler said, 'I don't care what happens to Karamachik' . . . and then Vestil said, 'You realize what's got to happen,' and then Scheffler said, 'Yes, I realize that, I quite understand.' . . . That's right, isn't it? That's what happened, isn't it? . . ."

My voice seemed to be working by itself. I heard it saying: "Yes . . . yes, I suppose so . . . I think so, yes, . . . yes. . . ." Someone else had come in now, a little bald man with a book on his knees. " . . . I can't remember, I don't remember that. . . . Yes, I suppose that's right . . . I suppose so . . . yes. . . ."

I found Djebraliev patting my shoulder; I heard him say, in the kind of voice that Mishlayevski had used with Vava, "You've been extremely good, Captain Otraveskov, most helpful! Count Scheffler will be very grateful, I can assure you of that. I thank you for your patience, I am deeply grateful!"

Darkness at last, a hot passage of darkness in which their voices hunted me, Djebraliev's voice, the voice of Kozlovitch, calling "Listen! Listen!" But they could not find me, I was down too deep, sinking further and further. The peace of it, the peace of it, the blessedness of darkness.

§

They found me. With a searchlight beam that would penetrate

to the earth's core they reached my eyes and opened them. Someone had his hands in my armpits and was lifting me up; strong hands, they wouldn't let me fall, wouldn't let me sink back. Djebraliev's face again, very close. Djebraliev's voice, quiet and soothing:

"I just want you to sign your evidence. Here's a pen—here. At the bottom, just there, just your name. Then you can go to sleep again."

Evidence? Sign my evidence?

Something came back to me: a voice, a mellow, rather obsequious voice, Strubensohn's perhaps, saying, "Never sign anything if you don't understand it!" I said feebly:

"I want—I want to read it. Read it before I sign."

"It's quite all right," Djebraliev murmured, "I've been all through it, I've checked all the points."

Oh well, I might as well sign. What did it matter? They would let me go to sleep then.

"If you don't understand it."

No. No, better not!

"You must read it," I whispered. "Read it to me!"

"But of course!"

He read very fast: " '. . . I was present on another occasion when Scheffler agreed that it was necessary to get rid of Karamachik . . . Scheffler said in my presence that he would undertake to incriminate Karamachik for the sum of seven thousand roubles. . . .'—You see, it's just what you told me this evening, it's quite accurate. . . . There, that's where you have to sign."

I wasn't sure. It didn't seem quite right, I couldn't remember saying all that.

"I'll sign in the morning," I said.

Djebraliev leant a little nearer, and suddenly his voice was menacing.

"Will you sign it now, please! Quickly!"

The sharpness of that command brought me a little further towards my senses. I opened my eyes wide, saw Djebraliev's angry little face, saw how short he was. A silly, cross little old man, trying to make me sign a paper: and I had stood against the bayonets of Mackensen's Ninth Army.

"Here, give it me!" I said. He handed me the paper. I tore it in half, crumpled it, and threw it in his face. "Now you can go!" I barked. "Go on, clear out and let me get some sleep!"

But the grip on my arms tightened, I was roughly shaken. When my vision settled again I saw that Djebraliev was smiling. He had another sheet of paper in his hand.

"I have several more copies," he said. "Bring the light a bit closer, Dunin!"

I was being held very tightly, and now someone put his fingers on the skin above my eyes, forced them open. A third man stood in front of me, he had two pieces of stiff surgical plaster, he bent over me studiously and fixed the plaster across my eyelids. It was neatly done, it gave me no discomfort, except that my eyes would not close now.

"The light, Dunin!"

They had an inspection lamp on a long flex, they hooked it on to the wall just above my head. I tried to turn over, but the man behind me wouldn't allow that. Djebraliev gave me the pen again.

"You will have a nice sleep," he said, "as soon as you've just signed your evidence. It's only a formality—the statement was all taken down from your own words, Dunin was there to witness that. It's a pity to be obstinate. You'll sign it in the end, why not now? It would be so nice for you to go to sleep again, to have a good, long sleep.—All right, rest him a moment, Dunin. . . . Now, try him again."

That light, that light! The eyes watching me. To sleep, to fall back, down, down into sleep.

"This a true and accurate statement of the evidence I gave voluntarily before Comrade Djebraliev, in the presence of Comrade Dunin. Freely and voluntarily signed by my own hand. . . ."

". . . Now, try him again!"

An hour perhaps. No, not so long, I suppose.

"Alexei Alexeivitch Otraveskov."

"Thank you, Captain Otraveskov!—Yes, Dunin, you can get the plaster off now."

52

The Polish doctor was visiting me again, once every day. He knew his job, that man; he varied his tonics and they always seemed to do me good. I was classified as fit for exercise, Schedule B.

I don't know what Schedule A was like. Schedule B seemed to consist of ten minutes, morning and afternoon, in what was called the Field of Liberty: that was an open space in the center of the building, thirty of my paces long, about twelve wide. You were expected to keep moving. The guard lounged against the wall at one end, chewing sunflower seeds. Whenever I stopped for a moment's rest he shouted cheerfully, "Keep at it, you lazy bastard—what d'you think you're here for!"

One day there was a new guard on duty and he was much more fierce. He kept shouting at me to walk faster, and when I stopped for a moment, out of breath, he came and shook me.

"What's that you've got in your pocket?" he demanded.

I told him quite truthfully that my pockets were empty, but he insisted on plunging his hands into all them. Half an hour later, when I was back in my cell, I was surprised to find in my trouser-pocket a piece of paper screwed up into the size of an acorn.

I made sure that no one was at the spy-hole and then spread it out. It was a cutting from a cyclostyled paper called *The Moscow True Independent Communist,* dated some three weeks previously, and I saw the cross-heading, *"The Case of Comrade Scheffler."* My eyes were in bad condition for reading, and the writing was abominable; it was twenty minutes' work to make it out.

"How can Druvalov call himself a Communist," I read by degrees, "when he has murdered scores of True Communists? Why isn't the new Clothes and Shoes Distributing Centre built yet? It isn't even started, you know that, Comrades! What's happened to the money, the money that belongs to the Workers? Have you seen Druvalov's new motor-car? Isn't it smart! How did he get that? Druvalov is a bloody tyrant, you all know that. What happened to Trevestiev, he was a true friend of the Workers—Druvalov killed him. It wasn't Zakharin, he's nothing but Druvalov's wiping-boy. What's happened to Comrade Scheffler? Comrade Scheffler fought for the Workers against the bloody Nikolas. Now he's gone. Where? Ask Druvalov. You write and ask Lenin if he knows what Druvalov's done with Scheffler. Has Scheffler been brought to trial? Why not? Ask Druvalov why he doesn't bring Scheffler to trial. Because he can't, he's killed him. Jealousy. Druvalov's jealous of everyone who's a friend of the Workers. It says that in the America newspaper, the important America newspaper, the *Jackson Courier,* it says Druvalov killed Scheffler. If he didn't what has he done with him? We challenge the bloody anti-communist Druvalov to produce the friend of the Workers, Comrade Scheffler."

I looked round for somewhere to hid this slip, and then caught sight of a note written in violet ink across the back. I recognized the hand, it was Strubensohn's:

"This means that A. A. S. will only extricate himself by a full 'confession.' I am working for that, help if you can. Better destroy this."

And across the bottom corner, in another, bolder hand:

"They are all right. I am looking after them.—Y. A. S."

I tore the paper into tiny bits and set about the business of swallowing them. But I kept separate the piece with Yelisaveta's note on it; feeling that I must have that to look at again and again, I rolled it and hid it in my hair.

Later on I got reckless, I kept on taking out that splinter of paper and looking at it, hardly bothering to see if the spy-hole were clear. *"They are all right."* It is curious to celebrate in a small bare room, all by yourself, but I do not think I ever celebrated with greater ecstasy. I walked up and down, quite tireless; kissing the paper, hugging and kissing my mattress, laughing and crying.

53

Next day I saw the streets. I was taken to the K.P.J. building in the Dechinkaya in an open drozhki, a man sat beside me but he was not visibly armed; I might have been a German tourist. That was a curious experience: to move so fast through crowded streets, to see, with eyes that worked uncertainly in the blue daylight, people hurrying along the pavements, men in earnest conversation, a woman leaning on a man's arm and smiling.

In the K.P.J. building I found the stairs difficult, but my guard helped me. I was locked in a small room which had a vulgar flowered wallpaper; I rather liked it. There was no one with me. I was there for two hours.

A man in a military uniform of some kind came to fetch me. We went along a passage smelling of naphtha soap and through three doors; the third released the sound of voices and the smell of human beings who are not prisoners. I went in and sat down on the first empty chair I saw; no one seemed to notice me.

The excitement of yesterday had worn off, I was depressed and lethargic. These people, I supposed, would ask me questions, and I should have to answer them as best I could: it never seemed to matter what one answered. My chair was quite comfortable, an elaborate affair with padded seat and arms. The chair in the waiting-room had been a wretched one. I was quite content, so long as they let me go on sitting in this chair. Opposite where I sat there was a man with a grey moustache which hung down over his mouth like a horse's tail; above his head, a damp patch on the wall which resembled a wav-

ing flag. In my visual memory of that room those two objects are far clearer than anything else.

After a little while my eyes wandered and I got a rough photographic impression of my surroundings: a big dining-table with men on two adjacent sides of it; further towards the window a long trestle-table with four or five men writing; a soldier standing by the farther door: that was all, except the people behind and beside me. At first I saw the men at the trestle-table most clearly. There were two in particular whose faces I remember, one because of his high forehead, and the one sitting next to him for his small black beard, of rather unusual cut. I realized that these were foreigners, and I have since identified them, by reference to Sturgiev's *Letters of a Kommissar,* as an American journalist called Toyber, and Paul Daguillon of the *Prolétaire Charentais.* My eyes travelled slowly across the long side of the big table. Druvalov was at the far end, slumped in his chair with his waistcoat rumpled like a ploughed field, just as he had sat in the Weigh-House; his eyes on his finger-nails, his face a caricature of boredom. The man next him was in uniform, with the cropped head of a Prussian officer, then came the one who was speaking, a pale youth with delicate hands who reminded me a little of one of Van Gogh's self portraits. Urdin, who sat next to him, had his hands folded on the table and looked as if he were in a day-dream. By contrast, the man on his left was turned to face the speaker and seemed to be listening intently. Then there were two more in uniform, men who wore the heavy confidence of infantry sergeants; next to them Djebraliev, who gave me a little, friendly smile when he caught my eye; and lastly, the man with the wandering moustache. I had seen him before—I was sure of that now—but I couldn't think where.

". . . that the Workers' State has enemies, many bitter and violent enemies, both within its borders and beyond them. We do not care about those enemies, our moral and physical strength is great enough to meet them." The young man's voice was refined, with a touch of pedantry. He was speaking without notes, but with a sureness and care in elocution which argued careful rehearsal. "We can even afford to treat them generously, to have some pity for these picturesque, if inwardly rotted survivals of an age which happily has vanished into the dark oblivion of history. But there are other enemies who have pretended—who go on pretending—to be our friends. There is a kind of man who, to gain his own ends, to try and dam the flowing tide of liberation, will not scruple to ingratiate himself with simple people, to pose as their champion, to win their confidence.

Such a man will appear the warmest, the most loving friend, to the very one whom he is being paid to destroy. . . ."

I thought of officers' conferences held to decide some trivial question as to rations or the allotment of fatigues. Here there was the same atmosphere of formality, of dignified boredom. One of the press reporters had his pencil moving, but I thought he was only making circles in his notebook. The young man's nicely measured periods floated out like smoke-rings from the funnel of a steam-tug, with no more disturbance to the stillness. By the clock above Urdin's head it was a quarter past twelve. I closed my eyes and put my hand on my head. The tiny twist of paper was still there, so that was real, whatever dreams I had to traverse.

I thought, "I must get them out of Russia, I must arrange that. Why haven't they gone already, what are they staying for?" Through eyes a quarter opened I saw Urdin's legs under the table; one of his socks had fallen down, there were two inches of yellow skin showing under the turn-up of his blue trousers. I thought, "If I could get word to Yelisaveta she might arrange it. Perhaps someone would take a message—one of the guards. Sometimes before they shoot you they let you write a letter. . . ."

"That is the kind of man we have to deal with. And he is sitting there!"

He had only raised his voice very slightly, but the studied stress on certain syllables pricked me to wakefulness. Glancing up, I saw his thin hand pointing and followed its direction. The man sitting a little forward of me had shifted in his seat, and now, looking past his shoulder, I caught sight of a wheeled chair placed close to the short side of the dining-table, a foot or two from Druvalov's place: Anton sitting there.

He had his hands on the side of the chair and was leaning forward. My first impression was that he looked much better than when I had seen him last in the camp at Kittanoi, his cheeks were not quite so thin, he had just a little colour. He was properly shaved now, his hair was tidy, he was wearing a clean white collar and a decent suit. I tried to draw his eyes, but his face was turned towards the man speaking, attentive, like the face of an artillery observer; attentive and rather strained, as if he were trying to see something a long way off. Yes, there was something peculiar about his eyes: too tightly fixed, too bright.

But now, as I held his face in better focus, I saw that his mouth had not altered. It was strong and tender as the mouth of Raphael's Julius. That was enough to rub out the filthy stain that Kozlovitch had touched my mind with.

One o'clock. Someone else was talking now, a man sitting next but one to me on my right, a shrunken, dishevelled creature who might have been a stable-cleaner. He was reading rapidly and awkwardly from a sheet of paper which he seemed to find difficulty in managing with his stumpy fingers, his voice was of the Moscow suburbs, phlegmy and rumbling. ". . . to that date I was employed by Kurotski. Kurotski worked for Prince Azdetski and other large landowners, his main object was to hold up supplies of grain coming through to Moscow. I was employed as messenger. I made a number of journeys to Chaveschok, taking messages and money to a landowner called Konstantin Viktorovitch Lusanov. I also took messages and money to Scheffler. Kurotski told me that Scheffler was retained to manipulate legal affairs that might arise. He said that Scheffler was entirely in sympathy with the Kurotskist movement. He said that if I was arrested for any criminal act which I had to perform in the course of my duties Scheffler would be able to get me off because he was in the—in the——" "Confidence," someone prompted, "—in the confidence of the Moscow Soviet. I saw Scheffler in Kurotski's house several times. . . ."

It did not seem to me that this halting recital could make the smallest impression on anyone in the room. But Urdin was listening with close attention, his eyes touched with surprise and a faint disgust; and Djebraliev's face was that of a sensitive man who dutifully witnesses a flogging.

A rough, stalwart man who was sitting close to Anton suddenly jumped up and leant menacingly across the table, pointing his finger at the speaker.

"You say that Scheffler was a personal friend of Kurotski's," he barked, "you say you understood that they had been friends for many years. Is there any reason why Scheffler shouldn't visit a personal friend? Of course there isn't! You say you took money to Scheffler. How do you that wasn't in settlement of a private debt? You took money several times? Well, the debt may have been paid off in instalments!" He turned to Urdin. "I maintain that this man's evidence is worthless, he has told us nothing that we don't know already. It's perfectly possible that Scheffler worked for Kurotski out of friendship. He may not have realized—or only half-realized—the subversive nature of Kurotski's activities. In any case he was very short of money, and a man who is accustomed to living in good style can't afford to examine too carefully the source of anything he can pick up. I maintain that Scheffler's association with Kurotski had no political significance whatever, it was purely a matter of business and of friendship."

He sat down.

Anton said something. I caught the words "seen or spoken to Kurotski in my life." But Druvalov was noisily shuffling his feet. Urdin said sharply:

"The time's going on. Perhaps, Linevir, you can manage to take your witnesses a little more quickly."

Linevir nodded. "Dr. Bestushev!" he said promptly.

So that was who it was, the man with the unkempt moustache. Yes, I should have placed him as soon as he began to speak, for although his appearance had deteriorated his voice was just the same, the voice of a man who has dined well enough to take his troubles philosophically.

"Scheffler and I were fellow-officers at Mariki-Matesk. (And that was a godforsaken outfit if there ever was one!) What? Oh I'm sorry. Yes, well, Scheffler, he and I were together a lot, we were very friendly, I found him to be an aristocrat of the old kind, he was very good company, I became much attached to him. . . . I was very much surprised at Colonel Vestil's proposal of a plan to get rid of Karamachik. Karamachik appeared to me an inoffensive intellectual communist. I told him that none of my colleagues was likely to undertake such an underhand proceeding. He asked me whether I knew that Scheffler was very short of money. . . . On that occasion they were two or three officers present besides Scheffler and myself. I know that Captain Otraveskov was one. . . ."

I listened dully. After those nights with Kozlovitch there was nothing in all this that could shock me, least of all in the mouth of Bestushev. I felt only a tickle of anger at the ripe pomposity of the man's utterance, at the length of time he was taking.

Fiercely cross-examined, he answered with an insolent composure which I could hardly help admiring.

"How do you know that Karamachik would not have maintained his revolutionary position without Scheffler's encouragement?" he was asked.

"Because, my dear sir, Karamachik was a porridge-livered little snake who would never——"

"All right! All right! I want to know why you are assuming that Scheffler was hostile to Karamachik and——"

"I'm not assuming anything—why should I assume things? He may have loved Karamachik like a mother her last-born, the fact remains——"

"How was it that Scheffler was court-martialled after the incident, if Vestil——"

"That was an exhibition to satisfy the men, some of the men were saying——"

"Then tell me this! Why was Scheffler sent to Petrograd as a prisoner, when——"

"Because, my poor good fool, he meant to clear himself with the revolutionary interests with an eye to future occasions. And if you think——"

"It is perfectly obvious that you've invented the whole of this story——"

"Indeed? You flatter me! I never realized before that I was a budding Gogol!"

The questioner turned to Urdin. "Dr. Bestushev has told a very ingenious story," he said. "I congratulate him, his narrative hangs together perfectly, there is not a flaw in it anywhere. I simply maintain that it's a pack of lies from start to finish."

Urdin shifted his bored gaze to Linevir.

"That, I take it, concludes the evidence you are calling?"

"No, I have two more witnesses. The first will corroborate Bestushev's evidence, it is another officer who was at Mariki-Matesk between the operative dates: former-Captain Otraveskov."

A hand came over my shoulder holding two sheets of typescript. A voice said in my ear: "You have a wife and child, M. Otraveskov."

Urdin glanced up at the clock. "Very well. He is here, this Otraveskov? . . . Ah yes! You will please be as quick as you can!"

With my eyes on the first sentence of the script I tried to think of something to say: a single sentence that would totter Bestushev's romance like an axe laid to a sapling. It wouldn't come, my brain wasn't up to that. I stammered and halted. I said:

"I have no evidence."

"You mean," Linevir said swiftly and quietly, "that you were not at Mariki-Matesk during the period under discussion?"

"Oh no. I mean—yes, I was there, but——"

"And you were present at the meeting when Colonel Vestil discussed the case of Karamachik?"

"Yes, I was present, but——"

Djebraliev was leaning forward. "Perhaps I may be allowed to give you a little explanation on this matter," he said urbanely. "Captain Otraveskov has been in a very difficult position. Scheffler was his personal friend—an intimate friend—who had shown him some kindness during their imprisonment together in Austria. Very understandably, he has been most reluctant to say what he knows about this affair; he has had to struggle between the claims of personal emotion and the larger claims of duty. But I have here a signed

copy of evidence voluntarily subscribed by the witness and formally attested. It would save Captain Otraveskov's feelings if the Court would allow me to read it for him. The evidence bears chiefly——"

I stood up, and my voice broke out with a fierceness that surprised me. "That is quite un——"

Urdin struck the table with his fist.

"*Kindly wait till I give you permission to speak!* This is not a brawling-parlour. Comrade Djebraliev, will you please read the former Captain's evidence."

" '. . . in my presence. Captain Grassogi, Captain Bestushev and Lieutenant Virchov were also present. Scheffler was at first reluctant to undertake the business, arguing that he would be placing himself in a dangerous position. Vestil, however, undertook to give him full protection. Scheffler said that five thousand roubles was too small a remuneration for work which would involve a great deal of skill and patience—he knew that Karamachik was a man unlikely to act mutinously except under very powerful moral suasion. . . .' "

I was watching Anton's face, but he did not appear to see me. He was leaning back now with his hands dropped loose over the side of the chair, he seemed to be taking less interest in the proceedings than anyone else in the room. For myself, I was no longer listening. The sentences that Djebraliev was sowing on the air had no meaning to me, they simply brought back the white walls, the brilliant light. Once I did catch the sense of a few words, "Scheffler told me privately that he simply must get money for his wife"; and at that point I had the impulse to run across to Anton's chair—it was only five yards off, they could never have stopped me. But as I started to rise I was caught by the tail of my jacket, the voice whispered, "You had better keep still!" I found myself weeping then, convulsively, without noise and with scanty tears, as a shamed child on the verge of adolescence weeps. I should have cried out loud, but no sound would come. Feeling my coat still firmly held, I wanted to escape from this room more passionately than I had ever wanted to escape from the Logis des Hyacinthes, to escape and hide. But I could do nothing, I could not even scream, I was chained by feebleness.

" 'This is a true and accurate statement of the evidence I gave voluntarily before Comrade Djebraliev, in the presence of Comrade Dunin. Freely and voluntarily signed by my own hand. . . . Alexei Alexeivitch Otraveskov.' "

A moment's silence: less than that, the interval in which a swallow swoops past a window. I knew that this was the only chance to right myself, I made an effort that was like the last thrust forward of Pheidippides. My voice half whispered and half shouted:

"Untrue! I tell you——"

Small and smooth as it was, Djebraliev's voice was strong enough to shutter mine. "I have already explained that Captain Otraveskov has had emotional difficulties in giving evidence."

He paused, and another voice came in. It was Anton's.

"May I be allowed to say——"

Urdin looked round.

"What?"

"I only wish to say this: I am perfectly satisfied that what M. Djebraliev has read to the Court is a true and accurate copy of what he wrote down when Captain Otraveskov gave his evidence."

For an instant Urdin was startled into confusion. I saw him glance at Druvalov. Then he nodded, and said sharply:

"Very well! If the defendant is satisfied with the accuracy of Otraveskov's evidence there is no need for anyone else to challenge it. . . . You said, Comrade Linevir, that you had one more witness?"

"Yes: Mme Scheffler."

I saw Anton start violently. He craned forward, peering towards the corner of the room behind me, as a man's eyes will dart in a moment of danger. I turned to look that way and saw the door opening. Yelisaveta came in.

She was pale, as she often was, but not—as it seemed to me—so ill as when I had seen her last. The dark coat she was wearing was not the kind of thing she would have bought for herself—not, at least, in the old days—but its severeness gave her dignity. Her head was bare; she had let her hair grow to neck-length again. Speaking as painter rather than man, I say with certainty that I never saw her beauty refined to such splendour as when I saw her there in the doorway. Her eyes were on the ground, the woman who had brought her in guided her to a chair, she sat down without once glancing about her. Djebraliev said gently, "Yes, Mme Scheffler——" Still staring at the floor, she began immediately.

"At the time when my husband was at Mariki-Matesk I wrote to tell him that I was in debt and needed money badly." Her voice was low and mechanical, but perfectly. "I told him that the rental compound of his Morshansk estates had been delayed and there was nothing in his account to draw on. He wrote back that he had not been able to save any money out of his pay, but he saw a chance of getting a small windfall quickly. He said: 'It means disposing of a communist person that the Okranha say is a nuisance, though I can't see it.' Later on he sent me a draft on the Provinces Bank for five thousand roubles. . . ."

She stopped suddenly and her voice changed completely.

"I can't—I can't go on with this——"

Anton was trying to stand up. I heard him say something like "Go on, go on, it doesn't matter!" But it was Djebraliev who acted swiftly. I heard the scrape of his chair as he pushed it back, and almost at once he was by Yelisaveta's side, solicitously bending over her. He said seriously: "Comrade Urdin, you will understand that this has been a great strain for Mme Scheffler, I beg that you will allow her a few moments' rest."

"I cannot see why that should be necessary!" Linevir interposed sharply.

Urdin glanced at him with sober indignation. "So long as I am in charge of these proceedings," he said curtly, "they will be conducted with decency and humanity. . . . Of course, Djebraliev!"

But Yelisaveta was out of the room already, Djebraliev supporting her on one side, the woman on the other.

Urdin turned to Linevir again.

"Have we to wait till your witness has recovered before we can proceed?"

Linevir turned over his papers and gathered his lips.

"It rests with my friend Gerudin," he said laconically. "Perhaps there is someone he wants to call?"

The man beside Anton folded his arms.

"I simply state that the whole of Comrade Linevir's evidence is fabricated. For reasons best known to themselves, his witnesses have combined in a plot to incriminate the man whose probity I am here to defend. I say, for reasons best known to themselves. It may not be out of place to mention that the witness Otraveskov and the witness Mme Scheffler were living in the same house at Petrograd for several months, Scheffler himself being absent. . . ."

Anton turned violently. "M. Gerudin, will you please withdraw that innuendo! You have no instructions—I haven't instructed you——"

Linevir was on his feet.

"Exactly! Gerudin has recourse to an innuendo which Scheffler himself repudiates! Against the array of evidence he has nothing, nothing to say! All he can do is to try and discredit my witnesses by an insinuation so vile that the man he is defending will not tolerate it. There you have an estimate, Comrade Gerudin's estimate, of the force of testimony which I have brought against the prisoner. I think that your estimate, the estimate of the Court, will be the same. . . ."

He was off now with a hurricane in his sails, the niceties of rhetoric thrown overboard. I didn't try to listen. I watched the hands of the clock, and Urdin impatiently scratching his chin, and Anton

leaning back with his eyes closed as if he were asleep. I wondered what was happening to Yelisaveta: Djebraliev had not come back. Once, as Linevir paused for an instant to take breath, I thought I heard from somewhere in the building a faint cry, like the cry a child utters under anaesthetic. I looked towards Anton again and saw him sitting up, his eyes open now. ". . . for a time he is out of harm's way, a prisoner in Austria; but as soon as he returns he takes up his old trade, the loathsome trade of *agent provocateur*. He finds himself short of money; the high pay of a czarist officer—ten times that of a common soldier—is not enough for him. But there is money to be made, money to be taken from both sides. He writes to the Olkhaist Association at Petrograd and quotes his terms for promoting mutinous insubordination; simultaneously he treats with the serpentine Vestil. In the evidence I have called we have followed the whole process stage by stage. . . ." Surely they would not bring her back. Surely we should not have to watch her standing there again. Ten past two. Two of the journalists were whispering and laughing together: and if they were not listening, in God's name what was this man going on for? Quarter past. Twenty past. Anton leaning back again, but his eyes open, searching for something: no one was looking at him, he seemed as separate from this business as the flies crawling about the walls. The shadows in the room had shifted, leaving his face full-lit; and now I could see that his breathing was shallow and rapid, like the breathing of my Siberians as they waited for the last rush forward on the slopes of Mo-tien-ling. ". . . this cynical and calculating ruffian, this pedlar of men's lives, this three-faced poisoner of the well of liberty which our people have toiled and bled for—he dares to come cringing before you, he dares to open a mouth festered with falsehoods and whine for your mercy!"

Without looking up, Anton said suddenly:

"I'm not asking for anything of the sort."

Linevir stopped like a chucked horse. But he was too adept to be thrown out of his stride for more than an instant.

"No, he falls short of that impudence! You hear what he says! Whatever faults he has, he does not lack intelligence, this Scheffler. He knows that his game is up. He knows that a man who has shown no mercy——"

With a motion of his hand, as one who silences a noisy child, Urdin stopped him. "One moment! . . . Yes, Comrade?"

Djebraliev was back. Standing just beside my chair, he said pleasantly. "Oh, I had no intention of interrupting! It is just that Mme Scheffler has recovered, and is ready to continue her evidence."

Urdin nodded. I think he had become a little sleepy in the hot wind of Linevir's eloquence.

"Mme Scheffler—ah, yes! You wish to recall her, Comrade Linevir?"

Linevir shrugged his shoulders. "She has already told us——"

Anton was struggling, pushing on the arms of his chair, he was on his feet. His voice came like a stone hurled through a window. "I won't have my wife—I won't——" It went away to nothing. He stood drooping over the table, actually weeping, all his courage spilt, his dignity all gone. That spectacle cut loose the shackles on my tongue, I shook away the man who held my coat-tail. I shouted, "I protest, in the name of common justice!"

"Hold your tongue!" bawled the man at Urdin's side.

"I protest against——"

"Silence! Somebody plug that man's jaw!"

Something pricked me between the shoulders, the pain was so sharp that it made me sick and giddy. When my eyes cleared I saw Urdin standing up and shaking his fist at me, I saw Anton dropping back into his chair with Gerudin holding his arm.

". . . to conduct this Court in decency and order if everyone thinks he can jump up and bawl and scream whenever the fancy takes him? . . . Comrade Linevir, do you want this woman brought into the Court again or not."

Linevir smiled. "Count Scheffler evidently does not wish it. No doubt he has good reasons. I should not be so discourteous as to put my own poor wishes before his."

Urdin looked at him with (I thought) a shade of genuine distaste.

"You mean by that, I take it, that your case is concluded?"

"Perhaps it would not be too bold to say that the case as a whole is concluded."

"Very well! . . . Gerudin!"

I thought that Anton was unconscious; his arms were crossed on his knees, his forehead on his wrist. But as Gerudin was shuffling to his feet and clearing his throat, he spoke again. It was hardly more than a whisper.

"I do not wish to be defended by this man."

Gerudin shrugged his shoulder and sat down. Urdin looked up impatiently.

"You don't—do you mean you want to conduct your own defence?"

"What?"

"Do you want to conduct your own defence?"

"What? No. I—I would like Strubensohn."

"Strubensohn? Do you mean that at this advanced stage you actually propose to change——"

"May I suggest," Linevir put in, "that this is a device for wasting the Court's time! It seems to me that at this stage——"

Urdin closed his eyes for a moment. "My opinion is the same," he said. "Anton Scheffler, since you reject the services of Comrade Gerudin—whom no doubt you think too humble a practitioner to serve a man of your own forensic reputation—will you please tell us quickly whether you propose to defend yourself?"

A moment of silence. Anton was still in the same position, I wondered whether he had heard the question. Then:

"I want first of all to say something about my past association with the Russian Revolutionary Movement." His words filed out slowly in little groups, as if he were composing a telegram for which he could only afford a small sum. "And after that I am going to describe the way in which Druvalov has manipulated. . . ." The strength was ebbing from his voice: in the coughing, the impatient rustling of papers and scrape of chairs, his words were lost. Druvalov had moved and I thought he was going to say something; but he changed his mind and relapsed into his former apathy. I saw Djebraliev glance at Linevir, and Linevir stood up.

"Since M. Scheffler evidently wants to give us a very long speech, I beg to propose an adjournment."

"It would perhaps be fairer to M. Scheffler," Djebraliev added. "The strain of a long session——?"

Urdin looked at his watch and wiped his mouth.

"I should have thought," he remarked, "that anything there is left for the prisoner to say could be said in two minutes. However: since Comrade Djebraliev is so concerned for everybody's comfort!" He yawned, chivvied a particle of sleep-dust from the corner of his left eye, pushed back his chair. "At three-fifteen!" he said, and strolled out of the room.

Linevir lit a cigarette. He looked tired. Djebraliev, touching his scanty white hair into position, came round the table, threw a polite smile at Druvalov, and went over to speak to one of the reporters. Druvalov, with his hands in his pockets, was talking to Gerudin; the room had become the foyer of a provincial theatre, everyone was standing and chattering, Anton in his low wheeled-chair was left unnoticed. I was about to cross the room and speak to him when the man who had brought me in caught my arm and took me away.

§

I was taken not to the little room I had waited in before but to a larger one next door to it which was furnished as a drawing-room; a little overloaded with chinoiserie, but on the whole in good taste; I saw a woman's hand there. The guard told me that I might sit on the sofa and he gave me a cigarette. He said: "You must throw that away if anyone comes in."

He left me, but ten minutes later he came back.

"Mme Scheffler is to be brought in here," he said, as if delivering a message. "I have instructions that you are not to speak to each other. Do you understand that?"

I said: "Why should she be brought in here? I should rather be alone, I don't want——"

That, of course, was useless. He had left the door open, and there was the woman I had seen in the court-room, with Yelisaveta behind her.

She saw me at once, and recognized me, but she made hardly any sign. The woman took her to a chair, she sat down. She sat rather stiffly, as the poor do in doctors' waiting-rooms. The blue coat had been taken off, she was wearing a brown overall, the kind of thing that French women wear in the factories; I could see that there was no dress underneath. There was a mark, nothing more than the scratch of a pin, where the collar of the overall came down to the breast's cleft. At the corner of her mouth there was a very small drop of red; I should not have noticed that had there been any colour in her face. The woman who had brought her went away.

I stared at the brown overall. I remembered thinking, "That will have to be changed, its tone is too low against the blue wall, it would be impossible to grade the tones towards it." The guard, walking up and down the room, eyed us with a certain awkward pity. "Perhaps the barina would like a glass of tea, if I can get it?" She didn't answer. I said, "Yes, please——" and foolishly felt in my pockets. "It doesn't matter!" he said roughly, and I knew he was a southerner. "You're not supposed to talk," he mumbled, and went off down the corridor.

I went across to her and put a cushion behind her back; that was all I could think of to do. When I put my hand on her shoulder it was like feeling the shoulder of a dead man. I pulled a chair near to hers and sat half-turned towards her, afraid of hurting her with the pity in my eyes, afraid to seem callous by looking away. I said "Yelisaveta!" She did not seem to hear, she was rubbing her fingers in the idle way of women who are proud of their hands. But suddenly she turned her head, as if shaking off a day-dream, and looked at my eyes with a doctor's narrow curiosity.

She said: "Alexei, why are you looking at me like that? Alexei, were you there, where all those men were? Did you hear what I said? Tell me that, did you hear me?"

I said: "In the Court? Oh yes, I was there, yes, I was there—I don't remember what you said—no, I wasn't listening, it wasn't worth listening, no one was speaking a word of truth."

She put a finger between her teeth. "Oh. Oh I see! . . . It's over now? No, no it isn't over, he said I'd have to go back, Djebraliev said so, he said I'd spoilt my evidence——"

"No, I don't think they'll want you back."

"You mean it's over?"

"No, but there's nothing left except what Anton has to say."

"Oh."

For a moment she seemed to lose all interest in what we were talking about; that had often been her way when one talked of serious subjects. As I started to speak again she stopped me. "Wait! Listen! I thought I heard someone."

I listened.

"I can't hear anything."

"What? No, I suppose it's all right. He said we weren't to talk, that man—he may tell Djebraliev. . . . No, no, it doesn't matter, I suppose it doesn't matter. You'll stay here if Djebraliev comes, you won't go away!"

"I'll try, but——"

"No, listen, we mustn't waste time, there isn't any time. I want you—come closer, Alexei, I can't talk very loud, I can't think clearly —I want you to tell me: did Anton hear me, what I said?"

It was no good evading that.

"I expect so—but he knew it wasn't you speaking, he knew you were only saying what they made you say."

"Yes, but did it make any difference, what I said? That's what I want to know. Tell me, I must know that, you were there, you heard——"

I said: "I don't think anything made any difference. They knew what they wanted, Druvalov and the rest of them, they were going to get it somehow. I had to say—the same sort of thing that you did. It's no good our——"

She cut me short with a flash of her old haughty impatience. "What do you mean, 'they knew what they wanted'? Do you mean—Alexei, do you mean they're going to kill him?" Fiercely, "Tell me that, tell me, are they going to kill him—after all this——?"

I said: "I don't know, I—I don't know."

She got up and went to the door, pulled at the handle as if she

didn't realize it was locked, came back brutally twisting her own wrist, stared at me as if I were a senseless churl refusing to help her. I thought she was going to faint, I said quickly, "Sit down, sit down, it's no good wasting your strength." But she didn't hear that.

"You must find Djebraliev!" she said. "I want him, I want to see him. He'd like to have my body, I know that. He's that kind of old man, I saw the way he looked at it when—I shall offer him that, I haven't anything else——"

I said soberly: "Djebraliev isn't the important one . . . and if he wanted it he'd take it——"

She sat down at last, with her eyes half closed. As if I had been a child bothering her with nursery chatter, she said, "What are you saying? I don't understand. . . . What am I to do, why can't you tell me that, why don't you say something? . . . Alexei, I want to go back, I want to go back into the Court. I can do that now, I'm all right now. I shall tell Djebraliev I'm going to say what he wants—I don't mind what he does afterwards. . . ."

She began to weep; it was a relief to see her weeping. I could come close to her now and hold her hand, I felt a pressure from her hand responding. Her head was bent right down, so that I saw only her neck and her hair; that, and the brown overall. And I lost for a moment all that I knew of her, and I remembered she had been kind to my beloved, and that Anton had loved her. She was speaking again, it must be her voice though it seemed to come from some other lips, so high, so narrowed, and I bent down, trying to hear her.

". . . saw him there, all alone in the chair. I never knew, I never knew he was—so great as that. . . . If I'd known—if I'd known, I could have loved him—I could have loved him as he wanted me. I could have known how to make him love me."

But her voice could not live in the rushing current of her tears, the force of it tore wide the sluice she had opened. I watched her thankfully, as if a little of my own heart's pain could be carried off in the flow of hers, I didn't try to restrain or comfort her. I kept my arm about her for a little while, and then I moved away, leaving her to spill what grief she could into her body's violence. For a long time she was crumpled there, crying with a noise like laughter.

The storm had dropped, grown soundless, when I heard footsteps again; not from the passage where the guard had gone out but from the other side.

There was a door I hadn't noticed, behind where Yelisaveta was sitting. It was opened without the sound of a key turning, a woman came in with two glasses of tea. I knew her face at once; at the first moment I thought she was the woman called Dunyasha who had

talked to me on the night when the Vadorka was taken; but this was a younger face, that of a woman in the early fifties, more refined, more predominantly intellectual: the forehead very finely made, the eyes, deep set in high straight cheeks, remotely lit with the scholar's intensity. She was very small, but in the close, severe black dress she wore her smallness did not immediately strike me, my eyes were fixed to the fine grey head, spoilt only by a scar that ran from ear to chin, and her hands, which were oddly rough and callous. She held both glasses against her breast with one arm, as the Polish women do when they go out to the harvesters; with her free hand she picked up a little table and put it between us. "There you are! Tregelik said you'd like that."

Yelisaveta started and looked up. "What? . . . Who are you, who is it, Alexei?"

She said: "I am Druvalov's wife. . . . But you needn't be scared, Pyotr Yevgenievitch's affairs are nothing to do with me. . . . You had better drink that, don't let it get cold." She was regarding us with open curiosity. She said to me: "I agree with what they told me, Mme Scheffler is a very beautiful woman. Having no looks myself, I enjoy seeing beauty in others. It's a great pity . . . *eh bien*——"

She was going away, with an air of some reluctance, but I stopped her. The face had come back into its surroundings: the end of a railway wagon against a darkening sky, a group of men and women standing dejectedly in the snow, a hoarse voice shouting, "Gruchov, come here, hold the lamp, keep your eye on that one!" I said: "Excuse me—I've just remembered, I know who you are. You are Sonia Schevolciewicz!"

She nodded carelessly. "My photograph has sometimes been in the newspapers."

I said: "No, that wasn't how I knew. I saw you once before, at—wait—at Petropavlovsk."

She shook her head. "I don't remember."

"It's of no importance," I said. "—Only then it was I who had the pleasure of bringing tea for you. It was in a tin mug, I had to hold it for you to drink. Your hands were behind your back."

"I remember that," she said. "Not you—but someone holding the mug." She pulled up one of her tight sleeves to show me a white mark on her wrist. "That serves as well as my memory. . . . Where was I going to then? Oh yes, to Kirensk."

"And my wife and I to Krasnyesk."

She said: "You must forgive me for not remembering you—it was a long time ago." She smiled faintly. "If you had been a notorious assassin I expect I should have remembered your face—

as you have remembered mine. . . . But we are bothering Mme Scheffler with this chatter."

Again I stopped her just as she was going. I said deliberately:

"I only wanted to remind you that you belonged to a group of terrorists who were defended by Count Scheffler in the trial at Kiev."

That was a chance shot, and my aim was wrong.

"You are mistaken," she said coldly. "My trial—on that occasion —was here in Moscow."

I said: "Ah, then I beg your pardon. You are saved from what would have been a rather embarrassing position."

She looked away for a moment, then she said in a hardened voice: "Yes, I understand you. You mean that if it had been Count Scheffler who saved me from hanging I should have been grateful to him for the rest of my life. I should have pleaded for him with my husband, like the heroine in a book. I'm afraid you have retained some rather bourgeois ideas, M. Otraveskov."

That provoked me to furious anger. But it was Yelisaveta who answered her, her voice made more bitter by its huskiness. "Yes, I suppose it is a bourgeois idea, that the wife of a leading Communist could be capable of anything so humble as gratitude."

Flushing angrily, Mme Druvalov took a step towards her, and then checked herself. She picked up the empty glasses and went out of the room. But almost at once she came back, went across to the other door and stood leaning against it.

"I don't know if it's any use trying to make you understand," she said, controlling the fury in her voice, "you who are ignorant of everything, the poverty and suffering which has been the life of ninety-nine hundredths of the Russian people. But I shall give you your chance to understand it. You are shocked because I talk contemptuously of gratitude. Gratitude—that's a simple virtue, a dog is grateful when you're kind to it. There are other virtues that do not come so easily, they have to be learnt. You think, I suppose, that I have no ordinary feelings—you think that when I shot at Pobietsnov I was joyous and carefree? I tell you, when I saw the blood running down on to his collar I was as frightened, as grief-stricken, as any other woman who saw it; but I knew I had acted rightly—that is the difference. That is what people of your kind cannot understand. You think that Pyotr Yevgenievitch has brought your husband to this trial because he hates him—a simple mind such as yours cannot conceive of any other impulse. You will not believe me, but I tell you that Pyotr doesn't hate your husband at all—he actually has some affection for him——"

I said: "That is very interesting——"

"Be quiet, fool, and listen to me! I'll tell you why Count Scheffler has been brought to this. It is not because he has challenged us, it is because he has challenged the thing we have lived for and suffered for, the thing I was nearly hanged for. Count Scheffler is a man of your own kind. He hunts to find some good in malicious people, he becomes attached to people who are dangerous. With him, it is always the individual who matters. He cannot think of the millions who have suffered and who will go on suffering if we allow the acquisitive and cruel to have their way again. He is a lawyer, he thinks in terms of particular cases, he is simply unable to picture the great march of liberation that we have begun, the vast campaign to free two hundred millions from the yoke of poverty. The man Lusanov was of no importance—he may or may not have been a reactionary of the dangerous kind. The important thing is that Scheffler insisted on defending him against my husband's strongest advice, he thought that the risk of a serious breach between two great sections of the Moscow Communist Organization was a matter less worth considering than the fortunes of one old gentleman. Yes, you can think as you like! I simply tell you that a new Russia is not to be made in a single generation—as we are making it—if every smallest step is to be clogged by petty scrupulosities. . . . If Count Scheffler were a nobody it would not matter. A nobody can be kept out of harm's way. Unfortunately he has a legend attached to him, a legend which certain ill-advised people are industriously preserving. And one or other must go—the legend or Count Scheffler."

She stood to one side as the key was turned in the door behind her. I thought it was the guard coming to fetch me back to the Court; but it was Druvalov. He stood just inside the door with his hands deep in his trouser pockets, his head sunk down on his fat neck, looking about him with his tired, gloomy eyes.

"Who said that these people were to be put in here?" he asked.

"I don't know," his wife said. "Pyotr, you are not to go back to the Court before you've had something to eat."

He seemed scarcely to hear her. Coming towards us, he said over his shoulder—"No. No, I won't eat till this business is over. You might see if the guards have taken something to Scheffler."

"I've seen to that."

"All right." He turned a chair to face us, sat down heavily and took out his cigarettes. "Madame will smoke? . . . But you will! Sonia, matches, I've used my last. . . . Now listen, will you please! Yes, you Madame! I am going to explain to you, quite simply and candidly, why your husband has been brought to trial."

"I have just been explaining that," Mme Druvalov said.

He turned his head sharply. "Why must you butt into these affairs?" he said angrily. "Haven't I told you a million times that what goes on in the Court-room is my affair and not yours! . . . I'm sorry, my love, I'm sorry. That is very useful—you've prepared the ground for me, that's excellent." He turned to Yelisaveta again. "You will have understood, then, that Count Scheffler's position is—very serious. No, I don't want to argue with you—please, please don't tire me with your arguments, I am really quite an intelligent man, I can see your side of things just as clearly as you. The fact that you have to accept is that, according to the normal order of things, your husband has incurred the same fate as Debenzkov, Lemuril, and others of whom you have heard. Linevir will ask for the same sentence, and there is no normal reason why Urdin should not award it. But I think—I say I think—that it can be avoided if I myself make special representations. I shall be ready to do that if you are willing to help me."

Yelisaveta put her fingers in her eyes, looked at Druvalov and then at me.

"I don't understand——"

I said: "Both of us are prepared to do anything——"

"Good!" he said. "You, I think, can do something that I have failed to do. You must persuade our friend that it is necessary for him to make a full confession——"

"Of what?" I asked.

"Don't interrupt me, please, my patience is rather short these days! —To make a full confession, coupled with a public statement that he will in future refrain from acts hostile to the existing régime. . . . I make no promises; but if he is willing to give us that guarantee I think it may be possible for him to receive a comparatively lenient sentence which will in fact set him at liberty quite shortly."

He looked at me inquiringly. I hesitated. But Yelisaveta said at once, quickly and nervously:

"Yes, I shall persuade him. If you give me time. You must give me some time, that's all I ask. Alexei, you will help me?"

"I shall try to help you."

"Then I may see him now? Please, I should like to see him now. Will you please take me to him!"

"Patience, patience!" Druvalov looked round for something on which to press out his cigarette. I saw his eyes meet those of his wife, I saw the expression "I'm not used to women like this, I do not care for hysterical women." He said: "Your husband will be brought in here. . . . Sonia, will you go and find Tregelik, please, and tell him that Count Scheffler is to be brought in here. And on

your way you might go into Savvushkin's room and see if he's got the Bashkir statistical return ready for me. I want to go through that."

Mme Druvalov went dutifully to the door; and paused there. Looking across at Yelisaveta, she said seriously: "I hope—I hope you will be successful. For your sake and for ours. . . . Pyotr, no! Not another cigarette! You are smoking too much."

When she had gone, Druvalov went over to the window and stood with his back to us, whistling against his gums. Yelisaveta moved her chair a little nearer to mine, but she did not look at me, her eyes were on Druvalov's back. She was sitting stiffly now, as when she had first come in, holding tightly to the edge of her chair, like a nervous passenger in a Lipetz troika; but she no longer looked cowed and frightened. Her breathing was regular at last, she had cleared away the traces of weeping from her face, only her eyes recorded it. I fidgeted, time dragging on my weary impatience; I should have used that space to shape my thoughts, but my mind like a broken-masted yacht had lost its steering-way. Druvalov worked at a little scab at the back of his neck, trying to pick the top off. Yelisaveta was steadier than us both, she seemed to be all alone, only her lips moved very slightly.

It was she who broke the silence. She said suddenly: "M. Druvalov! You have talked of what is to happen to my husband. You have said nothing about Captain Otraveskov."

He did not look round.

"Captain Otraveskov gave satisfactory evidence," he said. "I see no reason why anything should happen to him. . . . But I am not interested in Captain Otraveskov."

"No, but I am interested," she said.

He turned round then.

"What do you mean by that?" he asked tersely.

"I mean that you are asking me to do something for you, and that I'm raising my terms."

I said sharply: "Yelisaveta, you mustn't be foolish! You know——"

"Be quiet, Alexei, I——"

"I think you are mistaken," Druvalov said coolly. "I have not asked you to do anything for me, only for your husband."

"You're quibbling," she said, "you're pretending to be a fool. I may not be a very clever person, but I've sense enough to realize that you aren't wasting all this time and trouble over something that has no importance to yourself. What you're thinking about is your own

prestige. Your prestige was damaged when my husband attacked you at the Weigh-House——"

Druvalov wiped his nose and stared at her as if she were a scrubby horse-coper. "I am not going to argue about that. If you think that my interest in the matter is greater than yours——"

"I don't think that——"

"Very well! As you have the greater interest, it is I who make the terms."

He went back to the window.

She made one more effort. "M. Druvalov!" Her voice had lost its steadiness. "I am asking for your generosity——"

"I am not interested in generosity, in you, or in Captain Otraveskov," he said. "I am not even interested—as you seem to think—in my own fortunes. I have only one interest. That is the Proletaria Revolution."

The door clicked open. Mme Druvalov came in and went straight across to her husband, to whom she said something I did not catch. Tregelik followed, pushing the chair, with Anton's small, exhausted body perched in it.

Tregelik put the chair in the middle of the room and stood behind it, like a soldier who has brought his equipment for inspection. Yelisaveta got up, and would have gone to Anton's side, but Druvalov, turning round, said with nervous impatience, "Sit still, please!" Staring towards us, Anton said, "Is that—Yelisaveta? Over there, I can't quite see you——" She said: "Yes, it's 'Lisveta!"

Druvalov moved forward a little, hesitated, stepped back and propped his seat on the edge of a table. From his inner pocket he took a folded quarto sheet of typescript, thoughtfully fingered it, half opened it and then paused to pick his nose, gazing presbyopically about the room like a stage manager checking his properties. Mme Druvalov, standing very still, glanced at him anxiously. My mind sprang back to the library of my home in Kursk, old Dr. Munikov waiting for our total silence before he began to read my father's will; then, curiously, to Colonel Vestil, as I had seen him at the first of the Mariki conferences. They could hardly have differed more, Vestil with his soldierly figure, his firm carriage, and this short, bull-necked, untidy man who looked as if he had never in his life been out of doors: perhaps what linked them in my thoughts was a common air of passing uncertainty, the hesitance of practised wolf-hunters faced suddenly by a satyr. The moment passed. Druvalov spread the sheet and put it on Anton's knees.

"I want you to read that."

Anton glanced at it. He said, with something as near a smile as his drawn face would give him, "Is that really necessary? I think I could say it by heart, thanks to our friend Djebraliev's tuition."

I felt a movement from Yelisaveta. But she said nothing.

Druvalov went back to the table, took out the cigarette he had crammed in his pocket and lit it.

"I dislike Djebraliev almost as much as you do," he said thoughtfully. "But that's beside the point. . . . I told you this morning that you had had your last chance. I've changed my mind. Mme Scheffler has persuaded me—well, no matter, I need only say that I've decided to open my offer once again. I know you've been through—an exhausting time—but I want you to try and think clearly. We are both lawyers—in one branch or another—we both understand the business of separating thought from emotion. We have two facts to work on: first, that you and I differ in our political opinions; second, that my opinions are those which obtain among responsible Russians today and which are guiding Russia's destiny—for good or ill. You will recognize, I think, that those are facts; you are not so blind or so stupid as to imagine that a single man's opposition—yours—is going to deflect the march of millions. You are an inconvenience, and that is all. But inconveniences have to be altered or removed. . . . You are comparatively a young man, a great deal younger than I am. You have every chance of recovering your health. I have very little doubt that a man of your intellectual ability and—and virtues, of whatever kind they may be—can still find happiness and—I suppose—some kind of usefulness, in some other country which clings to the old-fashioned libertarianism. In Russia there is no place for you. I think that must be plain to you now. In reality, your Russian career has ended already. My proposal is simply that you should follow the course which logic dictates to you, by leaving Russia and starting a new life elsewhere. That can be arranged for you. All that is required is your signature on that paper, and a short public statement in Court. . . . He is not very comfortable, Sonia—will you arrange the cushions for him."

For a few moments Anton made no movement. Then he turned to me. "Alexei—it is Alexei, sitting over there?—Alexei, have you seen this that he wants me to sign?"

"That is not Otraveskov's business——" Druvalov began; but I interrupted him:

"It is very much my business, since I have to help persuade him to sign it."

Druvalov shrugged his shoulders. I took the paper.

Anton said wearily: "Oh, they've got you on to it. . . . And you, 'Lisveta?"

It was Mme Druvalov who answered that. "Mme. Scheffler is a woman," she said quietly. "We women have a quicker appreciation of what is logically necessary than men have."

I glanced quickly through the first and second paragraphs, which were merely a resumé of what I had heard in Court. "I acknowledge that for many years I have been acting secretly in the interests of the czarist and capitalist régime. . . . I further acknowledge that at Mariki-Matesk . . . I conspired, and took the main part, in a plan for the destruction of the revolutionary communist Ilya Karamachik. . . . I further acknowledge that since the establishment of the Soldiers' and Workers' Government in Russia I have been a paid and active member of the Kurotskist organization, that I have given moral and practical encouragement to counter-revolutionary acts of terrorism. . . ." The third paragraph was worded thus:

"I now recognize that the Soldiers' and Workers' Government, under the leadership of Comrade Lenin, is the lawful Government of all Russia, embodying the true will of the whole Russian people, and that its authority is therefore absolute. I am now persuaded, and wholly confident, that under the benevolent direction of the Soviets the Russian people are being led towards material and spiritual liberation."

"I'm afraid I can't agree with anything you've said, Druvalov." Anton's eyes were shut, his voice sounded as if he were speaking from the end of a long corridor. "Our difference is not a matter of mere politics, it is a difference in our attitude towards truth, towards the purpose of man's existence. I don't believe that your opinions are held by all responsible Russians. I don't believe that one man's opposition is useless. And finally, I don't believe that there is any virtue in your opinions so long as you have to torture a woman to uphold them." His voice rose a little. "You see, the real difference between us is that you regard truth as a bourgeois superstition; you think that when it hinders you you can always crush it out with electric bulbs and strips of rubber. That is what the Okranha thought. I disagree with that."

Suddenly Mme Druvalov stamped her foot.

"Pyotr, have we got to listen to this man for ever and ever."

"You can go away," Druvalov said sharply, "if you find your nerves are getting flaccid. . . . No, my dear, I didn't mean that! But I would rather you went away, you are tired, my darling. . . ."

Anton quietly: "I should like Sonia Schevolchiewic to hear me, if she has the courage."

Druvalov looked at his watch. "We have not much time. I have not asked you for a speech."

Anton nodded. "No, that's right, you didn't ask me." His voice was sinking again. "It's only this. I believe that every surrender to cruelty makes the battle harder for those who follow. I want you to see, Druvalov, that truth can't always—can't always be flogged into silence."

Fiddling with his little finger, Druvalov had at last worked the ring he wore there past the joint. With a little struggle he slipped it back again. His shoe-lace was undone; that had been faintly worrying me all the time; noticing it now he stooped abruptly and tied it.

"You will be wanted in the Court in seven minutes," he said, going towards the door. "Sonia, I think you have some things to mend for me. . . . You can come with me, Tregelik. . . . Mme Scheffler, you have made me a promise, and I have made you one. . . ."

The two doors shut, leaving us alone.

Anton said: "Lisveta! Lisveta, come a little nearer, won't you—I can't see you clearly."

She went towards him slowly, as if she were frightened of him. But when she was close to him she suddenly dropped forward, down on to her knees, her breast upon his thighs. I remember thinking how strange it was that a woman so tall as she knew how to make herself seem little against a small man in a wheeling-chair. And I remember the way his hand moved, slowly and painfully, till it found her hair.

Looking out of the window, I saw a one-legged man clearing the snow; he had attached a piece of board to the end of his stump and was using that as a pusher; that is all I can recall, I don't know if it was a street or yard I looked on. I heard Yelisaveta say, "I didn't know! I didn't know!" And I heard her say, "Now that I know, I can give you everything, everything I've never given you. . . . It isn't too late, we can begin now. You will let us begin, my beloved, my own, my own, my beloved, my own, my own. . . ."

Presently Anton called to me. And then I saw that she was still kneeling beside the chair, that she had his hand pressed with both of hers against her mouth, her hair covering his wrist. And I looked slowly up to his face, and saw in one instant what we have never painted, the height of joy and depth of agony alloyed in one man's mouth and eyes. He whispered:

"Alexei. . . . What am I to do?"

I could not look at him. Touching his shoulder, but with my face turned away, I said slowly:

"I think you—I think your duty—is to her—now. It's worth—it's worth more than any other duty. . . . You can't—you can't throw that away, what she is offering you."

For a moment he did not answer. Then, as one who hears of a bereavement too crushing to be comprehended, he said: "Oh . . ." and a little afterwards. "Where is the paper, where have you put it?"

I could not at once find the paper, it had fallen and floated under a chair. When I found it I took it to him, with a book to rest it on. I put it on the arm of his chair, I found a pencil and put it into his hand. I saw then that Yelisaveta was looking up at his face.

"Alexei!" She did not turn to me, her eyes were fixed on Anton's eyes. Her voice was low and steady. "Tell me, Alexei: if they kill him, how—how will they do it? Will it mean—more pain?"

How could I answer that? But Anton answered her.

"Pain? The pain is nothing, they only shoot you."

She turned to look at me then, and finding that I had moved away she got up and came over to where I stood.

"Alexei, you must help me!" She was like a bewildered child, like a starling placed for the first time in a narrow cage. "Alexei, you must make me clear, I can't make myself clear! Alexei I want him, I want him, why can't I have him?"

I said: "But you can have him, you will——"

She shook her head. And now I could only just hear her, so quiet she had to make her voice to hold it even.

"No. No, I shall only have the lover I used to want, the lover who would give me what I wanted. Don't you see that, Alexei? It isn't a lover I want, it's him, it's Anton. How could I love him as I do now when I'd destroyed the only thing I've learnt to love in him?"

"Destroyed?"

"Destroyed the truth in him."

She turned away, not brusquely, but as if I were some waxwork she had talked to by mistake. She went back to Anton and stood beside him.

"Toni! Toni, you are going to sign it for me—for my sake?"

He nodded. He was sitting there like one lost in a busy city, he had still not signed it. She took the paper and folded it and put it inside her overall. Looking down at him, she said slowly, so slowly:

"Yes, that is a gift you were offering me. You couldn't have offered me a greater gift. It was yourself, it was more than yourself, it was your soul's treasure, it was everything life meant to you. Beloved . . . I wanted it, I wanted it. . . ." Her voice was crumbling. "Beloved, I can't . . . I can't take a gift like that."

Tregelik opened the door. Standing sideways, he said, "I'm sorry . . . M. Scheffler must come now." But they didn't hear him, it was a long time before they heard him.

§

In ten minutes he came back to fetch me. I asked if he were taking me to the Court-room again; he said briefly, no, there was a car waiting for me outside, he didn't know where I was going. When we were just outside the door he furtively slipped something into my pocket. "I got that for you, you can have it in your cell." It was a piece of oatcake.

The passage seemed longer this time, I found myself counting the panel divisions and wondering if my legs would survive it. From the offices along both sides there came the sound of voices and women laughing and the continuous cliquetis of typewriters. A door was open, I caught sight of a man in shirt-sleeves with a lock of fine grey hair hanging down on his forehead, I remember now the sound of his pleasant voice dictating: ". . . its fervent interest in regional cultural development by financial support for the new museum of crafts at Nijni Dievitsk. . . ." A girl hurrying past with an armful of papers paused to stare at me. We went through the first door, leaving it to bump and swing and bump behind us, came into a group of men smoking and gossiping who stood aside to let us pass. ". . . sitting a long time today. Is it still over Scheffler?" ". . . over soon. Yes, a complete confession, so I understand." ". . . no difference. Druvalov's quite right, one cannot simply afford to have the articulate eccentrics running loose. . . ." A fat little workman took out his cigarette and politely held the second door for me. The stairs were on my right now. Over to the left I saw the door of the Court-room open, I just caught Urdin's thin, contemptuous voice: ". . . unnecessarily protracted . . ."

On an impulse I said to Tregelik, "I want to go back there, to the Court-room. Just five minutes—won't you let me?" He would not have allowed it; but someone coming up the stairs had heard me, I saw as his face came under the skylight that it was Djebraliev. "Of course!" Djebraliev said, "if Captain Otraveskov wants to. You can wait for him here."

He held my arm as if I were an old friend, took me just inside the door and left me there, crossed to his former place at the table. The men about me were leaning against the wall or over the back of chairs, one or two were sitting down, sideways, like those who wait for a better place in a theatre; four of them were playing cards, everyone

was smoking. The men along the big table lolled and yawned, the man who looked like a Prussian officer was fast asleep. Urdin, gazing dejectedly at the inkwell in front of him, rolled a cigarette and stuck it in a corner of his mouth, Djebraliev leant across to light it. At the reporters' table Toyber, with his dreamy eyes on the ceiling, was writing steadily in his shorthand book; from his colleagues I heard a continuous hum of sotto-voce conversation, I caught the words "Alors, à dimanche, s'il fait du soleil." Only Linevir seemed fully awake; he had washed off the superficial marks of his fatigue, his eyes were lit religiously, his voice was sharp, clipped to precision, eager.

". . . four bullets, four bullets with a sacred mission: to pierce the smooth skin, the putrid flesh of a master-hypocrite; to cut into a cankered heart, to smash and pulverize and burn away one more of the twisted, rotting lives by which the People's life is poisoned!"

The cigarette was badly rolled, Urdin bit off the end and spat it over his shoulder. Watching his face closely, I saw the pouchy, listless eyes of a connoisseur in pedlary.

"I take it that Comrade Linevir's observations, in so far as they have a practical application, will command a general agreement?"

Druvalov coughed and shifted his chair.

"If you will allow me, Comrade, I have a plea to make in this man's favour. But first of all I understand that he has something to say himself. Perhaps, if you will just have that much patience——"

Urdin blew out a cloud of smoke. He said shortly: "I dislike long speeches. However, this is a Court of Justice. Justice demands that every prisoner be given a proper hearing. . . . What do you want to say, Scheffler?"

All the talking had stopped. For a moment Gerudin was in my way, then I saw that Anton was struggling to get up. I saw Druvalov look at him inquiringly, I heard him say, "Your paper—you've got it, haven't you? . . . All right, I have another copy, here!"

"There is no need for the prisoner to stand up," Urdin said drily.

But Anton went on struggling. They didn't interfere. He got himself up at last, leaning against the table, his eyes still closed; but that had taken most of what was left in him, and he could not speak for several moments. I doubted if he would speak at all, the white mask was so stiff, I could see no token of consciousness. But when his voice came it was perfectly clear; no stammer; small, but perfectly clear.

"I love God, and I love the people of Russia, and I deny all the charges."

Urdin rose. "I am sorry you have been kept sitting so long Comrades." He looked both ways along the table, inquiringly.

54

"Listen! There's a door at the end of the passage, on the right, which opens on to the fire staircase. That goes down to the laundry yard. There's a gate on the other side of the yard leading out into the Tchulkovaya. That gate will be unlocked tonight at twelve o'clock. Just for ten minutes. Do you understand?"

§

Those words, whispered in a deliberate way by the blear-eyed little warder who looked after me, were my awakening from a long, unquiet sleep. There are some who claim to remember the very moment in infancy when they first attained self-consciousness: in just that way I recollect the warder's phlegmy voice, his perky face watching me sidelong, as the material frame of the moment when I was rejoined with the flow of past experience.

The interval, as it stands in memory, starts from a moment when I came out into the street from the K.P.J. building. Walking down the stairs I had felt very hot and stifled, my legs had been loose and difficult to control. The street door opened and I stood on the steps for a second or two. A motor was waiting in the road, a brown car with a dilapidated hood. Between me and the car the pavement was empty; that corridor was held by soldiers with linked arms; the rest of the street was (or seemed to me then) packed tight with people. I heard someone shouting. I thought I caught the name "Scheffler"; and glancing up, to my left, I saw a big man rather like Roumaniev leaning over the side of a little balcony and furiously waving his arms. As I stepped down to the pavement, with the guard's hand in my armpit, the crowd sent up a roar that came to me like the hot blast when a calciner is opened. I heard a woman yell, "There, that's the bastard!" and I saw a short, fat man squeezing between the soldiers. I have a sharp picture of his face, red and pimply, with fierce little eyes, and of the dirty olive-green blouse he was wearing. I realized that he was coming to strike me, but I watched him lazily, the self-protective instinct failing. I am almost sure that he didn't reach me, certainly I do not recall the pain of any blow. Just afterwards I saw the footboard of the car, a strip of rubber with a V cut in it, swinging up towards my eyes.

From that place the period of quietness starts. Through the square window just above my head I could see the sky, cut by a church's dome; and I could watch with constant satisfaction the gentle flow of clouds softer than Raphael's, indolently grouping them into hazy pictures, a flock of sheep with a werewolf chasing them, a girl with long hair and feathery train streaming behind her who changed as I looked into a leaning pine-tree. The blue would give place to a fierce crimson, darkness absorbed it, and someone pulled down a yellow blind. When the light came back there were no clouds at all, there was nothing to see but a sheet of grey. That did not matter, I would sleep today, and through the day following; and in time, from the alternating light and darkness, the sky showed free again, and a small cloud stole out from the edge of it like a mischievous child, and a buxom matron rolled out to pursue him.

Further down, my eyes caught the edge of a brown blanket, and a piece of yellow tape with the words *Bouginski Prison Hospital.* For a long time that meant nothing; but one day I realized that hospitals were for sick people, and since I lay here on a bed they must think me ill. That gave me a mild amusement, for I did not seem to be ill at all; I was simply disinclined to move my body, or to keep my eyes open for long at a time, or to make my mind work when they asked me questions. Later on, the name Bouginski linked itself with a fleeting memory: somebody saying: "The Bouginski Hospital, that's where they make you well before they shoot you." I had no idea who had said those words, but I took them as authoritative. And in time this brought me some anxiety, a tenuous fear that if the shooting was delayed too long I should first return to understanding. That much I understood: that my mind's contentment could not last, that as its liquid form congealed, the shapes I dreaded would make their impress once again. Sometimes a man who reeked of garlic came to wash me, I had to sit up with the boards of the bed-head sticking into my back; and then, with the cold water trickling down to my chest, I caught sight of the path which led to the country of sorrows. But I need not go that way just yet; I was flat on my back again now, with the sky to watch, with hours to go before the soup was brought; and surely before I had to start that journey they would shoot me. Donik, the man's name was; at least, that was what the others called him. I said, once or twice, while he was washing me, "Tell me, will you, Donik, do you have to stand up before they shoot you?" But I don't remember that he ever answered.

Day after day with no blue in the sky. A week must have gone without any blue, a month perhaps. But it came again, I actually saw it as I watched, a gusset opening. And now it was all pure blue,

and now another army came, huge clouds like boulders, drawn across across so slowly that I could hardly see the motion. A lovely bird—I do not know the name, but it was like a seagull—slid down from nowhere and wheeled and floated in my patch of sky, all as I thought for my enjoyment, and at last flew off with powerful strokes towards the dome. A week passed and it appeared again; this time I only saw it for a moment, the sun on the white of its flashing wings; but the pleasure it gave me was intense and lasting.

When I grew better they took me to a long, plain room, where the boarded walls, cheap-varnished in a flossy brown, were covered with salacious scribbling; it reminded me a little of the mess-room at Mariki. One chair had arms to it, and the other men—there were generally four or five of them—always let me have that one, while they sat mostly on a long bench with their backs against the wall. Of the faces I can only remember one; that face was vaguely familiar, and when the man told me that his name was Somov I knew that too; but I could nôt be troubled to connect him with any figure in the complex region I had left. He showed me much kindness, that fellow: when I was thirsty he would roar for Donik and make him bring me water: but one day I realized that he was no longer there, and when I asked what had happened to him they wouldn't tell me. There were two high windows, which showed you only a grey roof and a rabble of stumpy chimneys: they served chiefly to let in the bitter smell from some incinerator, which was always going when the weather was hottest; and whenever I pass the refuse yards in the rue Gaulière the sense of that room breathes on my mind again.

Sometimes I found myself weeping, chiefly from a remote sense of the summer passing and of my own debility; for although I walked firmly now, and could lift a heavy table, there was something in my stomach which choked the will for action. And often, when a thought of the past crept up to me, the house in the Viatschelaya, the trees coming to blossom, I broke into prayer, praying aloud and wildly as Kaffirs do, and to no god in particular. My prayer was always simple: that those two whom I loved should no longer be living: "God let Natalia and Vava be dead, let them be dead now!" for I could not think that a better state was possible for them. I prayed standing against the wall, and often hammering it with my fists, as if by physical force I could drive my petition through to the sleepy gods. My companions let me go on for a while, and then, with a gentleness I honour now, they took me away from the wall and talked to me and made me calmer. In time those outbursts became more rare, my nerves were steadying, I occupied myself by embroidering a handkerchief that Donik got for me. But my foremost interest was still

the passing of time. I watched the slow swing of the shadows, felt happy when Donik came to light the gas each evening; another day knocked off, one morsel more consumed from the thread of boredom; and tomorrow might be my day.

One thing happened that was out of the ordinary, A little parcel was brought to me, and inside I found a photograph. It was a crude snapshot, taken (if I remember rightly) by an Austrian soldier, which showed Anton and me standing together outside one of the long tents at Krozkohl. Anton had kept this in a morocco frame, and across the back of it I found he had written, "For Alexei, with my love: more in this than meets the eye." A little note was fastened to it, and I read:

> "Count Scheffler wished this to be sent to you. I remember someone bringing me a mug of tea at the station at Petropavlovsk, and I am not—as you think—incapable of gratitude.
>
> SONIA F. DRUVALOV."

When I received this I hardly gave it any meaning: it was a token drifting in from a world I had done with, I would not let it trouble me. I kept the photograph, however; and against my will it started in my mind an underflow of speculation, preparing me for the time when reason's mill-wheels must begin to turn again.

And one thing else I shall put on record, for those who care to believe it. At about noon one day, when my eyes were steady and a band of sunlight crossed my work and the other men were talking, I heard Natalia's voice, quite loud and clear. I heard her say two words, "With you," and again more faintly, "With you." That was all: a man started coughing and drowned the voice altogether. But afterwards something ran inside me like the winter's first rain flowing through parched courses, where the ground is dried too hard to drink it.

§

"That gate will be unlocked tonight at twelve o'clock. Just for ten minutes. Do you understand?"

From there experience is continuous. For perhaps an hour after he had gone I just repeated his words, till I came to wonder if I had imagined them. But now the wheels were moving and their pace grew steadier and faster. As yet I could not plan and calculate, look far ahead; at least it was clear, if he had spoken honestly, that death was no longer the event to which I travelled. All that security was gone, or might be gone. The small and easy world, the only one I had

known these many weeks, where food of sorts was brought to you, where you slept, awoke, existed, did no choosing—that world might pass from me as a lighted railway carriage draws away, to leave you in the half-lit bustle of a foreign station.

He had put me in a little room by myself. A clock was ticking on the wall and I saw that it was half-past nine. From half-past nine to twelve was three and a half hours: no, two and a half. In that time I must reach a decision. I tried the door into the passage and found it was unlocked already.

I had to look back now, trying to remember what life felt like when you went about as you pleased, worked for money, made your own arrangements. And in that backward search I came at one stride to my arrival in Petrograd, on leave from Mariki. The journey from Paulskov had started in hope and fear together, it had ended in bitterness and misery. Was I to go through that again? Throughout those days in the Logis des Hyacinthes I had been ready, if chance were given, to fight my way through a hedge of bayonets for just one glance at my loved ones, one touch of her hand, one smile from him. But the fiery agony of separation had become like that of my damaged leg, a dull and constant paint to which I had grown accustomed. That pain I could endure for a time, I had thought to go on bearing it until they killed me. Now I was offered new fears and a sharper torture, a spiking of old wounds.

"They are all right. I am looking after them." Yes, but that message had come many weeks before. Yelisaveta: I had seen her captive and crumpled, she might have died long before now. Anton had gone, he could not help me. And if, in Russia's vast confusion, I found my beloved again, could she be as I had left her, and not as I had found her in the Euphrosina Hospital?

Here, everything was settled. You sat and watched the shadows moving, they brought you food, in time they took you out and shot you.

The hand of the clock worked round, it was moving towards eleven now, and my stiff thoughts only counter-marched in dreary repetition. This place I knew, I was at home here; what reason could I find for going back to a world where I should be useless as well as lonely? Yet something told me that there must be a reason: there was a chance, one chance in fifty, that her life and spirit had stood out the storm, that somewhere she looked and prayed for me. Twenty past, twenty-five, half-past eleven. No, I could not face new battles, I had no strength for that. Here I was safe from everything but death, and death was perfect safety.

There was a little window, high up, and an iron bedstead under-

neath it. I climbed on to the head-frame, surprised and faintly pleased to find myself so agile; balanced there, leaning against the wall, rubbed a clear patch on the window frame. The yard into which I looked was very dark, but in a building over to the left which must have been the laundry there was one bright window, and against the leak of light I could just see the iron staircase. On the far side there was a high wall, with a shallow embrasure which showed me where the gate was; beyond, a curtain of trees through which a street lamp gleamed uncertainly. A motor went by, its yellow fan cutting a channel through the darkness. Between the trees I caught a glimpse of a group of boys strolling along the road, and when the motor's noise had gone I thought I could hear them laughing. Yes, I had forgotten, that was what freedom was like.

I was still looking out when a clock struck: I remember counting the strokes and waiting breathlessly for the last one. I got down from the bed and went out into the passage. A lamp was burning at the far end, there was no one about, no sound but the spasmodic coughing of someone in the general room. I would go along to the door at the end, just to see if it were really unlocked, just to satisfy my curiosity. I walked slowly, like one whose friends are trying to make him bathe on a cold day; I had the sense that someone was watching me. Yes, the door was open.

Standing at the top of the staircase I felt the air quick with frost. We were drawing into autumn, I had not realized that. I had no hat or overcoat, nothing but the linen blouse and trousers they had served to me. In the room I had left there were pipes along the skirting, it was cosy there, you could spend your time in pleasant dreaminess. Foolish, foolish, to shiver here, flirting with a pale temptation! I could just hear the sound of music, someone drubbing from a cheap piano the notes of a Chopin Polonaise. But I would not listen to that, I turned and went back to my room.

Ten minutes, Donik had said, and I saw that four of them had gone. Six minutes more and the dangerous, unwanted opportunity would all be over, the calm of regulated life go on again. I dropped on the chair and watched the clock's hand as I had watched it all the evening.

But the running out of time provoked new resolution. The tinkling tune I had heard still reached me here, my mind made a picture of the open gate and of someone coming to snap a padlock on the staple. Click!—and the last chance would be gone. How old was I now? I thought it was thirty-nine.

Four minutes to go. Refusing to think again, I let myself be carried on the gust: jumped up, hobbled and ran along the passage,

came out to the staircase and stumbled down the steps. At the bottom I stopped once more. Cold and the urgency of action had spurred my reason, I remembered the ancient trick they played on prisoners. A chance to escape: it was like the *tir aux pigeons,* you fluttered a little way and a crack shot brought you down: "Shot while attempting to escape"—at Popovedensk it had been the routine procedure. . . . For weeks I had been prepared for the last scene as I knew it, dull light of early morning, the dreary rectangle of wall, the folded handkerchief, order to load. This was different: to scurry through darkness, not knowing at which side you would hear the crack, whereabouts you would get the first red pain; without the paltry comfort that a soldier's business involved such accidents. It was back again, the terror I had thought so far behind me, the sickening, watery fear of men who lay in the shades. . . . Perhaps it was fear that drove me forward, for experience had taught me that a reckless boldness was the grip to hold that partner. I crouched and listened, crawled a few feet on my hands and knees, lost patience, upped and ran as if my very pace could beat a bullet's speed. The gate met me with the shock of a pine-tree falling; for these vast seconds, senseless to all but fear, I fumbled for the latch. My hand touched iron, jerked it and tugged, I thrust at the gap when it was half my width, went sprawling in the road. In a moment I was up and starting to run again, to run until my breath gave out. But a man sprang from the wall's shadow and caught my arm, "One moment, Comrade, steady!" And though I twisted like a weasel in a dog's teeth I had no strength left to escape him.

"Steady, Comrade, hold hard, steady!—what's the hurry?"

§

The building he brought me to was lit from top to bottom, to my fuddled eyes there were a thousand squares of light. Inside, the light was harsh and brilliant as in Druvalov's Pit, the *va-et-vient* was like mid-morning. Two flights of stairs, a passage broad enough for a tram to pass, *"Section of Telegraph,"* a hundred doors: the noise of transmitters filled the corridor with one incessant rattle, doors creaked and swung, tired men and girls in dirty overalls slipped out like parcels dropped on a travelling-band, came hurrying past me, disappeared again. Through this city of furious life I passed like Dante, foreign and separate; nobody looked at me, a man with a load of files who collided with my arm went on as if I hadn't been there. Now left, another passage; my Vergil stopped and opened a door. "In there! Sit down, will you, and wait!"

So: I was back in a familiar world. *Sit down and wait:* I knew the ropes of that.

I shut my eyes for a few moments, opened them again. A table and two chairs, a map of Russia, an oleograph of Lenin in a metal frame: I had slept, no doubt, and dreamed; a wild and curious dream. They had moved me while I slept to another room, presently Donik would come and put out the light. I seemed to hear the hum and rattle of transmitters, but that I supposed was a relic of my dreaming. I was puzzled, looking at my knees, to see my trousers muddy and torn.

It wasn't Donik who came. It was a tall, grey-haired woman in a tight, blue-serge dress, with military pockets and a leather belt. Her weary, sallow face was familiar: in another life I had known someone like this. She put a basket of papers on the table and sat down on the other side of it; took a letter, read it through, and wrote a memorandum in the margin before she spoke to me.

"Listen, Alexei, you must attend to me very carefully. I haven't much time——"

I jumped up. "Katie! What—why have you brought me——?"

"No, no, sit down!" she said impatiently. "I haven't time for gossip. Listen, now! Natalia is at Muropretsk—I've written down the address, there it is. What? Your friend took her there, that woman—what is her name? the Roumaniev girl—yes, the little boy too, of course. Yes, I arranged it. Now listen—Alexei, why won't you listen! I have told her—Mme Scheffler—I have told her that she must get the party down to Drevzhikahn by river, it's the only possible way out now. I'm not certain if it can be done, but it's the best chance. I advised her to get on the Rossner steamer a fortnight ago, but she has written that Natalia wouldn't agree. Natalia wanted to wait on the chance of your coming to join them. It was very foolish, but——"

"But you mean, Natalia is——"

"Alexei, can't you be quiet while I'm speaking! How am I to tell you what I've got to? Wait, you've muddled me! Yes, yes, Natalia wanted to wait for you. I've told Mme Scheffler that she is running the risk of missing the last boat—the river may be open till the fourteenth but certainly not after that. I've been in touch with the District Kommissar at Chevonik, all my information comes from him. . . . That means they may have gone now, I don't know how long Natalia may have held out."

The telephone rang.

"Militune! . . . Yes . . . yes. . . . Well, if Pischenev has got himself caught you must send someone else to take his place. No,

Schonik is no good, his German is hopeless, you must get Lippsacher back from Paris and send him. What? Oh, very well, it'll have to be Schonik, then. I shall write the articles myself, he must take them with him and place them as best he can, he mustn't write anything himself, he would only make stupid mistakes. . . . Yes, I'll have six articles dictated by seven o'clock."

I said: "Katie, I want you to tell me just this——"

"Do you want to join them?" she demanded. "Very well, you must attend to what I say! There will be a train leaving the Nijni station at 1.46—at least, if it runs. It runs most nights. I've told the kommissar to keep a place for you—he may do it or may not. You will be travelling as Sorbin Gaev, an agent of my department. I've got your papers for that—here, you see, they're all in this satchel. They won't take you any further than Muropretsk—they wouldn't be recognized in the next district. You understand that? You had better destroy them before you leave Muropretsk—yes, that's important, you must burn them. After that you will have to do as best you can. . . . You've got a coat? Everything you want?"

I took out the Krozkohl photograph. "As far as I know, this is the only thing in the world I possess. Strictly speaking I suppose these clothes don't belong to me."

"Of course, I'd forgotten that!" She banged the wall behind her and shouted "Tusha!" A boy came in. "Tusha, I want you to get an overcoat for Comrade Gaev, and things for him to travel with—a razor, I suppose, that kind of thing."

"And Ka—and Comrade, I wonder if I could have something—just something to drink? And perhaps something to eat."

She glanced at me sharply. It was the first time she had looked directly at my face, and I saw her lips move in a way I knew. But immediately she turned away again. "Oh—yes, Tusha, yes, see if you can find Comrade Gaev something to eat, and—and a glass of vodka. Wait, I'll give you a chit for it—take this to Lukhosin."

The boy went off, but as the door swung a man caught it with his foot and brought in a roll of galley slips. "Karl wants these passed for the mail at five."

"All right, yes, leave them!"

She unfurled the slips and ran her pencil down the top one, talking to me all the time.

". . . your railway pass at the top of the satchel—don't let anyone take that! And I've put some money there, it's in a leather bag inside, that'll be enough for you as far as Muropretsk. And there's a district exchange-note for Chevonik, that has Olkha's signature and my own, you'll have to get it endorsed by the Traffic Kommissar at

the district boundary—he'll probably charge you four Moscow roubles for that. You are not to mention my name—you understand that? If anything gets back here about it I shall simply repudiate my signature, I shall say that all the papers were forged. And whatever you do you are not to write to me, I can't—I can't have correspondence with anybody."

The telephone rang again. While she was answering, the boy Tusha came back with a tray on one hand, a travelling-case in the other, a heavy coat over his arm. "Everything you want in there, I think!" he said, with a smile; he was a handsome child, his smile was charming. "I found the coat in Comrade Militune's room, it may be a bit small for you——"

Katie put down the telephone. "All right, Tusha, yes, that's all right. . . . Oh, I shall want a car. Go to Lukhosin again, will you, and tell him I want a car to take Comrade Gaev to the station. Yes, as soon as possible. And when it's ready come back and tell me."

There was a bowl of tunny-broth on the tray, I had started on it already. She said: "You'll have to hurry with that," and went on with her proofs.

"Vassili's coat?" I asked, between two mouthfuls.

"What? I don't know. Yes, I think it was."

I went on eating; not hurriedly, for when one has not been fed too well or too often one eats deliberately, drawing a separate pleasure from each morsel; but when I finished the boy was still not back.

"Katie," I said at last, "Katie, you must let me say thank-you—for all this—I can't go away without——"

She looked up. "What?" Then, sharply: "You know I don't like that sort of talk, that sentimentality. . . . I can't talk to you, I've got these proofs to get through."

"Can I help you? You remember I did once——"

"No."

But I was not going to be put off like that, not by poor little Katie. I broke in again.

"Katie! Katie, couldn't you come with me, at least as far as Muropretsk——"

"Come with you! My dear Alexei, are you incapable of looking after yourself in a railway train? Do you think I've nothing to do, do you think I can leave my work, do you think this is a time——"

"But Katie, you look so ill, you can't go on like this——"

"You always say that!" she retorted angrily, "you always say how ill I'm looking! I suppose you imagine that when a woman's deserted by her husband—no, there's no need to say that!" Her voice

dropped. "Ill—what does it matter, what does illness matter when you are happy, when you are burning with happiness! Why can't you understand that! You, you were ready to give your life for Russia—that was your profession. Is it so strange to you that I should want to give my life for the real Russia, for Russia's people? No, it's no good, you can't picture the country we are making, you can't imagine a country loosed from selfishness and tyranny and greed, a Russia of universal opportunity. But I tell you, I tell you, Alexei, I saw them on Sunday, out there in the Red Square, half a million of them; I stood beside Comrade Lenin, I looked down at that ocean of humanity, I saw them lift their hands with a single movement, trusting him, trusting us to lead them into the kingdom of joy. And I saw then how little I mattered, a single person like me, a faded, useless woman. And I swore that what little I had I would give to them, all of me, my heart and my body; I would struggle and fight for them, I would work till my finger-bones were bare and my lungs too shallow to give me breath and my eyes used up and the pain in my chest too fierce for my body to hold. What else do you want me to do with myself? Do you think, with those helpless, trusting crowds before my eyes, I'd waste my life on anything smaller than that?"

I was spared from answering, for the boy came back just then. "The car is ready, Comrade!"

As the door opened she had dropped to her proofs again. She said, without looking up:

"All right! Go along, Gaev!"

Accustomed to simple obedience, I rose in silence, picked up my new impedimenta, and followed Tusha out of the room. But when I was half-way down the corridor she called me back. "Comrade Gaev, one moment!" I went back to the door and she beckoned me inside.

She stood a little way from me, gazing at my chin in a hard, uncertain way. She said suddenly:

"Alexei, I should like you to kiss me."

I kissed her on the lips, a thing I had never done before, holding her breast to mine as tightly as my little strength would serve. Her eyes were shut, and when I released her she turned away. She said in a shallow, fragile voice, as she went back to the table:

"All right—you must go now—you must hurry—not miss your train."

55

Only one breakdown: at Krevisil, two hours. Later on the news

came down the train that the driver had been at fault and they had shot him out of hand. I suppose the fireman took over.

Eleven in the compartment: a round, amiable District Kommissar and his wife, a silent, sickly-looking girl in a tight, black silk dress, half a dozen Trotski soldiers with the speech of Vologda. I slept very little. Each time I sank far enough to escape the train's discomfort I was roused again by the aged Tchekist auxiliary who was anxiously checking his list of passengers. Between Moscow and Krevisil he made us answer our names not fewer than five times, and each time we seemed to tally; but still he wasn't satisfied. Confidentially, he explained his difficulty to me. "You see, Comrade, it says for this compartment: '8 men, 3 women, total 11.' But there aren't three women, and there's nine men." I took his list and examined it. "The man who got this out made a mistake in adding up," I told him. "You see—two women's names here, nine men's." He shook his head doubtfully. "They say here there should be three women," he repeated. "How can I sign for three women when there's only two?" And at intervals he returned to consult me again. "You're sure you haven't seen another woman, not under the seat or somewhere? Or hiding in the lavatory? . . . You're sure you're not a woman? Or have you got your wife with you somewhere, under the seat perhaps? Well, it says here there ought to be three women—look, it's got Comrade Bulbin's stamp on it—third compartment in second coach back, and all the names, yes, they're all right, but it says there ought to be three women. Perhaps you wouldn't mind if I put you down as a woman?" I said: "You can put me down as a sheepdog, if that will help." He looked at the list again. "No," he said, "you must be wrong, Comrade, you've made a mistake, there's nothing here about a sheepdog. . . ." At Ovengrod, which we reached at dusk it was snowing.

I think it was on towards midnight when he made his last visit, and after that I slept deeply; but not, I imagine, very long. A jerk more violent than the common threw me into scattered consciousness; I saw a blob of light through the clouded window, the doors were open, letting in an icy draught. I heard someone say "Muropretsk."

In the station area I found myself held tight in a solid human press in ten minutes I only moved a yard or so. The snow was falling thickly. Everybody was half asleep, no one seemed to know where he wanted to go, and some, in despair of ever getting anywhere, were sitting down in the mud with the sheepskins wrapped about their heads and shoulders. As the crowd bore me along I stumbled on something soft and found it was a man's arm. I heard him mutter,

"Steady, Comrade, how can I get to sleep if you walk about on me like that!" A quiet voice, a voice of culture, was saying behind me, "It's no good going into the town, there's nowhere to sleep there. Besides, it isn't safe, they'll have the place ablaze by morning. . . ." I turned to see who spoke, but you could hardly pick one face from another in the snow-stippled darkness. It didn't matter, you had to go where they pushed you. Something pricked my arm and I found a barbed-wire fence running beside me. I shoved away from that, and now I was caught in a steady, narrowing current. "Where are we going?" I asked a woman beside me, but she didn't know. There was a light ahead, a carriage lamp hung on a wooden post, the wire seemed to end there. Passes: they wanted to see our passes. A man in a fur cap an an officer's coat stood underneath the lamp, soldiers with fixed bayonets on either side of him. "Steady, steady, get back, stop that pushing, damn all your bloody eyes!" Pushing—who was pushing? In a quarter of an hour I had progressed ten yards. For five minutes we were halted dead, somebody's pass was wrong; yes, I could see him, looking over the heads in front, a little fat peasant vainly protesting; they wouldn't have it, they wouldn't let him go through, two of the soldiers were searching him, throwing his clothes down in the snow. On again. I was there at last. "Your name?" "Sorbin Gaev." "Why are you travelling——?" I said: "I'm in a hurry, Comrade, I don't want any lip from you!" "All right—let this man go!"

The place I had to find was Koahin's Malthouse. *Koahin's Malthouse:* I had said it over and over in the train, now I wandered about like a lost child, swinging my valise from one hand to the other repeating the name to everyone I passed, "Koahin's Malthouse, do you know where that is?" Excitement and weakness had combined to make me stupid, it took me some time to realize that most of these people had come off a train like myself, nearly all of them were strangers to the town. Yanursk: that was the name that was going about; an earlier train had come from Yanursk which someone had set on fire the night before. That was where most of these people came from. "Malthouse? No. How do you get to where the boats start?"—that was the standard answer. I could see no houses, I seemed to be on a boundless plain where all the world's fools had been set at pasture; but away from the station a row of lights showed dimly through the grey trellis. I made for those, steering between the forlorn family groups, repeating, "No, I don't know where the boats are, I don't know anything about the boats."

The lights drew me to the town's main street, I banged on the first

door I came to and getting no answer went inside. A light from the street showed me faintly a small room carpeted with sleeping soldiers; I called out, "Does anyone know where Koahin's Malehouse is?" and the only answer was a chesty voice from the far corner, "Tell that bastard to shut the bloody door!" The next house yielded nothing, in the third a soldier sleeping by the door got up and kicked me; the town seemed to be stuffed with soldiers. Helpless and exhausted, I gave up trying the houses and simply shambled along the street, calling idiotically, "Koahin's Malthouse, somebody tell me where it is!"

I don't know how far I should have gone if a drunken waterman hadn't stumbled into the road and lurched against me. I picked him up and he kissed me on both cheeks, "I'm sorry," he said, "it's a little boil I have on my groin, it keeps on tripping me up. Wait a minute and I'll show it you." I said I didn't want to see it, I only waited to know where Koahin's Malthouse was. "Koahin's Malthouse? Koahin be damned in hell, he owes me eleven roubles. Look, brother, that's the fellow, that's the one that trips me! Koahin's house? Of course I know! Are you a Bolshevik? If you're a bleeding Bolshevik I'm not going to tell you. Swear me that! Cross yourself, cross yourself, little colonel, say, 'I'm not, I'm not a Bolshevik, I'm not a bloody Bolshevik, may Satan suck up Lenin's bile and spew it out in hell!' Now come with me, come on, little brother, come and I'll show you where it is."

It may have been three versts, all I remember is my wretchedness and fury as we staggered along together; the waterman clutching my arm, constantly falling on his knees and shouting every time he fell, *"Gakkah,* you frog-spawn, keep your sheening block up, topsy your motor, stiff-cock!" A narrow street where a woman's body lay across the gutter, a little bridge and the sound of water running, a stable-yard with a triangle of light across untrodden snow: those images come back as when you flick the pages of an album; then there's a turf-cart with the shafts stuck up, a stack of drift-wood, three hairs of light from the cracks of a pine-strip door. "Koahin's house—what did I tell you!"

Directly I thumped the door the light went out, leaving a wall of darkness and total silence. I had thought my nerves were under control now, but I found them playing loose again; I went on banging furiously, shouting, "Natalia! Natalia! Are you there?" When I paused I heard the squeak of a shutter opening, a woman's scared voice came down from the darkness above.

"I've nine soldiers in here already. There isn't room for any more!"

Kneeling beside me, the waterman suddenly raised his voice. "It's an old drunk that wants to see you, mother. I couldn't keep him——"

I struck him on the mouth and that silenced him.

"My wife," I called up desperately, "my wife—Mme Otraveskov —is she——"

"They've gone," the woman called back. "All three of them, and the little boy. They went off yesterday, they've gone to get on the boat."

§

At least the snow had stopped. And when I got back to the station crossing I realized that the dark had loosened. The crowd was not so dense: the stronger spirits had moved away, those who still wandered about or stood in hopeless apathy were mostly unescorted women, Turko-Tartar families who had no Russian, a Polish grandmother limping abjectedly from group to group to ask if anyone had seen Menea Durevna; here and there a party of nobility apparently still expecting someone to come and take charge of them. And now I found myself among the feeblest; as all the rest had done I started asking, "The boats, The Rossner boats, which way do you go?" "It's no good," someone said, "they won't let you on unless you've squared the Kommissar for Transport. You've got to have a purple ticket." An old Rebecca had pushed her barrow up against the cattle-pens, she called to me as I passed, "Here, barin, come here and I'll tell you! . . . See, barin, coffee, Arab coffee, you won't get it anywhere else. And look at this cake, that goes in with the mug, three roubles for the two. . . ." I gave her one of Katie's notes. "All right, tell me, never mind about the coffee!" But she made me drink it, and despite my furious impatience I was grateful.

"There now, take the cake with you! That way, go right across the sidings, you'll see the river when you get beyond the sheds."

I set off at a limping trot, the barley-cake with the satchel in one hand, the valise with its handle broken swinging about my legs; faintly conscious, as the light increased, that of all the distraught bedraggled humans hurrying that way I must look the most absurd. Beyond the railway lines the cinder carpet ended; the snow, trodden into the clay-soil as it fell, had made a layer of semi-liquid mud. Through this we floundered, seeing nothing but the line of sheds which fenced our right: a one-armed man and I; ahead of us a party of women with their skirts tucked up to their waists, labouring with the weird bundles that peasants always carry; a woman with three wailing boys dragging along behind. A cart splashed past, two percherons in trace exerting all their strength to turn the mud-caked

wheels; a man whose face I hardly saw called out, "No good, no good!" "It's gone!" the man beside me shouted back, "no good—the last boat's gone!" But he himself ploughed on, and the rest of us followed.

The Jewess was right: at the end of the sheds the mud-track turned, I saw through the haze against the lighter sky an embroidery of hoists and masts, someone ahead called back, "It's there, I can see the funnel!" But she hadn't mentioned the Zett-wire fence, some eight feet high, which stretched from the nearest wharfing sheds, leftwards, as far as I could see.

Between me and this fence, as I first saw it, there seemed to be a shallow copse or shrubbery. Getting nearer, I realized it was made of people, people standing thirty deep, as close to the wire as they could get gazing through it as if towards a promised land.

The track I had come by went on to the wharf through the only gap in the wire, a gap twenty feet wide. Across this opening was a counter-weighted boom, spirally wired with a wire curtain below it. It didn't look very formidable, and the soldier on guard was lighting a cigarette, his rifle between his legs. But further along the track there were men with bayonets fixed; as I gazed harder there seemed to be bayonets everywhere, and on the roof of a timber-shed, not far inside the fence, I thought I distinguished the muzzle of a menon gun. I understood why everything was so quiet.

The funnel, the drab, buff funnel of a Rossner steamer, vomiting curds of dirty smoke: in the strengthening light I could see it for myself now.

I lost my head: with a sense of hopeless impotence I limped along the fringe of the crowd, constantly pushing in to try and get nearer the fence, calling, "My wife, my wife's on the boat, I must get in!" No one took any notice. There seemed to be a small crowd on the other side of the fence, the two sides shouted to each other in a dozen accents: "Go on, get on the boat if you can!" "Not without you, not without you, beloved!" "Kusha, is Kusha there?—he's not this side." "Tavdya, I must take Tavdya, see if you can lift her over!" I caught sight of the girl who had been in my carriage on the train, still hat and coatless, squeezed in between two peasants. I pushed towards her, took her arm, "My wife, Madam, my wife—have you seen her?"—but she seemed to be unconscious, her face dead white, her eyes shut fast. . . . Afterwards I painted that, to get it out of my dreams: the white face and the black silk dress against a sea of grey and brown with the dark heads floating, the wires like a staff of music crossing the lucent, blue-smudged haze; it was useless, the dream still comes; the child they managed somehow to heave over,

the terrified peasant trying to catch her, the soldier running towards him.

A shabby, town-clad creature struck my face with his elbow, and the shock brought back what sense I had. I made to return the blow and the man shrank away, putting up his pathetic arms and whimpering for mercy. So: I was something above this rabble. As I passed with my hand upraised I heard the steamer's syren.

I turned and struggled out of the crowd, they drew away now, seeing my face's fury. Fight, fight for yourself, as when the Austrians had us hedged at Brutzen! Anger and desperation lashed my wits to the canter, as I stumbled back towards the barrier I saw like the page of a school-book the map of a single chance. A name, a name, that was all I wanted, and as I pitched across the last few yards of mud a name from a recent dream slipped up my throat. I shouted "Sentry come here, has Comrade Schonik come? Wake up, you blockhead! Is Comrade Schonik here?"

"Schonik?"

"Yes, you fool—here, get this open!"

He came at a run, hauling up the key from the pit of his trouser-pocket—a red-faced, ox-eyed youth, I knew his kind by hundreds—stooped and released the padlock.

"Your pass, Comrade——"

I thrust up the boom and hustled past him, called to another soldier, "You, come here, get hold of this bag!" A third would have stopped me, but I got out my words before he found his. "That boat mustn't go—there's a man on board that Comrade Schonik wants." The man on the boom had come after me, "Your pass, Comrade, you have to show your pass!" but I pretended not to hear him. I ran breathless with bursting heart towards the quay, the man with my bag lolloped beside me, the shout that came from behind was taken up by the soldiers along the track—"That boat—stop her—she's not to go!" The steamer, I didn't know where it was, I ran as the cart-ruts led me, all I saw was a curving railway-line, a long confusion of crates and cordage, soldiers waving their arms; all the outlines blurred in the early light by the covering of snow. *"That boat, she's not to go!"* I saw her now, as I came to the end of the timber stacks, mid-stream and under way; end-on, the hull scarcely showing, a yellow floating crate between two paddles, the funnel sprouting from its bursting cargo. *Natalia, somewhere there.* A group of men stood on the water steps, shouting and blowing whistles. No use, no use, she had got away.

But she answered. Panting there, holding my porter's arm, I heard the rallentando of her engine, the new note following. The paddles

eased, began to churn the other way, threshing the black water to fury. She was coming back, she was coming back, the figures on the deck grew separate, a coil of rope spun out from the stern.

With my eyes hunting the deck I forgot where I was, forgot the men all round me. But a hand had gripped my shoulder and a face thrust in between the steamer and mine, big, sensual lips, eyes steady and without emotion. "Yes, Comrade, what is all this?"

I had dropped my thread, I had to pick it up as best as I could. "Schonik—Comrade Schonik—he wants a man—a man who's got on there. On there, on the steamer. His name's Pischenev—in a brown coat—Comrade Schonik wants him."

"Schonik? Who's Schonik?"

In the second it took me to find an answer I saw the steamer's hull drift in and crash against a lighter lying to the quay, I caught a glimpse of a row of faces looking down. I said:

"Schonik—have you never heard of Olkha's deputy! Come on now, don't waste my time!"

He scraped his chin, I thought I had carried him. Then:

"Your pass—if you don't mind, I'd like to see your pass! Also your personal ticket."

I hesitated, trying to remember exactly what Katie had said. The Gaev papers—no farther than Muropretsk—at Muropretsk I had to burn them. Brief as it was, my wavering increased his suspicion. "Your pass, I said!" I gave him the satchel, "Here, Comrade, all my papers are in that."

Something was going on behind me, back where the wire was. I heard the noise of shouting as when a procession comes into a long street. But it went no further than my ears, I was watching the soldier as he loosed the satchel-strap, jerked out the papers. For a moment my glance went up, and I saw, as if a lime-light picked it, one pale, immobile face in the hedge of faces: Yelisaveta's. "Gaev," the soldier said, "what's all this—is your name Gaev?"

"Why not?"

"I'll tell you why!——" He looked at my eyes as God may look, and then his glance went over my shoulder. Suddenly he swung about and yelled like a horsewhip cracking, "Get her off—that boat—get her off again!"

I said, "Look here, you're not——" but he didn't hear me, my voice was trampled over by the row behind. He pushed me aside, jumped up on a stack of deals, shouted, "That gun, get that gun across them!" A rifle cracked, another, I thought they were firing at me, I turned and saw men running. Then I realized what had happened. Somewhere the fence had given and the crowd was inside.

The papers, my dragging mind was still on the papers, I followed the man who had them on to the deals and snatched them out of his hand. His arm struck out but his eyes were the other way, the blow only got the side of my head. In the moment when I was on my knees, dazed, the past and future not existing, I saw what he saw. The crowd, a hundred or two, came steadily towards us, not very fast, for the mud clutched every step, but with a senseless determination. Women, they seemed to be mostly women, a sweeping band of shawl and kirtle, red scarf, a patch of ermine, wild hair, breasts thrusting; they came like a lava-flow of Pelée, their eyes to where I knelt, seeing no danger, seeing nothing but the blaze of Yanursk behind; and nothing, I thought, would stop them. *Open that gun!* But the men over there, the soldiers on the peat-stack, were ready for them now. I saw them fling into line as the Ural patrols had done at Volskoed, saw the long, curved comb of bayonet points, rifles held low; and the line swung out like a scythe, and cut into the senseless herd with a sound like an engine's whistle. Enough, enough: the huge Caucasian, marble-eyed, thrusting like quarryman at rock-face, the woman's arms stretched as in crucifixion, the boy screaming as a boot trod in his face and the stream splashed down on him—ah Christ, was that not enough! But the man beside me had cocked his rifle, they were coming, they still came on, a girl who was five yards off ran straight towards us. He fired, and the puff of blue smoke held me blind, then I saw the girl turn over, falling, as a mined ship turns, and I saw her face as I had seen men's faces.

It had passed, the moment of insensibility. But all I felt was a furnace anger, a year's rage harvested, and all I saw was the man beside me loading. I twisted and got his leg, he kicked but I held him, he toppled and we rolled together down to the quay. I was on my back and he was sitting, his blood-smeared face looked down at me. A moment passed when weakness held me still, in that moment I heard the menon starting. Then I struck at his chin, one blow, one blow to carry all my passion, and his head crashed on the bollard behind him. Or so I think: for I cannot sort the confusion of that moment. Another soldier had run towards me; as I got to my knees I saw his brown form like a cliff above my head, the butt of his rifle swinging. I don't know how that missed my forehead, I only remember catching his belt and falling back, and the man falling over me, and my eyes looking down for an instant at the twinkle of black water. I think my shoulder caught the quay wall as we fell, but it was his head struck the lighter's gunwale, his body that saved me. Clutching wildly for something to hold me up, I found myself sprawling in the lighter's belly on a mattress of snow and sand.

"The rope, catch it, fool, catch it, barin, you bloody——"

The rope? I saw the end of it sliding past me, I plunged and seized it, twisted it about my arm, with no more sense of what I was doing than a circus pony. I felt a jerk as the slack was stretched, felt myself dragged across the sand, struggled and got my feet up. That stays clear cut, like a Dürer in a row of Barbizons, the instant when my feet slid up to the barge's rim: the steamer's hull sliding by me, four feet off, at what looked the pace of a horse's gallop, the rising, dripping vanes of the paddle-wheel, a hazel fender swinging: then there is water rising below me, rising up to my knees; a wrench of pain from the rope above my arm, something striking the small of my back and a jerk from my coat-belt. Up, like a lamb in an eagle's beak, away from the maddened water: someone had got me by the coat, by the tortured arm, and an arm came round my chest.

Lying there, in the after scuppers of the steam-barge, with Yevski bending over me, I had my last view of the quay. All white, they looked from here, the cranes and timber-stacks, the rows of casks, each with its coverlet of snow as in a Christmas postcard; only the human shapes were unadorned. It seemed that the soldiers had won that battle, for I saw them wandering here and there as soldiers walk about a camp in the hours off-duty, and the trespassers had all turned back. Turned back? A few had reached the quay, I saw things floating in the water, objects still struggling. Between the sheds I had a glimpse of the Zett-wire fence, and a few blurred figures floundering back to it. I thought they would let those off, but that wasn't granted. Before the sheds hid them the menon opened again and I saw them dropping.

§

"Don't talk too soon, my friend, don't talk too soon! We've got to get past Nilnikova yet—Nilnikova, there'll be trouble there."

I didn't see the man who said that, I only remember his voice, a quiet, soldier's voice. The gun had stopped, and now we had outreached the quayside uproar, enclosed in a private noise, tossed water, pistons stamping, that was kin to silence. I looked back once again and saw our black cat's-tail of smoke bent round towards the white-roofed timber sheds, a few black dots, an engine creeping into the town. The town was only a few husky lines, a rub of soft pencil on a Whatman board.

Yevski was squatting beside me, saying with a film of weariness over his cracked, mocking voice. "Barin, why are you such a fool! Why did you go wandering off after that fat Bolshevik up on to the stack—didn't you hear me shouting? What a baby you are, always

burning your fingers—you and your friend Scheffler, I don't know which was the dafter. . . ."

A woman said: "Hold your tongue, Yevski, leave him alone!" And then to me: "She's in the forward cabin. Listen, Alexei, I don't want you to go yet——"

I was on my feet now; and hearing that, as a dog hears his name called in a busy street, I started to push my way along the deck. That was not easy. The after-deck of a Rossner barge has an area, I suppose, of something under a thousand square feet; here, I doubt if there were fewer than two hundred people, leaving aside the children and baggage; women lying full length, men leaning against each other, their eyes shut or staring emptily. I stepped on someone's shoulder, I had to force apart a girl and boy who were sitting clasped together, I moved a girl who squatted shivering between two stacks of luggage. No one protested, they were past protesting. "Better stay still!" an old man said, an old man in a black felt hat, "better stay where you are!" but he didn't move to stop me. The short ladder down to the cattle-well was closed with a web of chains, and as I scrambled over it a half-Chinese in some kind of uniform did his best to send me back. "You, you can't move about the barge! If you boarded aft you've got to stay there." But when I turned my face to him he let me go, and I shoved my way past the engine-hatch and jostled on towards the forward saloon. Yelisaveta was still calling after me; but I saw, glancing over my shoulder, that the Chinese had got her by the arm and she couldn't follow.

A trunk and several boxes were piled against the starboard door of the saloon, but it seemed a quicker job to move them than to force my way through the crowd to the other door. A goat was tethered to the trunk's handle, I loosed the tether and fixed it to a nearby stanchion; that gave me a foot or two to shift the boxes. As I lifted down the top one, almost in tears with weakness and impatience, I noticed a child lying close by on coils of rope with a rick-cover folded over him: a frail child who looked very cold and whose eyes were shut. I went a little closer and stopped.

I had not been thinking of him, only of Natalia. And so it was, I think, that the abruptness of that encounter, and the sudden heat of emotion, and the feeble state my mind was in, combined to hold me in a foolish trance. "Vava," I thought, "Vava used to be rather like that, only a little younger. Perhaps, perhaps in some curious way that is Vava's body, Vava's body lying there." But at last, emotion taking reason's place, I leant a little forward and called out, "Vava!" He opened his eyes, shivered a little, and looked at me in

a puzzled way. Then a smile came, like the perfect smile of babyhood.

"Batiushka!"

Before I had loosed myself he struggled with his arms and raised himself almost to sitting upright. But pain came into his face, he said: "I can't, batiushka, not quite!" and dropped his head back again.

After that I was kneeling astride him. I held his cold hands, I was kissing his mouth and eyes and forehead, I was crying. He said: "Why do you cry, batiushka, now you're out of prison? Tell me about it, tell me what you did in prison!"

§

"I am going to get some blankets, I'll find some blankets to cover him up. I couldn't get a place for him in the cabin. . . . You needn't worry, Alexei Alex'itch, barin, I shall stay by him, I shall be near him all the time."

That was Emelian's voice. And now I heard Tatiana's:

"Alexei, you mustn't be angry, you mustn't be angry with us. You see, she wanted to wait for you—Natalia, she said she must stay at Muropretsk till you came. We couldn't let her do that, we didn't know if you would come—you do understand that, Alexei, you do understand?"

For a long time I didn't understand, I hardly heard her. Then I said: "What—what has happened—what——"

"It was—it was Yelisaveta." Her voice was like a mountain stream that has to wriggle its way between the boulders. "Yelisaveta—you see—she thought she must save the little boy, that's what she was thinking of. There was—there was a struggle when we were getting on the boat. Lisveta didn't mean to hurt her, she wasn't angry, she was only trying to do what she thought was right. We were both trying to do that. It was—Natalia's head came against one of those iron things. . . . Alexei, it wasn't Lisveta's fault. . . ."

My body got up and the door of the saloon came towards me. Something was trying to hold me back, a fur coat, a shawl, but my body went through those as a coulter through easy soil. A man said, "You can't go in there, it's only for women," his hand was on the door, I took his wrist and twisted it out of the way. It was very dark in the saloon, but I saw at once where Natalia was, over by the scuttle. A man was kneeling beside her. I picked my way over the people lying on the floor, I said to the man, with my face turned

away from Natalia's body, "You are to tell me if she's dead. If she's dead I don't want to look at her. You understand that! I don't want to, I don't want to see her if she's dead, I don't want to do that. If she's dead I don't want to see her."

"Stop that!" he barked. "Stop gabbling, you girlish fool, I'm telling you, aren't I? No, I tell you, she's not! But if you go on behaving like that she soon will be."

What was that man's name? Dr. Boyal—Boyal—something. I remember his face, like the face of a scanderoon, and the lock of hair which stuck up like a lightning conductor: a foolish, irritating face; but I think of him gratefully, for his sharpness worked like sal volatile, and my eyes could have rested on nothing better than that yellow, rather dirty skin, those prosaic spectacles. After that I looked quite calmly at Natalia, as you look at a house you once lived in: at her quiet body in the brown dress I had bought for her in Moscow, at the rise and fall of her breast, her pale face with the mouth a little open, the bandage which went all round her head, covering her eyes. A little blood showed on one side of that. ". . . very lucky it missed the left eye . . . sphenoid fracture . . . laceration in the zygomatic area . . . a very weak condition. . . ." The man seemed to be babbling. I said: "I don't understand that, I'm sleepy, I can't think very well. Is my wife going to die?" "We are all going to die," he answered. "It's no good asking me when. If I could answer that I shouldn't be a doctor, I should be a fortune-teller." I whispered, "Natalia! Natalia, can you hear me?" But she did not seem to hear, and when I bent to kiss her the doctor stopped me. "You'd much better leave her alone. It does no good, breathing into a patient's mouth. . . . There are too many people in this cabin, you'd feel better outside."

I saw he was right about that, it was no good my staying here. I went back to Vava.

Emelian had got some blankets, God knew where, and Vava looked more comfortable now. I sat beside him, where there was half a square yard of deck-space, and he talked to me dreamily. "Have you ever been on a ship before, batiushka? I never have. Does this ship go all the way to France, or do we have to go on another one? Which is the captain; is that the captain pulling in that rope—over there, look, where Yelisaveta is? I should like to be a sailor. . . . Did you hear all that banging? That was a real gun, one of the soldiers told me. There was a lot of banging at Muropretsk all the time, but that was only rifles, not a real gun. . . ." I found Tatiana beside me again.

Tatiana was saying: "Alexei, you mustn't worry too much. I think, I think it's going to be all right. That man is quite a good doctor,

Count Stankowicz says so, he knew him in Moscow. Oh, here he is! This is Count Stankowicz. You'd never think, would you, that he used to be the best-dressed man in Moscow! Where has Maria got to? Maria Astrovna, come here, I want to present you to one of my best, my dearest friends, Alexei Alexeivitch Otraveskov.

A woman smiled down at me. I can't remember what she was like, except that she was northern and beautiful and wore a man's weather-coat. She said: "I feel so sorry for you!—Your wife, such a horrid accident! It was all the steamer—the steamer gave a jerk, I felt it myself, it nearly sent me off my feet." Count Stankowicz stood beside his wife, nodding gravely. "Still, you've got a good doctor there! He did a splendid job for me when I broke my wrist once." He smiled. "And surely the gods are with you! I saw how you came on board—what luck, ye seraphim! I tell you, my heart was up against the roof of my mouth!" "You're not to worry him!" Tatiana said. "Maria, make him go and get something for us to eat; there must be something somewhere. Oh, and if you see Elena Pavlova, tell her to come to me. I've remembered such an amusing story about her husband. . . ."

I dozed, but the voices still reached me, voices which made me think for a time that I was back in the Orshaskaya drawing-room. "Nilnikova, they say the only real danger will be at Nilnikova. It chiefly depends on our engine. If we can get past there. . . ." "Goveshnov? he's all right, he's got credit for ninety thousand drachmas in the Simokotis Bank at Athens. . . . No, Dmitri, I've nothing with me, nothing but this coat and trousers. *Qu'est ce que ça fait!* One can live. Twelve months—surely I can pick up my own corn for twelve months! And that will be all that's needed. . . . The muzhik may not be clever, but he has his modicum of good sense; these lunatics have no constructive policy, when the muzhik finds they are ruining him he will turn them out and shout for the old szlachti. I tell you, Dmitri, this is only an interruption. Russia has so much virtue, such fortitude, she will rise to greatness again, and as she rises she will throw the whole crew of cosmopolitan upstarts off her shoulders. Then you and I will join again in the festival of resurrection." "Russia," a low-voiced woman said, "Russia, what cross must she carry now?"

§

When I woke it seemed to be about midday; we were passing level country bare of trees or cottages. Vava was sleeping with his head on Emelian's knee, I felt his hands and found them warm. I screwed myself to go into the saloon again, but the doctor motioned me

away. "She must rest," he said, "I don't want anyone disturbing her."

I felt that I ought to speak to Yelisaveta, and supposing she must still be on the after-deck I made my way there, moving carefully now so as not to tread on the people sleeping. I could not find her, but Yevski saw and came to me. He said seriously: "I don't see why you've got to look so heavy-bellied. Your dame'll be all right—a crack on the attic, why, I've had dozens like that! And don't you say I wasn't looking after her. I got them safely, that bourzhui pack of yours, all the way——"

"I know, Yevski, I know. I'm very grateful——"

"You go wandering about like a chicken with its head half-chopped, when you're the luckiest bastard on the boat. Look at him —that pug-nosed pedlar down there! That's a professor, a professor from the Moscow college, and they sliced up his dame in his own bed-billet. You might say he's got reason to look like a wolf in a claw-trap. . . . If you had a cigarette, barin, Yevski would ask the Virgin for special mercies——"

Automatically I felt in my pockets; but all that came out was the Krozkohl photograph. Yevski caught sight of that.

"Well, they had him in the end," he said, "your friend Count Scheffler!"

I put the photograph away again. I didn't want to see that, I didn't want to think of Anton, of what he could have been to me now. But I had to say, "You heard—you've heard that he's gone—they killed him?"

He put his head on one side and spat far out into the water.

"Didn't you know? They killed him all right. But he took some killing!"

"But they—they shot him?"

He nodded. "But that wasn't enough. Vargasin told me, Comrade Vargasin, that's a friend of mine, he told me all about it. They wheeled him out in his chair—he couldn't stand up, see? Two rounds, they put in him—four rifles, that was—and he was still moving, doing something with his hands. They took off the bandage then, and he looked at them, and Vargasin said he saw him grin. Of course he's a liar, Vargasin—he says he heard him talking, talking quite clear. 'I'd rather be killed a bit quicker,'—that's what Vargasin told me he said. Vargasin didn't like that, anyhow. He went away then. He heard they finished him off with their butts."

So that was what it all came to.

I said: "I must go now, I must go back, back to Vava. Yes, I must go now."

§

Early next morning we passed Chevonik-Nikoliensk; or what was left of it: houses roofless and disembowelled, the dome of the little church in skeleton, a litter of charred timber spread a verst or more along the snow. There was no one to be seen there except a soldier standing barehead on the wooden landing-stage; he bawled something across the water but I didn't catch the words. By degrees the Jezhvoi forest gathering on the eastern bank brought vision to a tinted amaurosis, denying the distance made.

There was snow to come. Mid-morning gave us a fissure through which I looked into naked sky. The gloomy, grey-shot clouds closed up again, but the northerly wind, sharp and sometimes boisterous, kept the whole vast body shifting.

They would not let me see her now. She was conscious, they said, but in a kind of daze, she thought she was back in Moscow. My presence (they explained so carefully, with such excruciating tenderness) might throw her mind into confusion, might permanently derange it. I read to Vava for a time—the same old book of stories, I didn't have to use my eyes—but I could not keep still for long, I had to be pushing my way about the barge, letting the febrile play of nerves run out in my body's movement I hunted for Yelisaveta, but I could never see her.

They were very patient, these people in the cattle-pit; they seemed to know me as the husband of the lady who had had an accident. They squeezed together to let me pass, shaped their pinched faces into smiles, murmuring, "We hear that Mme Otraveskov is better now, we hear she is doing well." A woman, a teacher's wife, who lay coughing beside the engine-hatch, gave me a bottle of scent: "If you would take that to Mme Otraveskov—it sometimes makes you feel better, a little scent on the pillow." Tatiana's friends, as I squeezed past them, would press me to take one of their last cigarettes; Maria Astrovna gave me a drink of cold tea. In that heterogeneous crowd, peasants and tradesmen from the Preska basin packed in with the intelligentsia of Moscow, I came across someone I knew, an aged priest without any legs, called Father Hertzen. In the bag which hung from his neck he had a little store of sweets, he was plodding about on his stumps and giving a sweet to any child he found crying. I stooped to ask him if he remembered me; we had met in the trenches west of Ploeknish. No, he didn't remember. But, "Your leg," he said, "I can see it isn't comfortable. That's the drawback to having legs, people so often get pain in them! If you wait a little

I'll find something to make a cold bandage with." I forgot about that; I had become so used to the bad leg that I hardly noticed it. But he found me again next day, and did the bandaging, making me suck a sweet while he did it; and afterwards gave me his blessing.

At Davrov, everyone said, we should stop for a little while, and fresh food could be bought from the peasants on the quay there.

I found a corner away from the wind, an angle between poop and jacket-box; sitting there for a while I yielded to temptation and looked at Anton's photograph again. "They finished him off with their rifle-butts"—that gentle creature, that closest, most understanding of my friends. . . . "More in this than meets the eye"; not seeing any little joke, I wondered why he had written those words.

More in this. . . . Fool, that so plain a clue hadn't set my brain at work! I stuck my nails in the cardboard back of the frame, worked my fingers along inside and stripped it off. Yes, it was there, a fold of several tissue sheets with my name written on the outside, another addressed to Yelisaveta. I put that one back in my pocket.

I did not open mine at once. To read that letter would be like hearing an echo of his voice, and I could not be sure that my nerves were steady enough for that experience. But presently I found my fingers unfolding it, six sheets thickly covered in pencil, and my eyes took up the opening words:

"DEAREST ALEXEI: I'm writing this in the faint hope that it may get through to you. Tregelik (you remember him? he is my gaoler now) Tregelik has promised to get it to you if he can. He is very kind to me, that fellow, I can't think why he should treat me with so much kindness, it hurts me that I can do nothing to repay him.

"From what I hear, it seems that my execution is fixed for next Sunday now. But I am not too hopeful. Twice they have given me a date, and each time something has happened to postpone it. I don't know what. You would think it was a fairly simple matter, to kill a fellow of my size; hardly more formidable that wringing a chicken's neck. But the doctor who comes here goes over me so carefully every day that I fancy they must be making diagrams of my anatomy with little circles to show what spots the men have to shoot at. It would be worthy of these people, with their passion for exactitude in planning—an exactitude so seldom fulfilled in the work achieved. Well, it gives me some pleasure to picture the scene, the class of earnest riflemen studying the diagram. 'Is that where Count Scheffler's heart is, Comrade Instructor?' 'No, Comrade, that is his navel.'

"Alexei, I'm so unhappy, so terribly dejected. They've made me well enough to see things clearly, to look back on all my failures. I know it's wrong to pour my troubles on to you, but I must try to ease myself by writing them down, and I know you will listen patiently—you have always been so patient, so very, very good to me. The trouble is that I can't see where I've gone wrong, why it is that with the brain God gave me I've accomplished so little. I have a terrible feeling that I've been selfish and egotistical and small-minded, I've always fought for small things, small things that concerned me intimately and therefore seemed so important, instead of saving myself for the larger ones. Yes, that is the only reason I can think of for such a mountain of failure. To you, best of all friends, I have been a trouble and a burden ever since we were together at Krozkohl. And in my struggle to keep in the position which seemed to me the right one I kept my spirit divided from that of a wife whose preciousness I never fully realized till—no, don't let me talk, don't let me think of that. I have always loved her—that is true, Alexei, though you may not understand it—yes I have always loved her. But how far from each other we have travelled, and how close we might have been if I had had less pride in my own small integrity, if I had lavished on her the devotion I gave to transient causes. Transient? Yes, it seems that I have to call them that, now that everything is shattered. What have we done, what have we gained, we who drew sword against the evil which was strangling Russia? We have only let loose a greater evil, a worse oppression, a viler cruelty. I have to leave it all with no light showing through the darkness. If only I could see some little hope for Russia, some happiness for those millions in the dreary plains, some little care for liberty, something to tell me that all our work has not been wasted.

"Forgive me, Alexei! I don't know what I have said, I don't know whether it has any meaning. It is only a sadness of the spirit. I keep on begging to see a priest, but they won't let me. That would make so much difference.

"Life has given me at least one thing, and that is your friendship. And that at least will go on, my love will follow you. I pray daily and hourly that you, with your dear wife and son, will escape from Russia in safety, that you will find new happiness. Don't think of me with sadness, Alexei, think of me only as one who loved you and to whom your love was very precious and very beautiful. God keep you, my dear, God bless you!

"I can't write more. My arm aches and my eyes aren't good. What a flabby creature I've come to be!"

The letter did not end there. But on the next sheet the writing was very bad, too hard for my eyes; and I did not feel like going on with it just then.

I gave the letter for Yelisaveta to Yevski. He said he knew where to find her.

§

The master of the barge, a surly tippler, didn't want to stop at Davrov; he said that ice formed early in the broads below Nilnikova, there wasn't any time to be lost. (He himself didn't look hungry, neither did his crew.) He was persuaded, however, by a former Colonel of Artillery and one or two others. The village seemed to be deserted; from the side of the barge I could look right up its street and there wasn't so much as a dog or a chicken to be seen. But a thin flag of blue smoke from one of the chimneys told a different story. A party went ashore and forced the door of two cottages; after that the rest opened up, the party came back with three sacks of oatmeal and two pails of salted trout.

It was understood that we should have to put in at Nilnikova for fuel; at Muropretsk they had only loaded for four days' running so as to leave more passenger-space. At Nilnikova—well, why not? Stankowicz enlightened me: there was a garrison there, two kuren of Trotski's Golden Cossacks; they might be away skirmishing in the Roshruk district, where the kulaks were known to be recalcitrant—or they might not. "It's a little trick, you see, it has happened to one or two of the refugee barges. At Muropretsk they sell you a laissez-passer which is supposed to get you through to Drevzhikhan. But at Nilnikova they don't seem to recognize the signature; they conclude that all the passengers are counter-revolutionary spies."

"But we couldn't all be spies!" Tatiana said. "They couldn't shoot all of us."

Stankowicz smiled. "Dear Tasha Vascovna, who would hurt such a creature as you!"

And she smiled back, a little sadly. "You remind me of Akiniev when you talk like that! He used to say those things to me when we were first betrothed. How happy we were then! Of course I knew that he learnt it out of a little book, a little book called *Le Dictionnaire Complet de la Galanterie des Jeunes Gentilshommes Amants*—all the young men bought it. But I loved to see him going all red and struggling to say that rubbish. Nowadays, the young men take no trouble, there is no real love-making, no refinement. Those two over

there by that crane-thing—I don't call that love-making. Still, I suppose it's better than nothing. . . ."

Natalia was sleeping now, the doctor said. Tomorrow he might alter the bandage to leave her right eye uncovered.

'A little past Davrov the snow began. It was falling lightly all evening: enough to be a nuisance, the wind blowing it into our collars and shoes; and by the time the deck-lamp was lit the invalids who lay all along by the engine-hatch were covered by a uniform white blanket. The crew had rigged a much-torn canvas awning over the after-part of the cattle-well, and we did our best to fix up strips of canvas and hessian between the stanchions on the windward side. There was supposed to be a cover for the after-deck, but no one could find it. There was a general shifting round; we got some of the women in the crew's quarters, most of the others on to that part of the well which was theoretically covered. I found a small place for Vava there, where he could sit up for short periods with his back against an engine ventilator, and where Emelian and I could easily get to him. I wanted Tatiana to stay beside him, but as I had given her my coat she would not take up covered space. "My dear Alexei, I couldn't look more ridiculous however much snow I get on top of me!"

During the night the wind strengthened and the falling snow became thicker, till the yellow light of the deck-lamp showed nothing but a sweeping swarm of snowflakes. I knew from the altered tempo in vibration, the more deliberate grinding of the paddles, that our engines were at quarter-speed; but we never lost way altogether, and throughout the night I heard the hoarse, monotonous voice of the Latvian at the forepeak, "Na pravo . . . na pravo . . . ma lyevo sei tchas." Sometimes you caught, beneath these constant noises, some flicker of sound from the dark dunes spread along the deck: a child whimpering, the mumbled curses of a Preska muzhik, a woman violently coughing. But the men about me made no noise. They stood in their scanty clothes half-conscious, holding a rail with frozen hands or leaning against each other, as my men had stood along the waterlogged trenches at Lovzegrad. Each time I made my way to Vava I found him sleeping peacefully. Mme Stankowicz had given me her fox-cape to make a bashlyk for him, and a woman lying by his side was constantly clearing off the snow which settled on his blanket. Once I found Yelisaveta there, tucking something about his feet. She did not answer when I asked if Yevski had given her the letter, and when I went again she had disappeared.

The men on the after-deck fared worst. The first light showed, up there, the appearance of a mountain drift with bodies tumbled

into it. Some of us went to take them a pail of zadne broth we had got from the engine-pit, and we found grey faces staring at us lifelessly, beards and eyebrows caked with snow. Some couldn't hold the cups, we had to pour the soup between their lips; and two were past the need of it.

In the broadened morning the snow was lazier, but the wind maintained its pace. We set about to clear a tackle-hold, making space there for half a dozen children; we worked slowly and clumsily, hardly speaking, often falling into stiff and chilly sleep as we carried a bailer or a coil of rope. I found Emelian sitting rigidly with his arm behind Vava's shoulders, and he could not answer me when I addressed him. "Are we nearly there?" Vava asked faintly. "Are we nearly at Drevzhikhan?" Nilnikova came into sight a little after noon, with the snow still falling.

§

I had known this place. I had landed there in the summer of 1902 with a contingent sent to deal with rioting in the Rushruk villages; that had been my last military action before the war. But as I saw it now with watery eyes through a waving veil of snow it had nothing familiar. A line of concrete silos, some kind of factory, these showed against the rising plain like paper shapes thrown on a pillow-case, the houses hardly visible at all. As we rounded the bend and our bows swung in I saw between saloon and paddle-case a broad landing-stage, quite empty, and the single-storeyed pinewood house where the landing-dues were once collected. In the middle of the road a woman leant against an ox's flank, with two cockerels under her arm; expecting, I suppose, that the barge would take her on to the next village. This was the place on which our long anxiety had centred.

A man standing beside me asked, "Can you see something over there, on the hill behind the town? It looks to me like a troop of horse." But I couldn't see it.

The bargemaster gave us trouble now. He was sure that ice must have formed in the broads, it wouldn't be safe to go on, he said; in any case he would not start till tomorrow, and only then if he got an order telegraphed from Muropretsk. I saw how things were going, but Colonel Vidlovski saw it quicker than I. Before the fenders touched he had snatched the revolver which the bargemaster carried in his trouser-pocket; with the help of Stankowicz and two or three of the crew we forced him into his own quarters and locked him up there.

No passenger was to land, Vidlovski said, except by his special orders. But we couldn't stop them. The men were over the side before the barge was fast, someone found sticks and a fire was made on the landing-stage. They shuffled round it, stretching cramped limbs, stamping in the snow, beating their chests like native warriors in the dance. "It's their own look-out!" Vidlovski said. "That fire will tell every Trotskist within twenty versts that a bargeload of fools are waiting for trouble. . . ."

In the landing-office a sheepish, goat-bearded creature was talking into the telephone; there was a bed in one corner with a woman asleep in it. "Very good, yes, Comrade Kommissar, I will detain them!" the man was saying. Vidlovski said: "You! Wood—I want wood for that barge, enough to keep her going three days. Where is it?" There was no wood, the man replied, all the wood had been taken by the Cossacks for their own fires, there was not one sagene of fuel in the whole of Nilnikova. But if we liked he would telegraph to Muropretsk and ask them to send a load from there; he believed there was plenty of fuel in Muropretsk. I went outside and walked a little way up the road. It looked as if he was telling the truth: I could see the iron roofs where the fuel stacks had been, a row of them extending a hundred yards, and nothing was left there but a pile of chips half covered with driven snow. A man came out from one of the cottages and touched my arm. "The soldiers," he said, pointing with his hand up the road, "—not gone long! That barge, it ought to be moving." "Axes!" someone was shouting, "find some axes!" I went back to the landing-office; walking slowly, the weight of the sleepless night still holding me.

The news had got ahead of me: the Cossacks, the Golden Cossacks were just along the road: and that was enough to bring the frozen crowd to their senses. The fire was out, a boy was stamping on the embers; and with spades and kinjals, with iron bars and bits of piping, they were wrenching up the top-boards of the landing-stage. Someone ran past me with a couple of feller's axes. Coming to life, I took one from him and set to work on the nearest thing to hand, the wall of an oil store. A big man joined me, dealing the wall tremendous blows with a length of pine-trunk; in a minute or two we had smashed up twenty feet of boarding; we seized the boards and wrenched them loose and threw them into the road, where a coatless, bare-armed woman picked them up and broke them across her knees. The township had come to life, people were running down the road, a growing crowd, oblivious of the snow, was staring vacantly as we hacked and sweated. "You mustn't harm that store," an old man twittered, "it belongs to the Communists, you'll be in

trouble!" I joined the woman breaking up the boards—I saw it was Tatiana—and shouted for someone to carry the pieces across to the barge. But everyone was at work now, they were hacking up the walls of the landing-office, while the woman in bed observed them fearfully and the sheep-eyed man still jabbered into his telephone.

It was curiously quiet, that scene of frantic activity. Steps were silent on the fresh snow, no one spoke or shouted, the villagers looked on in total silence. Between the axe-strokes I could hear distinctly the voice of the landing-officer, ". . . several thousand—fully armed—taking away my premises . . ." and the dotard at my side repeating, "You must put it back, put all of it back, the Communists will be angry!" I heard a shot fired, not very far away, but no one took any notice; each time I gathered a score of boards a man came along and picked them up and staggered off to the barge.

"Otraveskov! Is Captain Otraveskov there?"

I turned and saw a woman breaking through the line of carriers. I called to her, "Yes?" and she panted up to me.

"Captain Otraveskov? They want you on board."

I dropped the pieces I had just picked up, I walked right past the woman as if I hadn't seen her. A man with an armload of battens caught me on the hip and cursed me, another pushed me roughly out of his way, but I was hardly aware of them. It was as if an actor turned his back on the stage and stepped down to the auditorium: the crowd with the snow whitening their heads and shoulders, the axes swinging, the men running backwards and forwards, all that had dropped into unreality and I seemed to be quite alone. A man ran after me and pushed a piece of paper into my hand; he said, "I'm not going on, barin, you'll be all right now, Yevski belongs to the Workers, he's staying here." My only answer was: "That's all right!" and I walked on slowly across the landing-stage and climbed up to the after-port and passed by Vava without a word and went on towards the saloon. Half-way along the well the doctor met me.

"She wants you now," he said laconically, "she's asking for you."

I stood and stared at him, trying to read his face. I said in a whisper, "How long is there? Is she dying now?"

"Dying?" he repeated. "Who said she was going to die?"

I heard what he said, but in a foolish way I asked, "What did you say?—I don't understand——" I think he repeated his words, but I no longer heard him. I remember wondering why I should be so deaf, before I realized that the screams and shouting and the racket of rifle-fire were flooding over every smaller sound. As someone barged against me I saw a chip of wood fly up from the deckboards; and a moment afterwards the doctor, walking just ahead of me, put

his hand up to his side and tumbled forwards. I stooped and asked, "What's wrong? Is something wrong?" but the silly fellow gave no answer. I couldn't stop, I couldn't waste time with jokes like that, I pushed a woman out of my way and got to the saloon.

The scuttles were closed; as I kicked the door shut behind me the racket was dulled half-way to silence.

The sight of her calmed me, I was at home here. No need any more for haste, for fastening thought, for a show of boldness or civility.

They had moved the bandage, leaving one eye free; as I knelt and took her hand it opened. She looked at me as if I stood on a cliff-top and she on the shore far down below. And her voice came like the voice of someone a long way off.

"Alexei! . . . I wanted to wait for you, but they wouldn't let me. . . . I knew you would come, God told me."

I did not try to answer, for the noise outside had given me a sense of dumbness. And I could not smile at her, for a kind of pressure on my heart deadened all impulse. But when her free hand came up towards my hair I bent down slowly, searching her face, and I felt the smile she gave reflecting on my dry lips, in my tautened eyes. My arms were joined behind her shoulders, for a moment as I raised her I saw her beauty close and held it there, not daring to tread nearer. Then the last defence of conquered space fell down, my frozen face was closed in the warmth of hers, her loveliness fastened round me.

The smell of the cabin, and the side of the berth hurting my chest; the door opening and slamming; the angry roar, the crash of a bullet splintering the scuttle, the shudder of engines starting; that hideous frame remains, but the picture's glory overshines it, the frame itself is part of that hour's perfection. Safety, safety, no wound could hurt, no grief come near us in our unity. And all my body's weakness and my spirit's malady seemed to be lifted as the earth from a buried man by the strength of her whole spirit.

"Beloved, beloved, I know it now, I have been to the place where your spirit hid from me."

"It can't hide again, beloved. It was right, what you told me, there's nowhere my spirit can go where your love won't find me."

§

As far as the Zoltskoie broads a dozen horsemen followed us along the bank, constantly sniping; with what object, except to ease their temper, I cannot say. They smashed a cup that one of the sailors was

carrying, and a ricochetting bullet took a chip out of Vidlovski's wrist; but the snow must have confused their aim, for I do not remember that they did any serious damage.

We were too busy now to be worried by them or the snow. The first shots at Nilnokova had sent half the crew scuttling to the shelter of cottages, we were left with one engineer and a stone-deaf Tartar and a couple of scared apprentices. The Tartar seemed to know the channel but was too rheumaticky to hold the wheel; one intelligent passenger had always to be on the steering bridge, one in the fore-peak watching for ice; we took it in turns to break wood and do the firing. With some of the wood we had brought on board we made a temporary shelter for those who had suffered in the scrimmage; there were half a dozen flesh wounds, a broken leg or two, a case of serious frostbite; one man in scrambling among the last on board had somehow contrived to fracture the bridge of his nose. The only aid to nursing was hot water, which had to be brought in pails from the engine-pit; and there were scuttles to be blocked, and the pump to be worked almost continuously, and Vava to be comforted. On this activity the snow still fell, sparsely but with sullen persistence, freezing on our unshaved cheeks, getting down inside our clothes; and despite our energy our hands were always white and frozen. But I heard Tatiana's hoarse voice, as she shuffled past me with a can of tea for the look-out, "Tell me, Alexei, how can you look so full of happiness?"

In the early morning, a little before dawn, I used a few minutes between my shifts to steal into the saloon and sit at Natalia's side. And as I watched, in the roof-lamp's smoky light, the calm of her face sleeping, my fingers found the papers I had stuffed in my trouser pocket. The slip that Yevski had given me, I had forgotten that: and now I smoothed it out and saw Yelisaveta's writing. "Now that I know him I cannot stay away from him. My love to Vava." That was all. And then, shifting to get the light on the crumpled sheets, I read the end of Anton's letter.

"Later: It's fixed for tomorrow now. Sorry the writing's bad. Someone got wind that I was writing, they have broken the fingers of my right hand to stop it and I have to use my left. Tregelik still says he will get this to you, he is wonderfully kind.

"Alexei, I don't know what has happened to me, I can't understand the clearness I see with now. I thought that all I had tried to do was wasted, I thought that every battle was lost and no voice left against the driving power of evil. And now I see that the seed you plant stays in the ground while the grass above it shrivels

and burns, and the fire can't touch it, and the soil made up of old dead things will keep it alive and ready to give new life. They have said in every hundred years that nothing will grow again, but it goes on growing. And all my feebleness and all my stupidity and failures seem not to matter beside the force of life that I see waiting to burst again. Oh, if I had seen that power beneath me, how much harder I'd have fought, how much more joyfully.

"It doesn't matter. The joys I have had come back to me, far more beautiful now that my eyes are cleared. And the vision stays, and keeps me in its warmth, and wherever I go I cannot lose it. Only one thing is still beyond my understanding. Where did they find the love they gave to me, you, and she, and the nurse in the Moscow hospital, and all the passers-by who have loved me. I try to find it in myself, the reason for such loving, but there's nothing in me that could start a flow so deep and so continuing."

The letter seemed to end there. But I turned the last sheet over, and I saw scrawled across the back:

"I hear them getting ready, it will only be half an hour now. Such happiness, such perfect, burning happiness. Everything has melted and gone except the love that fills me, I am filled and held and covered with the sweeping blazing love of Jesus."

Natalia was still asleep. I put the letter away and went to relieve Vidlovski at the forepeak. The apprentice taking part-duty told me we had been through one area of ice, and he thought there was more coming; there would have to be a team of men on the crashing-boards if we wanted to get through. But the wind had eased and the snow stopped altogether. I sent the boy to get me some tea if he could. I wanted to be alone. Here you hardly felt the vibration, you heard the engine's chugging and the frash of paddles as though they belonged to another vessel some way behind. Leaning over, I thought I could hear faintly the crackle of ice, but I could see nothing in the dark field we ploughed. Daylight showed the clouds high and driven fast, still big with snow.

PARIS, 1925.

A LIST OF THE MORE IMPORTANT CHARACTERS IN TESTAMENT

Captain OTRAVESKOV (ALEXEI ALEXEIVITCH), the Narrator.
His wife, NATALIA KONSTANTINOVNA.
Their son, IVAN ALEXEIVITCH ("Vava").
Alexei's sister, KATRINA ALEXEIEVNA (Mme MILITUNE, "Catherine" or "Katie" or "Katia").
His servant, YEVSKI.

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Count (or Lieutenant) SCHEFFLER (ANTON ANTONOVITCH), a Barrister.
His wife, YELISAVETA AKINIEVNA (sometimes called "The Little Princess," "The Countess," "Lisveta," "Vetrisha").
Her father, Prince ROUMANIEV (AKINIEV MIHAILOVITCH).
His wife, TATIANA VASCOVNA (sometimes referred to as "The Princess," sometimes called "Tasha").
BAJOUSKA, EMELIAN } servants of YELISAVETA.
GOBODIN, servant of the Roumanievs.

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ZVETZKOV, a saddler, on trial in Petrograd, 1909.
M. KRISHNIENKO, President of Commission of Inquiry (Skoropadski Palace, 1909).

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Frau JAENICKE, Dr. KLÜBE } at Krozkohl.

Colonel VESTIL, Captain GRASSOGI, Captain (Dr.) BESTUSHEV, Lieut. VIRCHOV } officers at Mariki-Matesk.

KARAMACHIK, a soldier at Mariki-Matesk.
General LYUBLINOV, in command at headquarters, Paulskov.

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VLADIMIR IGNATOVITCH OLKHA (called "Vladimir," "Volodya," or "Comrade Olkha"), a friend of Katie.
General SOPOJNIKIN, of the General Staff at Petrograd.
The Countess KOTCHOUBEY (JULIA PETROVNA), Mme GRODZIEJOWSKA, Col. ASTANOVITCH, DARLYNIA ANTONOVNA SELIKHANICHEV } friends of the Roumanievs in Petrograd.
DR. TORKLUS, Superintendent, Mme IVANOV, Matron } at the Euphrosina Hospital.
HILDA JAKOVLIEVNA KOROSCHIK, "Guardian" of Vava in the Mlinovakaya.

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KAHN ABRAMOVITCH STRUBENSOHN, a lawyer.

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M. GRETZKOV, Col. NEIMITCH } of the General Staff Secretariat, under the Provisional Government.
Sergt. KRALITZKOV, Corpl. VOLDIK } at the Military Detention Establishment, Palais de Montresor.
Mme ARNEVITCH, employed as nurse to Natalia.
Dr. TSEKHOVOI, attending Vava in Petrograd.
M. GRÜNAUER, a banker in Petrograd.

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KONSTANTIN VIKTOROVITCH LUSANOV, father of Natalia.
His companion, LUDMILLA VASSILIEVNA.
His servant, DROMELIN.
MURAVIOV, millowner at Chaveschok.
KRUNOVITCH, agitator at Chaveschok.

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MISHLAYEVSKI, specialist-surgeon in Moscow.
Mme LENSCHITZI (VA'ISHA LVOVNA), Tatiana's hostess at Moscow.

ZAKHARIN, of the Judicial Committee of the Moscow Soviet.
DRUVALOV, secretary of the Political Department of the Judicial Committee.
KOKLOVITCH } visitors to Alexei in the Detention Establishment
DJEBRALIEV } at Moscow.
Mme DRUVALOV (née SONIA SCHEVOLCIEWICZ).

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Note.—The characters are entirely imaginary. They have no relation to any real persons who chance to bear or to have borne the names used, or similar names. They do not represent any persons who may hold or have held any such offices as the characters are described as holding.