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Vladimir Kurochkin

My Comrades

Regular readers of this magazine have become familiar with the work of the writer N. Virta, whose first novel, *Loneliness,* we published last year. *My Comrades* is the first work of Vladimir Kurochkin who happens to be a friend of Virta, and who came to literature through journalism.

To present the outstanding productions of Soviet literature has been one of the aims of *International Literature*; and to fulfil this aim it has been felt necessary to present the work not only of well-known writers but the new writers who in the Soviet Union are given unusual opportunities.

N. Virta himself may be given as one of many examples. This writer, recently quite unknown, is now extremely popular in the U.S.S.R. His play, *The Earth,* adapted from his novel *Loneliness,* is to be produced in one of the leading Soviet theaters (The Moscow Academic Art Theater) whose directors are the famous regisseurs Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko.

N. Virta is not only a personal friend of Vladimir Kurochkin, but a comrade-at-letters who has helped him in launching his literary career.

Vladimir Kurochkin is young, only 26. Not long ago he was a manual worker at the Moscow Electric Works. As a member of the Young Communist League he took active part in the issue of the factory wall newspaper, and it was here that his talent was revealed and developed. Like most of the Soviet youth, Kurochkin is keen on all kinds of sport, especially aviation.

My Comrades is a novel about Soviet sportsmen, about the heroic youth of the Soviet Union, ardent in their love of the Socialist fatherland. The novel presents a new human type, unknown to capitalist society.

It must nevertheless be borne in mind that *My Comrades* is a first novel. It has some marked shortcomings, attention to which has been called by Soviet critics. One of the chief ones is that the author, although he has very fully and very ably shown his heroes' actions, has failed to show their minds. Kurochkin's heroes scarcely think at all. The young writer has not yet learnt the art of broad typification of the phenomena of life, has not learnt how to show not only people's actions but also the impulse on which they act.

Nevertheless, even the most antagonistic critics do not deny the undoubted talent of the writer.

My Comrades belongs to a literary genre which has been very little treated in Soviet literature. Like Pavlenko's novel *In the East* (with which readers of this magazine are already familiar), *My Comrades* is in large part an imaginative novel. The concluding section is a presentation of the conduct of these sport-trained comrades in a possible war against the fascist enemy. Here the retention of a realist technique makes the fantasy extraordinarily effective and gives the book a real distinction.

The Boy Meets His Father for the First Time

The dragoons advance from the right; the cuirassiers from the left. Ahead of them march the drummer-boys. But the drums are mute. The dragoons and cuirassiers are made of tin. Tim builds fortresses of wooden blocks on the floor for the tin soldiers to attack. But twilight also attacks. Darkness advances upon Tim. He moves his toys nearer to the window. The forts fall to ruins in the process, and are rebuilt. Tim moves on until the darkness robs him of the last piece of floor. Then Tim turns toward the kitchen and calls out:

"It's dark!"

"Yes, but we can't light the lamp. They're shooting in the street, Tim," his mother replies.

Tim listens. He, too, can hear firing outside the window. Absorbed in his game, he had forgotten the shooting in the streets that had been going on now for a week. Tim got up and trotted off to his mother in the kitchen, where it was not so terrifying. True, it was dark but the stove was going. The little door of the stove was half-open and the cheerful fire could be seen. It was nice! Tim stood by the stove, clinging to his mother's skirt.

His mother was boiling potatoes. She did not utter a word. But Tim did not mind. His mother had a great deal to think of these days, was always silent and thoughtful. Sometimes she talked to herself. Once she had told Tim that his father would be coming home soon. It was the evening the postman had brought her an envelope containing a sheet of grey paper covered with writing in pencil. Tim had heard a lot about his father from her before this happened. That was his father in the photograph hanging on the wall. A clean-shaven, cheerful face. Tim had never seen his father but he knew that he was a very necessary person, like his mother. He would be completely lost without his mother, especially since the shooting in the streets began.

Tim bent down and saw a bit of paper lying on the floor. He picked it up and threw it into the stove. It blazed up immediately and Tim watched with enjoyment how it was sucked in by the warm air, how it curled and vanished into the very heart of the flames, where white tongues fought for it with orange.

In his mother's pocket was a letter, which she felt from time to time. It said: "My dears, I shall soon be at home with you. This blasted life is coming to an end at last. We are not fighting any more. When we are led into an attack we make friends with the enemy. Our boys are throwing down their rifles and the Germans are doing the same. I'm sticking to mine, though. Vassili was shot a few days ago. I'm so happy, when I think I shall see you soon. I've been talking to the boys and we think we will be home in October."

It was October now. And there was shooting in the streets. That was because a revolution was going on in the town. Rifle shots and the rattle of machine-guns could be heard. The firing was close by. The military cadets holding the Ensign Training School in Smolensk Street were being attacked. The siege of the school had been going on a long time. Tim, listening to the shooting, asked his mother: "Will they be shooting tomorrow as well?"

"Yes, Tim."

"Will they stop when Daddy comes home?"

"I don't know, child."

"Will he be frightened of them?"

"No, he's not easily frightened, love."

"When will he come?"

"Soon."

"Today?"

"Yes. Or perhaps tomorrow."

Tim shuffled his feet on one spot for a while. Then he bent down, picked up a piece of birch bark and pitched it into the fire. It curled itself up like a live thing, then bubbled, flared up and burned brightly.

"What a lovely fire!" the child exclaimed admiringly.

At that moment there was a loud knock at the street door. It sounded like a kick. The mother ran to the door; Tim remained standing by the stove. But not for very long. Following his mother, he halted on the threshold of the kitchen and the next room. From here he could see everything. The stove, burning merrily, cast an orange glow straight at the open outer door where his mother was speaking to a soldier. The latter wore a tall, shabby, sheepskin cap with a bit of red cloth sewn on it, and a tattered army overcoat.

"Are you Citizeness Rausheva?" asked the soldier.

"Yes," said Tim's mother.

"Then this is for you. Documents. They must be your husband's. He was killed by the cadets just now."

He handed her a thin packet of papers. She opened it. She saw her husband's passport. The hands holding the papers dropped to her nides. Then she stepped back into the room to lay them on the table: there she stood still, pressing the papers to her breast. Meanwhile the soldier was peering out of the doorway into the street.

"Come on," he said to someone. Three more soldiers carried a man in a military overcoat into the house. They did it with difficulty because of the rifles slung across their shoulders.

"This way," said Tim's mother, pointing to the bed.

Tim felt terrified. What a lot of soldiers! He ran to his mother and hid behind her skirt, until the soldiers went out, closing the door after them. The first soldier remained. He drew out his tobacco pouch and lit a cigarette. It was evident that he was longing to go, too, but did not know how to do it. So he stood there, shifting from one foot to another. Tim's mother broke the silence at last.

"Did you see them kill him?"

"Yes, citizeness, I did."

"Did you see him fall?"

"Yes, citizeness."

"Did he say anything?"

"No, citizeness, he was killed outright."

"Ah!"

Tim's mother was silent. So was Tim, and so was the soldier. Then the soldier said:

"Devil only knows what drove us to get mixed up in this business. We've only just come from the front. We wanted to go straight home from the station. Well, and we all set off together, because we were all going the same way. Your husband said: 'I've not far to go, just down to the river.' So we thought we'd see him home."

Tim looked at the bed on which the man in the military overcoat was lying. His father? Why did he not speak? No, his father was gay and cheerful. Look at the picture of him! But this man just lay there, saying nothing.

The soldier continued his story. "And devil take those cadets—if they didn't go and lay an ambush right in our road. It seems they've been turned out of their premises three days already. And your husband up and says: 'Shall we lend a hand?' Well, and it's nothing new for us, of course. We lay down and fired away. We made it hot for them. And they killed him. We saw things were looking bad and we cleared out. We found your house by the address on the letter."

Tim's mother laid her husband's papers on the table and seemed as if she was about to ask the soldier something. But he had finished his smoke. He settled his sheepskin cap firmly on his head and said:

"Well, I'll be going, they must be fed up waiting for me."

He went out and Tim's mother closed the door after him. But she did not go over to the bed. Was she afraid, or was she, perhaps, waiting for something? After all, people sometimes made mistakes. Killed outright? Perhaps not! She listened. But the man on the bed lay motionless. Then she went up to him and threw back the coat. The glow from the kitchen stove lit up the man's face. The woman did not recognize it. The man was a stranger! His cheeks were unshaven and grey, as if they had been rubbed with gunpowder. He had a bruise on his forehead. His cheek bones were very broad. Tim's mother shrieked and clutched her head. What was the meaning of this? She

ran into the kitchen, lit the kerosene lamp and carried it into the room. Tim was roaring at the top of his voice now, as loudly as that time, in the yard, when a stone had been flung and had broken his nose.

His mother rushed back to the table and went over the papers. She examined them page by page. They were all her husband's. Then she came upon a letter. The envelope was addressed to her. She opened it and began to read. The letter was in her husband's handwriting, but she could not understand anything. The letter had got wet in the rain and must have lain crumpled for a long time. The writing was illegible. She turned the paper over and held it nearer to the lamp. Now the sense of the last line was becoming clear: "Goodbye forever, my dears." She did not need to know any more. Her husband had been killed, some time ago at the front, perhaps by the Germans, perhaps by his own officers. He was dead—that was all. This was his friend lying here. A dead man had brought her husband's documents and his last greeting.

Tim was tugging at her skirt and crying:

"Daddy, daddy, daddy!"

His mother picked up the child in her arms and carried him over to the bed. What should she tell him? She covered the face of her husband's comrade with a clean handkerchief. Many a hard day lay ahead of her now! She would have to learn to bear everything stoically. She must not lose her head or cry. She must carry on and not get downhearted. Her husband had not let himself get downhearted out there in the horror that had brought him his death.

"Your father is dead, he's not alive any more," she said. "Now we must bury him, Tim."

Shark-Catching in Australia

Under the midday sun the asphalt pavements had softened. Two little boys were sitting in a yard, tired of their play. They sat swinging their legs.

"Ever been to Australia, Serozha?" one of them asked.

"No, Tim," Serozha replied.

"Well, I have."

"What did you go there for?"

"I had to."

"What a yarn!"

"Why should I tell a lie?"

"Is it further than Tula?" Serozha asked.

"It's in another direction. A hundred times more southerly," Tim informed him.

"Is it hotter there than here?"

"I should think so! Why, you daren't go out in the daytime there."

"Then when can you go out to play?"

"Only at night."

"Now that's a lie. Because there'd be lots of wild beasts out at night."

The yardman appeared at that moment, rolling a huge wooden reel before him. Around the reel was wound the hose used for watering the streets. Its brass nozzle glittered in the sun.

"How it shines!" Serozha exclaimed.

"In Australia things like that shine two hundred times brighter," said Tim.

"What sort of animals are there in Australia?" Serozha asked.

"Different kinds. More kangaroos than anything. They jump right over the houses."

"What a lie!"

"It's not. The houses are small. Then there are duckbills. They have snouts like spades. Ever seen them?"

"No. We haven't got up to that yet in our school."

"Then there are rhinoceroses and giraffes."

"Oh, I know what a giraffe is. I've got a stamp with one on it. They live in Africa."

"Those are the yellow-spotted ones. The Australian kind have brown spots."

"Oh!"

"As a matter of fact, there are more ostriches than anything else. Just running about, you know. I used to hunt them."

"Aw, tell us about that," Serozha begged.

"Well, there was me and another chap. We used to take about a hundred traps with us every night and lay them on the ground. The ostriches fall in as they run along. They can't fly, so they just have to sit where they are, in those traps. We'd catch them then. Not bad, eh?"

"Not bad at all!"

"I used to ride ostriches. Very strong birds, you know. I went all over Australia on one."

"Ooh, I say!"

"You would say 'ooh!' if you saw me! I jumped on his back and off he galloped. He had big hard claws. They sounded like horse's hoofs. He was faster than a horse."

At that moment Serozha's elder brother came out into the yard with a towel over his shoulder.

"Coming for a swim, kids?" he called out.

"Oh, that would be grand!" Serozha and Tim cried out. They both grabbed at a black button on Tim's trousers, because they had said the same words, at the same moment. They joined Serozha's brother and set off for the river. It was not far off: the boys pulled off their shirts and carried them. At the end of the street, the embankment came in sight. The water glittered in the sunlight.

"Lesha," said Serozha, "Tim's been to Austria."

"No, Australia," Tim corrected him.

"What's that?" Lesha asked.

"He's been to Australia," Serozha repeated.

"He's just pulling your leg."

"No, I'm not. I *have* been there," Tim insisted.

"When was that?"

"Not long ago."

"But you were at the forest school not so long ago."

"That was at first, and afterwards I went to Australia."

"Oh, what a liar you are! What were you doing there?"

"Catching sharks along the coast."

Lesha stood stock still and stared at Tim. This youngster actually had the cheek to pull *his* leg. Tim strolled along nonchalantly, swinging his checked shirt. They reached the riverside and descended the stone steps to the sand.

"Well, I expect you know how to swim the Australian crawl, then, don't you?" Lesha asked.

"Oh yes. We used to swim a good bit there," Tim replied.

"Show us how it's done," said Lesha. He knew very well that neither his brother nor Tim could swim at all.

"Sure," said Tim.

He pulled off his pants and went down to the water. Impossible to retreat now! He walked slowly over the sand. It was burning hot; his feet sank up to the ankles in it. Before him rippled the water with the sun quivering in it. Should he say he was feeling sick? No. Tim clenched his fists. Never! And then, hadn't he been to Australia, after all? He had trodden the sand there, too, when they went out hunting sharks. And the water, the cold sea-water, had lapped the shore just as here. Yes, there it was, the water! Tim went closer; a cool wave licked his soles. He glanced round. Serozha had dug himself into the sand and was watching him. Close by, Lesha, in his bathing trunks, was watching him, smiling. Tim stepped into the water. He felt the sandy floor beneath his feet, sloping smoothly into the river. Tim could see the broken reflection of his legs in the water, and the sand and shells. Beyond him sand and shells melted into a greenish dimness. He had to go into that dimness.

Lesha strolled down to the water and watched the small, sunburnt figure moving resolutely away from the bank. The water was washing over his knees. Now it was up to his hips. Now his waist. Now his shoulder-blades.

At this point Lesha entered the water, too.

Tim could feel the water at his chin. A wave splashed into his mouth. He had to raise his head, step on his tiptoes, and stretch out his arms to keep his balance. But he moved steadily ahead. It was lonesome and terrifying. But he could not think of turning back now. How silly it all was! He should not have got into the water at all. But that would have been cowardly! At the next step the bottom dropped away from his feet. This was the end! He started whirling his arms, and his legs. His motions were like those of a bicycle rider. Mouth, nose and eyes were full of water. At first his movements were calm and Tim managed to keep on the surface. What luck! He had even contrived to take in a fresh supply of breath. "I must be swimming like they do in Australia," he thought. Then he grew tired; his movements became spasmodic. In his convulsive efforts to take in some air through his mouth, he swallowed water. Something was pulling him down, down. "I'm drowning!" flashed through his head. Instinctively his hands pressed the water downwards. His head came up again. He swallowed a new supply of air. Should he call out? They would come and save him then. No, he mustn't make a sound. He *had* been to Australia and he *could* swim. No one would have a chance to laugh at him. But Tim was now so exhausted that he had ceased to move. The air still in his lungs kept him on the suface. But now he was letting it out through his nostrils. The air bubbled over his face. Tim sank rapidly. The movements of his hands were no more than a feeble gesture of protest. He did not want to drown! But it was too late now. Tim mustered sufficient strength to open his eyes; through the green streaming water he saw a faint light which penetrated from above. His legs sank first, for there was still a little air left in his lungs. He was drowning.

At that moment Lesha seized him and pulled him up to the surface. He held Tim in his arms and twisted him round to see his face. The youngster had got the punishment he deserved! Lesha was just about to say: "Well,

evidently they don't know how to swim in Australia!" but when he saw the beseeching look in the child's gray eyes, he was silenced.

Lesha carried him to the bank. Then he called out to his younger brother:

"Serozha, we'll have to believe him. He must have been in Australia."

Tim lay on the hot sand, inert, recovering his strength. He watched Lesha return to the water and swim to the opposite bank.

The Beginning of a Friendship

"Tim—this is Dima," said Serozha, introducing them.

"Very glad to meet you," Dmitri murmured, smiling.

"I've heard a lot about you from Serozha," said Tim.

"I know all about you, too," Dmitri said.

The boys shook hands. Their faces revealed their satisfaction at meeting each other. Dmitri screwed up his deep-blue eyes and smiled. Even sunburn could not cover the thick sprinkling of freckles on his cheekbones and nose.

"I expect everybody calls you 'Carrots,' don't they?" said Tim, with a glance at the thick, bronze locks of his new acquaintance.

"Yes, but I don't mind," Dmitri replied. "They could call you 'Crow,' couldn't they?"

"That's true," Tim agreed, laughing and touching his stiff black hair. "Only my beak wouldn't quite fit in."

"Why not! It's a pretty long one."

Serozha, meanwhile, was hopping about his two friends, delighted that he had at last succeeded in bringing them together.

"Do you know what?" he suggested suddenly. "Let's go down to the river."

"Not a bad idea," Dmitri agreed.

"Only the sun's gone behind the clouds."

He looked upwards. Serozha followed his glance.

"It'll come out again in a minute," Tim said.

The remarks about the sun were merely to make conversation. Dmitri and Tim were longing to get down to the river as soon as possible to see who was the better swimmer. That was the whole point of their meeting. Serozha had spread the most fantastic rumors about each. Tim was thinking: "They say he dives awfully well, but I can show him how to lie in water."

"Come on," said Serozha, "the sun will be out by the time we get there."

"Sure, what's the point of hanging around here?" Tim agreed.

They strolled leisurely down the street.

"Are we going to the bridge?" Serozha asked.

"Yes, let's," said Dmitri. "People stop and look down at you from the bridge."

"No, it'll be better to go to the barge, we can jump from there," cried Tim.

"We'll go first to the bridge and then to the barge," Serozha suggested, to satisfy them both.

"Then we'll have to go through that yard," Tim said, pointing the way.

They went through the yard. Pigeon fliers lived here. They seldom allowed anyone to pass through the yard without a wise crack. A young fellow, on one of the roofs, waving a pole with a black cloth tied to it, shouted down:

"Hey, birdies come back, you've missed a step!"

"Don't shout so loud! You'll fall off the roof and frighten the old women," Dmitri retorted.

The pigeon flyer was startled by this retort in kind, but they were already

outside the gates before he could think of anything. Then they crossed the street and went along a narrow, humpbacked lane that led straight down to the river. Tim was full of admiration for Dmitri. Such a daring, clever fellow! Looked rather fragile, though. Never mind, those kind made beautiful swimmers. You could be friends with a chap like that. He wouldn't let you down! They reached the river bank and turned to the right, close to the large, handsome bridge. The trio descended to the water's edge. This was a deserted spot. Here stood a big wooden platform. It was hollow underneath and one could hear the hollow splash of the water under it. The sun had reappeared and enlivened the river. The boys undressed. Tim went to the edge of the platform, sat down and dangled his feet in the water. A rather musty smell rose from the greenish mould on the logs of the platform.

What a wonderful thing, water! You could sit for hours by the river, listening to it. When the heat prostrated the town, the best place to be was by the water. Fling something into it, watch, through half-closed eyes, its gradual alteration. It would lose its own shape and assume other, mysterious forms. In the water you swam with slow, gentle movements, raising your head now and again to look at the sun. Swimming should be done slowly. You should never make abrupt, fussy movements in the water. It loved masterful, insinuating movements. To spend your childhood by the water was the finest thing in the world. By the water and in the sun. You needed nothing else. And you would grow up strong and healthy, and best of all—calm.

Tim was gazing at the water-spiders and would have sat there a long time if his name had not been called out suddenly.

"Tim, let's go for a swim!" cried Dmitri.

They jumped off the platform into the water, while Serozha stayed on the bank to mind their clothes. He sat down where Tim had been sitting and dangled his feet in the water. The other two were swimming to the bridge, without trying to make a race of it. From time to time Tim floated. He floated with his eyes open, and could see the greenish water lit by the sun. But it hurt his eyes a little. Dmitri dived and swam under water. His sunburnt body flitted like a huge fish. Tim watched him with interest. Dmtri's movements under water were abrupt. His impeded breathing made them convulsive and jerky. The boys swam to the shadow the bridge cast upon the water. Trams rattled over the bridge; people passed by. Some, noticing the swimmers, looked down. Tim and Dmitri went on. The water under the bridge was much colder. In the depths were currents that felt icy. But Dmitri went on diving without letting this disturb him. His agility was fascinating to watch. Tim swam abreast of him. He was looking upwards. Tim looked up too.

"It's pleasant when there are so many people looking on. I love it!" Dmitri said.

"It makes no difference to me," said Tim. Then they swam back again and climbed out on the planks. Serozha went into the water now, while the other two lay on the planks and gazed at the river along which tugs were crawling and little boats darting.

"Do you go in for water sport?" Dmitri asked.

"No," Tim replied. "I just swim—I don't go in for anything special." To him, the word "sport" signified something unattainable.

"You ought to go in for water sport," Dmitri observed. "In olden times in Greece, boys of our age broke records."

"I've no one to do it with. It's dull doing things by one's self and I don't know any of the right sort of chaps. There was one in our class at school, but something happened and now he goes about looking like a funeral."

"What happened?"

"He ran away to the Far Eastern frontier, hoping to get into the Red Army. But he was sent back. Too young."

"That was rather plucky of him. What's his name?"

"Dorokhov. Petya."

"They wouldn't have got me to go back. Why couldn't he say he was twenty?"

"I don't know. Maybe he did, but they wouldn't believe him."

Dmitri bent over to Tim and whispered:

"I've been meaning to go there, too."

"Have you really?"

"Yes, but my father went and got sick—he's awfully old—and I was afraid he'd die while I was away."

"A pal of mine—and me—we wanted to go together. . . . And Petya decided to have another shot at it, along with us. But the enemy had surrendered already. They've been put down without our help. We'd got everything ready, too. Tickets and money and everything. We were starting in the morning, when Petya came running in and shouted: 'It's all gone bust, the Chinese generals have been smashed to blazes.' So that was that, we didn't go."

"You know what, Tim, let's all go in for water sport!"

Serozha climbed out on the planks, puffing and blowing. He had got some water up his nose.

"Listen, Sergei, will you go in for water sport along with us?" Tim asked him.

"No, I'm going to be a sprinter," replied Serozha.

He lay down beside them on the planks. Tim and Dmitri went on with their conversation.

"Are you fond of diving, Tim?"

"No, I don't like it."

"It's not dangerous."

"Oh, I'm not afraid. I love swimming. Fast swimming."

"But diving's interesting. Sometimes when you go very deep, it's even terrifying. You think you're just going to suffocate. . . . Are you afraid of death, Tim?"

"No. I don't know. I've never thought about it."

"I have. It's terrible to die."

"Yes, it must be."

"It's particularly terrible to think that you won't be in the world any more. There'll be neither hands nor feet nor head. You'll never walk any more. You won't be able to breathe. And you won't know what's going on in the world."

"It's too frightful to think of," Tim said.

"I'm not afraid of diving, though. I can go to the very bottom."

"I'm not afraid, either. I could dive anywhere if I had to."

"Can you dive under a boat?"

"Yes, I could."

"Let's go and try."

They jumped into the water again and swam out a good way from the

bank. Dmitri made for an approaching pleasure boat, while Tim waited, floating, and watching Dmitri. The latter was swimming rapidly towards the boat. When her bow was almost on him, he uttered a cry and dived under her. Two men were sitting, rowing in her. When they heard the cry, they lifted their oars and listened. Then, with frightened faces, they peered over her bow and sides. They spoke to each other and then began to row again in an undecided way. But Dmitri was already hanging on to the stern and laughing, while the boat drew him along. Then he let go and swam towards Tim.

It was Tim's turn now. He swam away from Dmitri in the direction of another boat. Seeing her skimming swiftly towards him, he felt queer. He had never done it before. Here were the bows; he clutched at them and dived. He did not let go but moved his hands rapidly along the keel, which was bound with iron. In some places the iron had come loose and Tim nearly scratched his hands on it. The water was whispering above him. Tim's head swam. He could not get enough air, but now his hands had gripped the rudder, and his head left the water. It was good to draw fresh air into his lungs. Tim smiled at Dmitri and listened. The man and woman in the boat were talking to each other.

"Wasn't there someone swimming ahead of us, Marussia?"

"Yes. Do you think we could have run him down?"

"Devil only knows!"

"What shall we do?"

"Don't worry. I'm still alive!" Tim called out, drawing himself up by his hands.

Then he let go of the stern and swam away to Dmitri.

"Bravo!" said the latter. "Now can you dive under a shell?"

"Yes."

They waited for a racing boat. When one appeared in the distance, Dmitri said:

"You'll go second again"—and swam right across her bows. Tim noticed how swiftly the long, narrow shell shot down the river. She was manned by eight oarsmen. Dmitri paused and dived right under her. It seemed to Tim that the boat's sharp nose must have pierced Dmitri's head, which now disappeared. For several seconds Tim felt nervous. Then he caught sight of Dmitri, at the stern, slapping the water with his hand.

"I couldn't get hold of the rudder, she went too quickly," he said as he came up.

"It was fine!" Tim remarked.

They waited for another racer but none came.

"You'll do it another time," said Dmitri. They swam to the bank and clambered out on the planks.

Suddenly the siren of a steamer rang out over the river.

"Could you dive under a steamer?" Dmitri asked.

"I could have a shot at it," Tim said.

"Chuck it," cried Serozha, "stop boasting! You both swim jolly well."

But Dmitri was already up and at the edge of the planks.

"I'll dive under it straight from here," he said, and disappeared under the water. Serozha and Tim ran to the edge. There was nothing to be seen. The ship was steaming along in the distance.

"He's a regular devil!" was Serozha's admiring comment.

"That was a risky thing to do," said Tim.

The steamer passed. Waves ruffled the surface of the water, but Dmitri was not to be seen.

"What's the matter, I wonder?" Tim said.

He and Serozha paced up and down, along the edge of the planks. Tim fidgeted nervously with his fingers. Five minutes passed, but still Dmitri's head did not appear. The boys grew alarmed. Several minutes more went by.

"We ought to call for help at once," Serozha suggested.

"Yes, run!" Tim said.

He looked at the river. It was quiet, now, as if the steamer had never passed. It lived a life of its own.

The trams rattled on the bridge. It would never occur to anyone that an accident had happened. The sun shone as brightly as before, even to Tim it seemed as if nothing could have happened. Nothing indeed! Here were Dmitri's clothes lying on the bank, but he—? Perhaps at the bottom of the river. A little shiver ran through Tim. He was alone. Serozha had gone. Oh, if only somebody would come quickly! Should he swim out to look for Dmitri? No, what could he do alone? They would need several people and boat hooks. How terrible! A boy had been alive a few minutes ago and now he wasn't. To find a friend and lose him so soon! This was death—that Dmitri had talked about.

Serozha was coming down the bank with a little stout man oozing sweat from his exertions. He carried a fishing rod.

"What's up?" he demanded.

"A pal of ours has got drowned!" Tim shouted.

'What pal? What are you lying for?"

"I'm not, it's true. Here are his clothes."

"Then you'll have to run and get a boat."

"Serozha, run quick!"

The fat man threw down his rod and pulled off his shirt. Suddenly his gaze lighted on something behind Tim and grew fixed. The fat man shouted angrily:

"Aha, so you're just pulling my leg, devil take you!"

Tim turned round and saw Dmitri in the act of scrambling out of the water. He ran eagerly to the friend he had given up for lost.

"Dimka, old chap! Where've you been?"

"I've been sitting under the platform. As soon as I'd dived, I went in there. There's a clear space between the planks and the water. Did you get a fright?"

"I give up," said Tim. "You're a better swimmer than me; but don't do any more of these death stunts."

The man with the fishing rod climbed swearing up the bank.

First Love

The lilac was in bloom. A little man was sitting on a bench in the garden close to the flower-laden boughs. He was waiting for a girl who did not come. He sat twirling a branch of lilac, sniffing the flowers. Then he pulled off the tiny petals one by one. You could see his lips saysing: "She love me, she loves me not. . . ." There was a rustle in the bushes behind him and the little man turned, smiling expectantly. When the bushes parted, it was only a burly gardener with a watering can.

The embarrassed little man sprang up, hiding the branch of lilac behind his back. He bowed ingratiatingly to the gardener, raising his battered derby.

The gardener swung his watering can fiercely and the little man hurried down the path, pressing his hand to his heart in alarm. Then he took refuge behind a bush, and when the garderner had gone, returned to the bench to wait for his girl. . . .

The audience laughed heartily at the lover's troubles. But though Tim felt a fellow feeling for him, he laughed too because the little man looked so comical. It was very annoying that the film broke off so often. Now it stopped again and the lights went on. Tim said to Valya, who was sitting beside him: "What bunglers they are!"

"Yes. And the couples behind us keep kissing all the time. Can you hear them?" Valya said.

"Well, let them," Tim replied. Then the lights went out again. The little man on the screen resumed his languishing. Tim understood his sufferings. He had felt just the same himself not so long ago. He recalled how he first became acquainted with Valya. It had happened about a month ago, in the autumn. But the first time he had seen her had been in the summer. He lived not far from her house and once as he was passing he had seen her standing at the gate with some friends. She had on a fashionable yellowish blouse with white lace down the front. Her head flung back, she was laughing at her companions' jokes. Her full, capricious mouth caught Tim's attention. It was crimson, although not painted.

"What a handsome boy," she remarked to the others.

He blushed and walked past without looking round. After this he found excuses every day to pass her house. She lived on the ground floor. Tim often caught sight of her at the window. Soon she was smiling to him as to an acquaintance. He named her Tatiana to himself, and made up fantastic stories about their love. When she was not at the window or the gate, his heart choked with yearning and his day dreams became sad.

Once, as Tim was walking down her street, some boys were loitering on the pavement opposite her house, teasing a big dog. They sicced the dog on Tim, who braced himself to kick him off, when his "Tatiana" appeared at her window and signed to him to run into the vestibule of her house. Tim ran in. Immediately afterwards the girl emerged from behind a door covered with oilcloth. They shook hands.

"The dog didn't bite you, did it?" she asked anxiously.

"No, he didn't catch up to me," he replied.

"I'm called Valya. Isn't it strange—we don't know each other's names and still we seem to have known each other a hundred years. How old are you?"

She said all this in one breath. But it did not surprise Tim, because he was under the impression that all girls talked like that—rapidly and breathlessly.

"I'm seventeen," he replied, adding on six months to his age.

"Are you? You look more. And how old am I? Do you want to know? I'm older than you. But I look younger, don't I? You often pass our house. Do you live near here?"

"Yes, in Smolensk Street."

"Oh—I know. I've got an uncle living there. Well, what's your name? You haven't told me yet. I seem to be talking all the time and you don't say anything."

"I'm called Timothy."

"What a nice name. I've got friends called Michael, Vladimir and Alexan-

der, but I haven't known a single Timothy yet. They called you Tim when you were little, I expect? Didn't they? Are you a student somewhere?"

"No. I'm working already. I went to a factory school."

"I've finished school, too, and I'm working now. I like work better, don't you? Tim—I'm going to call you that—you've got such wonderful eyelashes, long as a girl's. Do you know what, Tim, let's go for a walk."

That was their first walk together. When winter came, walking gave way to the skating rink. Tim no longer suffered; he no longer submerged himself in day dreams. He was even a little disillusioned. It seemed impossible to talk to Valya on any serious subject. Whenever Tim began to talk to her about affairs at the workshop or about something he had read in the papers and got excited over, she interrupted him with: "Oh, there you go again, getting serious. My head's ready to burst with serious stuff at work. Why, should we talk about it now?" Tim would fall silent, disappointed and hurt.

Once coming back from the rink, they lingered in the vestibule. They had laid their skates on the radiator and were very close to each other.

"You're so funny, really," said Valya. "You never, never talk. And your lips are frozen. Aren't they? I've a good mind to bite them off for you this very minute."

"You couldn't!" Tim said, laughing.

"Oh, couldn't I? You'll see!"

She seized his lip between her teeth. They kissed. Again and again. Tim had never kissed like that before. The kisses were long ones, and Tim could feel her teeth against his. It felt unpleasant. What a strange kind of kisses! The novelty of the sensation was more alarming than anything else. He wanted to hurry away. Valya would not let him go, and was offended when he went away after all. After that they met less frequently. And now!—

The little man on the screen did not attempt to kiss his beloved. He only touched her dress tenderly. In his agitation he kept falling. First he fell on the slippery floor of the drawing room; then on a piece of melon rind on the pavement. Tim felt sorry for him, but Valya whispered:

"Isn't he ridiculous! Why don't he kiss her! How stupid to go running about like that—all for nothing."

"Yes, he's a freak," said Tim, but he was thinking of something else.

Valya whispered again:

"The people behind us keep kissing."

"We ought to call a militia-man, perhaps," said Tim, smiling.

Then, quickly: "Look, Valya, look—there's a brick going to drop on his head!"

He craned his neck in an effort to see better over the vast back of a military man sitting in front of him. He was anxious to see how the little man on the screen would fare in this new danger. He seized Valya's hand, she craned her neck too and gave his hand a return squeeze. Then she lifted his hand and placed it on her breast. The screen swam before his eyes. He was quite bewildered with the unexpectedness of the act. He did not know what to do. Very likely, everything was as it should be. He could feel the warm, firm girlish breast under his hand. Even her heart beats felt like caresses on his palm. He stared tensely at the screen. Should he take his hand away or not? Valya's head was very close to his, almost touching his cheek. She pressed his hand deeper into her breast.

Tim's cap fell to the floor. It had been lying on his knees and fell down

accidentally. Bending down to pick it up he freed his hand. At that moment the lights went on. People got up and started for the exits.

It was snowing. Big, fluffy flakes were falling softly. They melted as soon as they touched the hands or face. But on the ground they formed an even laver. If you shoved your foot along without raising it from the ground, a crest of snow formed around the sole of your galosh, just as it did around the snow-plough on the railway. Tim and Valya slid along the pavement as if on skis, leaving four deep ruts behind them. The light from the street lamps was reflected as blue sparks in the snowflakes. For awhile Tim and Valya walked along in silence; then she said:

"Say something. Don't you like being with me? Are you fed up with me? Since you have nothing to say to me you must be."

"Stop inventing grievances. Valya," said Tim.

"You're fed up with me, I know!" she persisted. "I don't care, you're just a kid."

"You're shouting," Tim said.

They reached Valya's house and stood still.

"You're not offended with me, are you?" she asked, when they were saying goodbye. "No? Then come and see me tomorrow. There'll be nobody home. We'll be alone. You'll come, won't you?"

"I'll try. Goodbye."

"Fine. Goodbye—till tomorrow."

But Tim did not go the next day. He had joined a hockey team. The first practice was to be held that evening.

The Sky Changes Its Hue

"We're on duty today."

"Why, we were on not long ago."

"I tell you, we're on duty today."

"Sentry-go again?"

"Yes."

We stood at a long table, near the rifle stands behind the tents. Our rifles lay on the table before us. We were cleaning them. The day before the whole company had had shooting practice. Now we had to give our arms an extra going over. The senior was hovering round threatening to smell every rifle He was in a stew because there was to be a review today. Our factory patrons were to pay us a visit and we were to entertain them with a parade.

I gave the barrel and the breech of the rifle a thorough cleaning. I poked my nose to it several times; it smelt of clean cold metal. Then I oiled it. This was an art. The metal had to be covered with a thin, scarcely noticeable film of oil. I kept a tooth brush for this purpose. I dipped it in oil, shook it and passed it over the metal. Having oiled it, I wiped the wooden parts with a cloth and put the lock in place. Just as I was about to set my rifle on the stand, Peter Dorokhov came running up:

"They're here!" he cried.

"What, already?"

I hurried, and pulling up the strap of the rifle, placed it on the stand. There was a commotion at the table; Kunitsin had dropped the lock of his rifle in the sand, giving him another half-hour's work. He cursed Dorokhov heartily for startling him and making him drop it. I went up to the table. Peter said to me:

"Tim, you ought to clean your boots, the visitors are here."

"Yes, thanks for reminding me."

I looked down. My boots were dusty. I ran off to clean them. My hands trembled a little as I picked up the shoe brush. So our factory patrons had arrived. For me this was a very important event. Our regiment was under the patronage of the plant where I had formerly been employed. Natasha worked there too. She had not written to me for six weeks. In her last letter she had said she wanted to come and see me. After that no word from her. So far I had not attached any particular importance to it. She might have been busy; she might have been ill. This right boot would not clean properly, damn it; some drops of water had fallen on it.

While I was at my boots, the visitors passed by on their way to the drill-ground. I saw only their backs as they passed the tents. I noticed a girl of medium height in a red jacket. It must be she. She alone had hair like that, like alluvial gold, a lock here and there darker than the rest, giving it a bronze tint. Her hair was always combed back, as if blown by the wind, giving her a headlong look, as if she were racing forward—a proud bird, flying fast. Yes, it was Natasha. She had come! Now both boots shone with equal brightness.

We formed ranks, shouldering our rifles. We straightened our lines. Music came from the drill-ground. The regiments of the whole division were marching there. Soon we fell in and marched singing to the square. It was full already. We were at the rear. We stood "at ease," talking quietly, but keeping our ranks. It was very hot. The clouds simply crawled across the sky. They were low on the horizon and the sun poured down mercilessly. My shirt was soaked.

Soon there was a stir in the lines. We all drew ourselves up and stood at attention. It was very quiet. Through a narrow slit in the lines, the divisional commander could be seen. He walked along the field, then took a stand and waved his sword. The sun danced on the steel blade which seemed molten. The divisional commander reported to the chiefs from Moscow who passed down our lines. They greeted us and we replied heartily, rank by rank. It was so quiet that we could hear their voices when they were almost out of sight.

We began to march past the raised stands. The orchestra struck up a ceremonial march and we dressed to the right. I was on the outside of the line. I thought that when I reached the platform I would be able to pick out Natasha's face and smile at her, but we were marching too fast, and on the platform all I could see was a mass of faces, all gay, all delighted faces, all shouting "hurrah," as we were doing. The divisional commander with his black, well-trimmed beard, greeted us. Faces flashed past us as on the films. Suddenly it was all over, as if the film had broken off. We were beyond the stands. I had not seen Natasha, but I was sure she had seen me.

Following the parade, the visitors went sight-seeing. They looked at our tents. Meanwhile, we went off to smoke. I made for the summer house, where we had our Red Corner, because after looking at the tents, visitors invariably went to see the Red Corner.

So it turned out: our patrons streamed into the summer house, Natasha with the rest. I saw, too, one of our fitters, Nikolai Tymov, and old Ivan Ilyich and big, broad-shouldered Skolbyansky, the head of the assembling shop. They all shook hands with me. I spoke to them and then smiled at Natasha and went up to her.

"Hello, Tim!" she said.

"Hello! Did you see me?"

"Where?"

"On parade."

"No, you all looked alike and passed very quickly."

"What a pity. Did you bring me that book about Kirov? It's a red one, and it's on my table at home. Did you find it?"

"No, I forgot."

"Oh!—and I wrote to remind you of it. I need it badly, and I can't get it from the library. It's always out."

"When I get back, I'll mail it to you. My mother came to stay with me."

"That's nice. And how are things at the works? Have they finished building the new department?"

"Yes, they're mounting the machinery already."

"Well done! Why didn't you write for such a long time?"

"A long time? Why, it's only a week."

"A nice sort of week, that! I thought you'd forgotten me altogether."

"Let's go over there."

She made for the summer house where the others were. They were looking at the work of our artists. I stood beside Natasha and said softly to her:

"I'm awfully glad you've come."

"Are you?"

She looked hard at a poster showing a fascist crawling towards our frontier.

"Isn't it well drawn?"

"Yes."

"One of our chaps did it. He's going to be sent to the Academy."

"And how are you getting on?"

"All right—better than most. Nata, your hair has gone lighter still."

"Yes. Bleached in the sun."

"Do you go swimming much?"

"No, but I'm out to the country every holiday with the others."

"With whom?"

"Oh, with the girls from the works. The whole bunch."

Just then they all started to leave the summer house, and Natasha made a move to join them. I was longing to talk to her. I wanted to say something very important. What it was I specially wanted to say was not clear to me, because we knew each other very well and were aware of everything we could have said to each other. We came out into the avenue and walked towards the club. The visitors wanted to see that, too. Natasha was walking along with the rest when I pulled her by the sleeve and drew her aside.

"Are you staying till the evening?" I asked her.

"No, no. I'm going home with the rest."

"Why? I'll see you to the train. I'll ask to be let off duty. They'll give me leave."

"No. Since I've come with the others, I've got to go back with them. It would be awkward otherwise."

"But I did so want to be with you a bit longer."

"I'll come sometime by myself. Just now it would be impossible to stay."

"Yes, but—"

"Oh, do come along. We've dropped so far behind the others."

"What of it; why should we follow them about?"

She did not answer—only walked faster. I almost had to run to catch up with her.

"Nata, seriously—let's go to the drill ground."

"Why?"

"There's going to be air-raid games."

"We'll see it from here, very likely."

"No, there are going to be stormers, flying low. It'll be very interesting! Why, you used to like that sort of thing!"

"We'll probably all be going there."

But no one went to watch the air raid. I could hear the distant roar of the airplanes and the trac-trac of the machine-guns, while we were hanging around the club. Then it was over. It was a big disappointment. I loved watching military games.

Dinner-time came, it was time for me to go. We had to march to the mess hall. It was cool there. We ate a greasy *borshch.*[1] I was thinking about Natasha, when Peter Dorokhov shook me.

"You've emptied that pepper shaker. What's the matter with you!"

"Eh?"

And sure enough, my *borshch* was covered with what looked like a layer of ashes.

After dinner our guests left. They wanted to get home while it was light. They had come in lorries belonging to the plant; the drivers were cranking them up. The regimental commissar was shaking hands with Skolbyansky. The rest were getting into the cars. Then the drivers got in. I stood beside the lorry Natasha had climbed into. I beckoned to her. She bent down to me and I said awkwardly and in some agitation:

"Do you feel the same as ever to me?"

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, you understand!"

"Tell me, Tim, does it ever rain here? It's got clouded over all of a sudden."

"No, we don't get much rain. When I come back, are we going to live together?"

Natasha looked away. Her eyes slid past my face and I saw her smile, at whom I could not see. I glanced around. Skolbyansky had already climbed into the lorry; the commissar stepped aside and raised his hand. He was pointing to the heavy rain-clouds that had suddenly appeared from nowhere. "Never mind," said Skolbyansky with a careless gesture. They were just starting when Natasha said:

"Oh, I almost forgot. This is for you!" and handed me a small note.

The lorries started; those who had come to see them off walked a little way after them, and I stood staring at the sky. It might not be going to rain, but the sky had changed color, had turned grey and flabby. I tore open the envelope. The scrap of paper inside had two brief sentences: "I am Skolbyansky's wife. Explanations are unnecessary."

The tips of my fingers went cold and pricked me as if they had a cramp. They may even have turned blue, but I was not looking at them. I forced myself to look up. The sky was changing color, and coming closer to the earth. The lowest stratum of clouds resembled grey rags. They fled swiftly, almost catching their tattered edges on the tree-tops. The stratum above was the color of sea-foam and moving in the opposite direction. Perhaps they really stood still and my eyes deceived me, but that did not matter. What did matter was that the blue of the sky could only be seen in tiny rifts. It seemed very far away, and irretrievably lost. A sudden change like this in the sky

[1] *Borshch*—meat soup with cabbage and other vegetables.

could only take place in the autumn. A gust of wind tore the bit of paper that I was, perhaps, holding none too firmly, out of my grasp.

"Raushev!" someone shouted from behind the trees.

I recognized Peter Dorokhov's voice. Soon I heard the creak of his boots behind me. He had seen me.

"Tim, where were you? It's time to go on duty!'

"What's on?"

"Kitchen-drill—peeling potatoes."

"What—again? It's easy to see that potatoes aren't love—potatoes never leave you."

"Eh, what?"

"I say, love isn't like potatoes."

"Apropos of what?"

"Oh, it just came into my head."

"Trying to be funny?"

That night we peeled sufficient potatoes for the whole regiment, as usual.

The Main Thing is the Heart

In the morning Nikolai had not been able to go to the medical inspection. Timothy and Zhenya had left the plant without him. When Nikolai started out, he kept regretting that he had not been able to go with the rest. Frankly speaking, he was in a terrible funk, afraid he would be turned down. It would have been less terrifying could he have gone with the rest. He had never before undergone a serious medical examination, and the examination for the aviation school was said to be especially tough. The main thing was the heart.

He entered the clinic. Timothy and Zhenya were sitting in the waiting room looking pleased and holding their medical certificates in their hands. They called Nikolai over.

"How did it go?" he asked.

"Fine!" said Tim. "We're both in."

"Good. Heart O. K.?"

"First rate. Look."

Zhenya handed him the certificates. Nikolai, in an armchair beside them, read the parts that had to do with the heart. "Heart tones clear. No murmurs. Function normal." He handed the certificates back.

"Well, congratulations! You had nothing to worry about, Tim, anyhow. You're not long out of the army."

"Six months; long enough for something to go wrong with me—heart or lungs."

"Go in and get it over with," Zhenya said.

"I'm scared."

"What are you scared of?"

"My mother died of heart disease."

"So what?"

"Sometimes I have twinges in my heart too."

"It's your imagination, that's all."

"Well, I'll go in and see. Wait for me."

"Can't. Tell us about it tonight. There's a film on at the club."

"What?"

"Newsreels of Abyssinia."

"I've seen it, but I don't mind seeing it again."

They parted. At the door of the examination room he stopped and looked back. Tim and Zhenya waved their hands encouragingly. At the office window he was given a card on which he pasted his photograph. A nurse stamped it and he started on his round of the examiners.

The first doctor looked out of sorts. "He'll never pass me," thought Nikolai. But it turned out that he was in the wrong. He was sent to another room where there were several doctors who looked cheerful and business-like.

"Over here," said one of them, motioning to him. "Take off your clothes. How old are you?"

"I'll be eighteen in two months," Nikolai replied.

"What illnesses have you had? Have you ever broken your arms or legs? Any bruises? How is your appetite? How do you sleep?"

Nikolai replied rapidly to the rapid questions. He held out first his right arm, then his left, to the doctor. He stepped to one side. He walked. He exhibited his legs. He straightened up and bent down as he was ordered.

He had never imagined there were so many ways of examining a chap. He felt embarrassed, too. He had never been examined in such a matter of fact way before! He blushed then and was angry with himself. Stupid. No women in the room.

Then he was sent to a doctor who looked for internal complaints. He was a sandy-haired old fellow with a pince-nez that kept falling off his nose, evidently a big specialist. He drummed on Nikolai's body, and listened to the reverberations. He was rather short of breath himself. "Breathe," he commanded. Then "Don't breathe." He was ordered to jump, and putting his hands on his hips he began to jump to his own count.

"That'll do," said the sandy-haired doctor. He took the boy's wrist and felt his pulse.

Nikolai strove to breathe slowly to quiet the beating of his heart, tried to breathe more evenly. But his heart kept thumping for all it was worth. Suddenly it seemed to stop, then it began throbbing afresh.

After another round of jumping he was told to lie down on a couch. The doctor studied his pulse again, listened to his heart again. Nikolai sought to read the face bending over him. A raised eyebrow, a questioning glance, a movement of the lips—might tell the story. But the man only settled his pince-nez, snuffled indifferently and listened, listened, listened. Then he put a band on Nikolai's left biceps. Straightening his glasses again, the doctor started to inflate it. He squeezed a rubber bulb, and watched the quivering lines of mercury in a V-shaped glass tube propped up before him on the table.

Nikolai wondered what this apparatus was for. He felt his arm being squeezed tighter and tighter. His heart beat fast. Nikolai tried to control his breath, to force his heart to beat normally. Then the doctor stopped, unstrapped the apparatus, handed Nikolai his medical certificate, and said, pointing to some other doctors:

"When you've finished with them, come back here with your card."

Nikolai did as he was told. In the corridor, he looked at the card but found nothing alongside the entries dealing with the heart. The next test was the eyes. He was not afraid of that. The main thing was the heart. Nikolai rapidly read all the letters down the brightly lit chart.

The nerve specialist passed him as quickly.

There was one more test, hearing. The doctor making this examination

stood him in a corner of the room, walked away slowly and began to whisper. Nikolai repeated his words aloud.

"Thirty-six. . . .Twenty-one. . . .Forty-two."

Perfect.

Then Nikolai was told to sit down on a special kind of chair. The doctor told him to shut his eyes, and bend his head over to one side. Then he spun the chair, faster and faster. He stopped it suddenly and told Nikolai to open his eyes. The world was in motion, the walls heaving steeply over to the right. Nikolai, fixing on a button on the doctor's smock, saw it careening to one side; it had a nimbus around it. Nikolai himself thought he was swaying over to the left when, as a matter of fact, he was sitting up quite straight in his chair. The doctor watched his patient to see that he did not sway. "I suppose you feel like this in an airplane," thought Nikolai. "I guess I've lost my balance." But the doctor said:

"Feel sick? No? Good. Next!"

That was all. Now back to the first doctor. The old anxiety fluttered up again. All the other doctors had passed him, had written "eligible" on his card. Why had the sandy-haired one made no entry? Evidently, there was some question. The heart, the heart!

Nikolai tremblingly held out his card to the old, sandy-haired doctor. The latter took it, looked at it, and then wrote in a large quick hand: "Eligible for admission into a flying school and for parachute jumping." Unexpected and simple.

Nikolai asked: "Is that all?"

"Have the card stamped in the office."

This was really too simple. So he was sound! His heart, too. Splendid.

Nikolai sat down in the waiting room and read the card. A pity Zhenya and Tim had not waited for him. Eligible! What a wonderful thing to be, eligible!

He read: "Athletic, muscular build." This was he, Nikolai! He had never paid any attention to his body up till then. Had he a broad chest? Had he strong arms and legs? He had never given it a thought before. Before this it would have made him shy just to think of it.

He wanted to have a look at his arms, so he rolled up his sleeves. He would go home like that! It was warm outside.

His arms were large and big-boned, with firm, elastic lines of muscles, like a grown man's. Yes, he was a man now. Like Tim, even. . . . No, Tim was manlier, but then he was much older and had been in the Red Army.

Things could not have gone better. And the chief thing was, even his heart was sound. He folded his medical certificate in four and went towards the door. He held the certificate lightly in his hand and took big strides. It had just been raining and the asphalt shone as if mercury had been poured over it.

A tall, broad-shouldered youth with long arms left the clinic at the same moment. He came abreast of Nikolai, and turned his face towards him. Then, fidgeting with his hands, he blurted out:

"They didn't pass me."

"Who? You?"

"Yes."

They fell into step and after a pause Nikolai asked:

"Why?"

"Heart murmur."

"Too bad!"

They turned a corner and the boy began again:

"This is the third time I've tried to make it."

"Where do you work?"

"I'm a musician. It may sound like a funny mixture to you, music and aviation."

"Too bad," said Nikolai, "but the heart's the main thing."

"What? The heart? Oh, yes."

Nikolai's pity for the boy beside him grew unbearable. He broke away.

"I'm going that way," he said.

"Goodbye," said the musician mournfully.

Nikolai ran to catch a tram. It was packed to overflowing and moved with difficulty. It was going uphill and the driver sprinkled sand under the wheels. The sand trickled in a thin stream under the wheel band, and gave out a hissing sound, like oil poured on a redhot frying pan. Nikolai ran round to the back and, to check the centrifugal motion, sprang onto the step with one foot and clung to the wooden handle with his right hand.

A moment later a motor car struck the back platform. The car had skidded, the chauffeur had jammed on the brakes, but the brakes had not held. When it was struck, the tram came to a standstill. Nikolai fell off. He fell with his whole weight on his left arm. He felt as if a large knitting needle had pierced his arm. People around him screamed.

Close to his head Nikolai could see a boot with a cigarette butt stuck to it. He looked up. A short man with a moustache was bending over him.

"Now, then, get up, my lad. You've lain there long enough!"

The bystanders laughed. Nikolai lifted himself on his right arm. Turning, he tried to move his left arm. Again, a stab of pain. Looking at it he saw that he had two elbows. With an angry glance at the spectators, he exclaimed: "Idiots! I've broken my arm."

Again there was shouting and bawling. Someone even shrieked "Murder!" A moment later Nikolai felt calmer. His heart beat regularly, unhurriedly. He lay still to ease his arm.

The ambulance arrived. By that time Nikolai had been assisted to the pavement, where he sat, resting his broken arm on his knee. In his right hand, he still held the medical certificate.

A girl sprang out of the ambulance, and threw the door wide open. The doctor, hurrying with his bag, called out: "Not necessary, we'll set it here."

He got to work, picked up Nikolai's arm and felt it, asking constantly:

"Does that hurt? Does that hurt? Does it hurt very much? Can you feel that? Never mind, never mind, try to bear it. Does it hurt now?"

It was irritating—and funny. After washing the abrasions with disinfectant, the doctor set the broken limb, wrapped it in cotton wool, took out two thin oaken splints of different thicknesses, looked at them with his eyes screwed up as if offended by their ugliness, then bound them tightly on the arm. The girl took Nikolai by his sound arm, and helped him into the ambulance. The doctor picked up his bag and ran to his place beside the driver. The girl closed the doors and helped Nikolai to lie down on a stretcher. The ambulance clanged and the crowd dispersed.

"Does your arm hurt very much?"

"No!" he replied shortly, then conscious of his crossness, added: "Not very much."

"Oh, you can't fool me, I know it's painful."

"I can stand it."

"How old are you?"

"Eighteen."

"You're acting like a regular hero." She noticed the medical card in his hand, and glanced over it.

"I guessed right. You're a regular hero."

He said nothing. She went on after a pause.

"Poor kid. Supposing they don't take you now?"

"Impossible."

"How can you be sure?"

"Sister," said Nikolai suddenly, and then blushed; where on earth had he dug up this word? "Please read this out loud to me. From beginning to end."

"The certificate, you mean?"

"Yes."

She read it to him. He gazed at the passing traffic signals.

When all was said and done, it was all very simple. The main thing was one's general health. That meant a sound heart and lungs, yes, and good muscles. And, of course, steady nerves. Then good eyesight. But the main thing was the heart. With a good heart you could go in for any sport you liked. You could afford to break your arm once. Or even twice. The main thing was to have a sound heart.

The girl finished reading, carefully folded up the certificate, gave it to him and smiled. He smiled back.

A Proposal Made to a Young Girl

There were five shower-baths, but the flow of water was not the same in all. You had to run for it if you wanted to get the best. Every morning there was a race to the showers.

That day, as usual, the man on duty roused Tim first, Timothy being "senior." When he left, he set the tent flap swinging behind him, and spraying cold drops of the night dew on Tim. Tim jumped up, flung a towel over his shoulder, ran round the beds of all his comrades pulling each one by the leg. They sprang out of bed. Dressed only in swimming trunks, he was already out of the tent and past the hangars by the time they were ready. Fog was over the flying field. The nights had grown cold now; it was the end of August.

First at the showers, Tim laid his towel on the bench and slipped off his trunks. He sidled into the cubicle and rising on his tiptoes, turned on the tap. He couldn't stand it yet.

He went outside and did some rapid exercises. Then he darted under the shower, head down. It made him gasp at first, his mouth wide open, in a parachute leap. His fingers were spread out. Then he slapped his thighs, delighted. His body warmed; it felt as if he were standing under hot water. Then he gave himself a stinging rubdown that reddened his skin.

Outside, the cold morning! How good it was! His body glowed. Everything looked good. Eastwards, the black railway embankment stood clear against the sky, lit by reflected sunlight from below. Then the vast flying field, the fog puffing out of the gully, the steaming river and the new ferro-concrete bridge across it. The hangars resembled great sleeping tortoises; beyond them, at a respectful distance, lay the woods. It wouldn't be bad to be in those woods on a morning like this. With a wave of his towel, Tim ran after his comrades.

Pulling on their jerseys and overalls, they all went to the hangar. The glider would have to be brought out. Airplanes were already droning in the

air. They were flying in a left circle. It was not good flying weather. Scraps of fog hung over the aerodrome. Zhenya and Anna, two girls in Tim's squad, were standing by the hangars, their hands deep in their pockets. Under their blue overalls their round knees were shivering.

"What's been keeping you, old slow-coaches," cried Anna.

They brought out the glider and set it down on the platform. The instructor arrived. Timothy began to give orders. He was senior.

"Zhenya, your place is at the wing," he commanded. "And you, Ryabov and Nikolai, look after the starter. The rest of you—look over the glider!"

He himself opened the door on the left side. Through it he could see the latticework of the wooden parts of the wing. He caught the smell of carpenter's glue and pear oil. Finishing his inspection he stepped aside.

The glider was given a good polishing with cloths. The bracings and wire attachments were tested. Then the working of the rudders. Nikolai brought up the under-carriage. The instructor went to mark the starting-line. Ryabov and Nikolai followed him. They carried the elastic release-sling and the signal flags. Zhenya held the wing, Timothy and three others lifted the glider while the carriage was wheeled under it. Anna ran to the tail. Then they wheeled it out to the field, pointing it against the wind.

The instructor, Ryabov and Nikolai were out of sight, hidden in the fog. Timothy could feel the damp in his feet.

A shrill whistle rang out. It was Nikolai. They could just make him out to the right of their path, waving a flag. He seemed legless in the fog that wrapped the lower part of his body. Timothy gave orders to change the direction. The glider was turned and wheeled further. Here they could see Nikolai, Ryabov and the instructor distinctly. Ryabov was driving what looked like a big iron corkscrew into the ground. It went in as easily as into a cork.

The sun rose higher, the fog detached itself at last from the ground and floated upwards. It had a tender rose color like the feathers of a flamingo. Airplanes droned in the air, unseen in the rising fog. They turned the glider toward the light morning breeze. One must always fly against the wind. That was the rule.

Timothy charged the self-starter of the glider. He ran behind the tail and unwound a cable ending in a ring from the corkscrew in the ground. He attached the ring to a clasp on the tail-beam. As the glider was moved ahead, the cable stretched taut. It could only be detached from the glider now by the self-starter in the cockpit.

The instructor made the first flight to test the glider. Timothy picked up the signal flags and took his position on the right. Zhenya was on the left. The instructor climbed into the cockpit. Anna closed the bonnet and slipped the ring of the elastic release sling over the nose of the glider. Then she ran up to the others. There were four of them standing at each end of the release sling, and stretching out the elastic ends. They were now looking at something like a huge catapult, except that instead of a stone, a glider was to be slung into the air.

"Ready, pilot?" asked Timothy.

"Ready," replied the instructor.

"Wing?"

"Ready," Zhenya replied.

"Release sling?" Timothy called.

"Ready," the others responded.

"Pull!" Timothy shouted, waving the white flag.

The others pulling at the elastic release sling counted their paces aloud. At fifty paces, the instructor pressed the self-starter. The cable slipped off. The gigantic catapult was put into action. Zhenya let go of the wing. The glider took off.

All heads were raised to watch its flight. It rose to a height of ten meters.

Nikolai was the next to fly. He was a clever fellow.

He had joined the school later than the others because of his broken arm, but he had caught up with them and was making a good record.

Nikolai listened quietly to what the instructor had to say, then climbed into the cockpit. It was to be the first flight for him, as for the others. Up to now they had only made runs along the ground. Today, for the first time, they were to rise into the air. Nikolai sat tense in his seat. At the signal they pulled taut the elastic sling; Nikolai pressed the self-starter. Under his steering the catapulted glider made a very smooth, low flight, rising only five meters. Even so, those below had to raise their heads.

Descending, Nikolai leveled the glider, as he had been instructed. The speed diminishing, he slowly drew the stick towards him. He had understood the instructor perfectly. The glider landed very softly, at two points, as it should—an excellent landing.

Tim was next. The runs he had made had been satisfactory. The glider had never listed or drifted with him in it. But a flight, no matter how low or short, was different. He felt it a little hard to control his excitement.

Timothy, facing the instructor, was given a searching look.

"Ready for exercise three?"

Tim nodded.

Anna was standing by the wing, listening.

"Your job is to manage the listing in time. When you're ready to land, ease the stick towards you. You understand, *only* when you're about to land."

"I understand," said Timothy.

He was turning to go when the instructor added:

"I expressly forbid you to move the stick during flight. Neither from you or towards you. Understand? Well, then, get along."

Tim stepped into the cockpit.

Anna helped Tim strap himself in. She closed the bonnet. Tim saw her fasten the hooks. He took hold of the stick and felt for the lever of the self-starter. Then he placed his feet on the rudder-bar and moved the stick up, down and sideways. The instructor fixed the rudders and stepped away. Tim saw the others go towards the sling. Immediately his insides seemed to drop out, his chest and stomach feeling like a vacuum. This was fear. Timothy gulped down his saliva and looked at the instructor. The latter raised his hand. Tim answered "Ready!" Those who were stretching the sling were pacing ahead, counting. The glider quivered.

Tim tried to remember the rules, but his mind was a blank. The sky was very blue; he saw the sun; he heard the airplanes droning overhead. It seemed to him that the flight would not take place. But the instructor called out: "Start!"

Tim pressed the self-starter. There was a click at the back by the tail. The glider skimmed over the ground. It listed to the right immediately. Mechanically, his hand pressed the stick to the left. The tilt was corrected. Tim was not thinking about the listing. The glider quivered on the unevenness of the ground. Timothy caught his breath; he was in the air.

What he had learned had left his mind; he acted instinctively. His body sensing a list, he shifted the stick. Another list drew another reflex of his hand.

Tim could see the ground beneath him as if from a second floor window. Nikolai, Ryabov, Zhenya and the rest swam past him, underneath. Zhenya's hands spread out, her mouth formed the letter "O" as if she were seeing something terrible. At the same moment Tim noticed the nose of the glider sticking up unnaturally. The stream of air ceased playing on his face. There was complete silence all around him. The glider hung; it had lost speed. That meant that he had pulled the stick towards him. He had made a mistake!

He pushed the stick sharply away from him. The glider dived nose downwards, the ground rushed up! He pulled the stick towards him, but with too sharp a pull.

The glider tipped up—its skid caught the earth. Thus did Timothy land, tugging convulsively at the stick. The glider bumped along the ground.

Tim climbed out and waited for the others to come up. They came running towards him and he went to meet the instructor. The flight had been a row of mistakes. He was headed for a stiff talking to. And yet he felt light-hearted. What he had experienced could be compared with nothing in the world. He had flown!

"What've you been up to!" was the instructor's greeting.

"My mistakes. . . ." Tim began, and could say nothing more. He stood at attention before the instructor but his eyes glowed.

"Think over your mistakes, and report afterwards," said the instructor.

"Very well," Tim replied.

Tim looked round for Zhenya. Zhenya was working on the elastic sling. Tim went up to her.

"Zhenya! It's wonderful!"

"Frightening, though, isn't it?" she asked.

"No, I'm simply drunk with delight."

"That was noticeable in the air. You frightened us badly."

"Don't be funny. Just now I'm quite capable of—"

"What?"

"Of proposing."

"You're crazy!"

"I love you."

"No, you're mad."

"No, I love you."

"Good heavens!"

"And I love you."

"Gone completely off your nut." Zhenya retreated to the apparatus. The others were coming up with the glider. The instructor was still speaking to Nikolai. Timothy followed Zhenya.

"I love you, and that's all there is to it."

"You could have told me that yesterday, when we were sitting in the park."

"Well, I'm telling you today."

"You're funny. Not a word out of you for two months—now you explode it."

"And you?"

"What about me?"

"Do you love me?"

"Come away. They're getting the glider ready."

"No, tell me."

"You're off your nut."

"Comrade Senior," the instructor called out, "who's next?"

"Comrade Zhenya Feoderova," Tim replied.

They brought up the glider. The boys lifted it. Anna wheeled the undercarriage under it. Timothy came up and took hold of the tail skid. Zhenya gave a tug to her overalls and with a glance at Timothy, reported for instructions.

A Red-Letter Day

"Tim, have you noticed? Nikolai seems to be tickled about something."

"Yes. He's usually so quiet. And today he's as skittish as a pup."

"Must have fallen in love," Zhenya said.

"Oh, yeah? That's your explanation for everything."

"Well, the explanation fitted your case, didn't it?"

Zhenya and Timothy were standing alone. It was during the rest period, after the flights. The young people had broken up into separate groups.

"Have you seen the artist from the factory paper?" Tim asked.

"Who? Vladislav? Yes, I must take a look at his drawings."

"You know, I can feel our course is coming to an end. Artists and photographers have turned up, and there's been an item in the factory paper."

"Let's see what the artist's drawing," Zhenya suggested.

They strolled over. The artist was sitting on a box, sketching the glider and the student fliers. On the snow at his feet lay his box of pencils and ink bottles. Nikolai was behind him. Seeing Zhenya and Tim, he came over to them.

"You do keep to yourselves, don't you? Family affairs, eh?" he said, grinning.

Zhenya and Timothy looked at each other. His liveliness astonished them. The three took a stand behind the artist, Vladislav. He had sketched the glider, a student group near it, and signal flags stuck in the ground, all making a cluster in the foreground against a huge skyscape flecked with clouds, and two airplanes.

"Excuse me, Vladislav," said Tim. "But one can't feel in your drawing that it's a twilight scene."

"I haven't finished it yet," Vladislav replied. "I'll have the sun down there, throwing long shadows. That'll give it the twilight effect."

"Don't buzz in his ear when he's working," said Zhenya, giving Tim a nudge in the side.

"Besides, staring is not refined," said Nikolai, catching Zhenya by the arm and spinning her round.

"I guess Zhenya's right. He must be in love," thought Tim.

"Let go, Nick!" cried Zhenya. "You'll pull my arm out and then I won't be able to fly. Oh, I've dropped my glove!"

"Now you're coming to the end of your course. What will you do next?" Vladislav asked.

"I'm going to a pilot school. I plan to be an aviator," Tim answered.

"And what about your old trade?"

"I'll just have to leave it. I took an engineering course in the technical school, and I'm still working in the testing station. But I'd rather be in aviation."

"He wants to fly a bomber!" cried Zhenya, who had caught his last words. "He's been drumming it into my ears for ages!"

"Are you going to leave your trade, too?" Vladislav asked Nikolai.

"No, I'm going to keep on assembling airplanes. In my spare time I'll keep up my gliding. I'm going to try for some record glides."

"Oh, that's just what I want to do," Zhenya cried. "Let's go to Koktebel when we get our leave. We'll fly, won't we? And we won't leave the factory and I'm going to stay on in the laboratory."

"You're going to be gliders all the time?" Timothy asked.

"What's wrong with that?" Nikolai rejoined. "We'll study aerodynamics, conditions for flying in cumulus clouds; we'll soar as much as we like. Why not?" he said, laughing, to Zhenya. She nodded. "That's so," said Vladislav, stopping his work. "Anything becomes interesting if you take it up seriously. For instance, I'm keen on parachute jumping. I've done two jumps already, and I'm going to do some more."

"Well, it's time to get to work," said Timothy.

The instructor, standing beside the glider, waved to him. "Senior, form your ranks," he called out.

"Right!" Timothy responded. Nikolai, Timothy and Zhenya started off for the glider. Nikolai turned and called back to the artist.

"When will we see the drawing in the paper?"

"Next number!" Vladislav answered.

Timothy lined up his group at the glider and reported to the instructor. The latter gave him leave to start the flights.

"Take your places!" Timothy ordered.

The glider was set against the wind and the instructor climbed in. He always tested it before the flights began. Ryabov went and took his place at the left wing.

Nikolai took off his gloves and picked up the flags. The others rolled the under-carriage towards a tractor. Nikolai waved one of the flags to the tractor driver. The latter started his machine. The tractor smoked. The wind carried the engine noises towards them. Nikolai brushed the snow from the ring of the cable that led to the tractor, and attached it to the automatic lock on the nose of the glider. Then he stepped aside. The instructor said:

"Give the signal."

Nikolai looked around the snowy flying field. He would have to be particularly careful, since flights were now made without the elastic sling release. The catapult apparatus was a cable rapidly wound round the drum by the tractor. The class was in the second stage of gliding.

Noticing nothing suspicious in the field, Nikolai gave the signal. The tractor emitted a bigger belch of smoke; the driver pulled up the slack of the cord; the glider moved. Then Nikolai raised the flag quickly and waved it over his head. The glider swayed, then slid on the skids along the hard, uneven snowdrifts. Ryabov let go of the wing and the glider launched itself into the air. Nikolai watched the flight. Twenty, thirty, forty meters. It was quiet all around, when Nikolai heard something click in the air. The instructor had cast off the cord. The metal thread glittered in the sun as it dropped onto the snow. "Is that all?" thought Nikolai. "I'll fly higher than that today." And, tasting beforehand the pleasure of the flight, he dropped the flags, and rubbed his hands till the palms glowed. Then he put on his gloves.

The glider described a circle, returned to the starting point and landed.

The instructor announced: "Everything in order!" The students at the under-carriage stood waiting for the next flight, while Zhenya and Timothy, thrusting a stick through the ring of the cable, dragged it to the glider.

"What are we doing this evening?" Zhenya asked.

"I'm going to town to see Peter Dorokhov, after my flight," said Timothy.

"Why, is he in Moscow?"

"Yes. He's a physical culture instructor at the Ball Bearing Works. I want you to come with me."

"What would I do there? Is he married?"

"Yes, but his wife's away at present. You won't find it dull, though. We'll all go to Dmitri's"

"What for?"

"We'll find something to do there. He's got...."

"Stop! The ring's slipped off."

"He's got the best radio I ever heard. You never get tired of listening to it. The special concert for the congress is being transmitted today. And we can get Spain on his wireless."

"Oh, all right, we'll go. But—just look at Nikolai. He's simply radiant."

"As senior, I'll have to forbid people falling in love," said Timothy, laughing.

At this moment they pulled the cable up to the glider. Nikolai was next. He got into his place. Tim closed the bonnet, attached the cable to the lock, and stepped away. Nikolai smiled and nodded to them all. The instructor waved the flag. The cord stretched; the glider, sliding along the snow, soared noiselessly. He climbed smoothly. Nikolai held the stick firmly and glancing sideways, watched the strip of red cloth laid on the ground. When it was below him, he must cast the cable. Those were the orders. A cold current of air blew in his face and forced tears into his eyes. He was flying at high speed and had no goggles on. "On flights like these, they ought to wear goggles," Vladislav was thinking.

The red strip was hidden by the wing. Nikolai flattened the glider and detached the cable. He glanced downwards. They stood out sharply on the snowy field—under-carriage, comrades, tractor and driver. They looked ridiculously squat. "I'll show them what's what now," said Nikolai to himself.

Zhenya and Tim watched Nikolai's flight anxiously. His gay, delighted face had become a tiny white spot in the cockpit. His height was sixty meters.

"Bravo!" cried Timothy.

Nikolai's flight was a beauty. The narrow silvery surface caressed the air currents, the glider slowly described an arc, then straightened, then went into a new turn. Yet Nikolai kept strictly to instructions. The second turn was made without a single waste movement, and at an even speed. When he had finished veering, Nikolai leveled the glider for landing. His landing was a perfect finish to a perfect flight.

"Now that, comrades, is the best flight made during the whole course," the instructor said. "I have no hesitation in telling Nikolai Tymov that he's passed."

"I told you Nikolai was in an exalted mood today," Zhenya whispered.

"Let's make him tell us what's up," Tim said.

"Nikolai," said Zhenya, "congratulations. What's happened to you today? You're on top of the world."

"Oh, it's.... Well, I've been admitted to the Young Communist League today."

"Why didn't you tell us! Congratulations! What a funny fellow. You should have told us. We wouldn't have been so anxious about you."

"We thought you were in love," Timothy put in.

"And people in love don't always fly well," Zhenya concluded, with a sly glance at Timothy.

The Sleeping Sack

The restaurant was noisy; the orchestra was sawing away, there was a clatter of dishes and the voices of people excited by wine.

"This is disgusting."

Having made this declaration, the sunburnt man with the blue eyes seated opposite Dmitri looked around at his companions' faces, looked each of the five, including Dmitri, straight in the eyes. Dmitri had just asked his friend Andrei to pass the bottle.

They were clearly athletes; their bleached hair, their complexions, the breadth of their shoulders revealed it and their sunburnt wrists, showing up sharply against the white cuffs of their starched shirts. It could be seen, too, in their free and manly movements. Dmitri was a swimming champion, Andrei a swimmer, too; three were sprinters. The man opposite Dmitri was a mountaineer. They had gathered in this restaurant to celebrate Dmitri's setting an all-Union record. They talked about women; where would you find a party of healthy young men who would not talk of women over a bottle of wine?

Scores of incidents had been recounted, each trying to wrest something unusual from his memories.

"Disgusting," the mountaineer repeated.

"Shall I fill your glass again, Peter?" Andrei asked.

"All right. But I say it's disgusting, just the same."

"What is, my child?"

"Why, all this babble about women."

"It's amusing."

"Maybe. But you must admit, every story leads up to one thing. . . ."

"Obviously."

"Not to let any chance slip."

"Rather coarsely put, but there's a grain of truth in it," one of the sprinters said.

"I would like to hear a word about purity and honesty," Peter continued.

"Fill up his glass," said Andrei. "Maybe he has a pure story to tell us."

"Yes, I have," said Peter.

"I have a friend," he began, "a downright vagabond, but it was he who started me mountain climbing."

Andrei interrupted him with: "Let's have a drink together first, shall we?"

"All right."

They all drank. The others in the restaurant were dancing, the orchestra was playing the tango, "Cucaracha."

Dmitri loved dancing, but he sat still, merely beating time to the music with his feet under the table. He wanted to hear Peter's story.

"This friend of mine," Peter continued, "is very fond of Siberia. He has traveled there a great deal. Two years ago he worked in one of the Vladivostok factories. In the middle of the summer he left the plant and took a train

to Shmakovka. He had an idea he'd like to wander about for a month along the banks of the rivers and through the woods in the Ussuri district. It's a wonderful place—a great place for a holiday. My friend stayed in the Pituge valley, until the autumn when the rains were over and the frosts had set in. It was particularly cold at night. It's not bad then. You feel more fit in cold weather, you know. My friend was in high spirits. He wasn't a bit afraid of the frosty nights because he had a fine warm sleeping sack."

"Well," asked one of the sprinters, "where does purity come in?"

"Don't interrupt, Sergei! So he was following the course of the River Situkha that leads to the Daubikha which, in turn, falls into the Ussuri not far from the Manchurian frontier. Now, to make your way along the banks of rivers in the Ussuri country is no joke. The woods come right down to the water, and my friend had to break his way through jungles and scramble down gullies and ravines. In places trees blown down by the storm blocked the road and he had to cross to the other bank and find a path there. He lost count of the times he had crossed the river; he just went on and on amusing himself by inventing new ways of crossing. At one spot he could ford it, at another, walk across holding onto the branches of trees flung down by the storm; another time he would have to build a raft and ferry himself across. Yes, to go on a tramp there you have to be a real man. At one point he was crossing the river with the help of a rope he had flung like an American cowboy, lassoing the bough of a poplar on the opposite bank. The other end he fastened to a branch on his side. He crossed the river, hand over hand on the rope, landed, and was jerking on the rope to get it off the boughs, when he suddenly heard someone calling to him. A girl emerged from the bushes on the bank he had just left.

" 'May I cross, too!' she called out.

" 'I'll fix it up for you, wait a bit,' he said.

"You imagine he was surprised? No, he wasn't. Travelers must never be surprised at anything. Surprise, my dear chaps, like fear, leads to catastrophe. He was sure the girl wouldn't be able to cross by way of the rope. He took out of his knapsack a little axe, you know the kind, like a tomahawk. He chose a suitable tree and started to cut it down. It took him an hour, the girl waiting calmly all the time on the other bank. He had a look at her from time to time out of the corner of his eye. She had magnificent straight shoulders and a high bust. She wore men's clothes: breeches and a jacket of blue flannel, a colored woolen scarf round her neck and on her head, which she carried very erect, a ski-ing cap. She had a gnarled walking stick and carried a small bundle. At last the tree came down. The top landed on the opposite bank, where the girl stood. He crossed to the girl and helped her over. When he was close to her, he noticed a scar on her right cheek, running from the corner of the mouth to the chin. But it did not disfigure her in the least. When they had crossed and he had jerked his rope free, they had a bit of a talk.

" 'How do you happen to be here?' my friend asked.

" 'I broke away from the group of tourists I was with!'

" 'Where was the group from?'

" 'Khabarovsk. I work in the power plant of the bread factory there.'

" 'How did the tourists come to let you go off by yourself?'

" 'We had a quarrel. I said some impertinent things.'

" 'I don't understand.'

" 'I told them we should go by the river bank, but they wanted to take a short cut through the woods. So we quarreled.'

" 'Well, of course, it's better—and safer—going along the river.'

" 'Yes, that's why I left them. There was another woman—she stayed with the group.'

" 'Yes, but if I hadn't happened to be there, you would have had to stay on that side,' he said to take her down a peg.

" 'Nothing of the kind! I've crossed that puddle before by myself,' said she, quite unruffled.

"Upon this the conversation ended. Perhaps I have not transmitted it exactly, but that's of no importance. They tramped off together, chatting. Towards evening their way was barred by another barricade of fallen trees. They found a ford and crossed up to the waist in water. After walking half a kilometer along the other bank, they came upon a half-ruined Chinese hut. From here the road was familiar to him. He had spent the night in the hut a month and a half ago when his journey began. Everything in the hut was as he had left it. Well, night was coming on and my friend had plenty to think about. The girl had no sleeping sack They lit a fire and sat down by it to dry their clothes. Then they had a bite to eat. My friend realized that they could not sit very long at the fire; they ought to go to sleep as soon as possible because they would have to start out early. They must try to reach a settlement tomorrow. So he calculated. But he could not imagine how to divide his sleeping sack. It was getting colder and colder, so they went into the hut, leaving the fire to burn itself out. Their clothes were not dry and they should have taken them off. You can all understand how awkward that would be under the circumstances. My friend asked his fellow-traveler:

" 'Where's your sleeping sack?'

" 'I lost it—and my other things—when I crossed the river alone,' she said.

" 'We-ell!' was all my friend could say.

"Then he offered her his sleeping sack, and do you know what she said:

" 'I don't want you to be turned into a frozen stump, all through me.'

That was what she said. He was at his wits' end wondering what to do next. Neither of them spoke. The dying fire crackled outside. It was so dark that he could no longer see the girl's face. He could only hear her teeth chattering with the cold. My friend came to a decision.

" 'Strip to your skin,' he said, 'and be quick about it!'

"She said nothing. Not a word, you understand. And he worked himself up into a rage.

" 'Do what I tell you! Strip naked. Just leave your bloomers on. And don't talk back to me, I'm not one of your tourists!'

"It was certainly a wild idea, but what else could he do. He undressed quickly and got into the sleeping sack.

" 'Come here, quick,' he commanded. She came, undressed in silence and squeezed in with him. 'Put your arms round me!' he ordered.

"She put her arms round him and he settled the knapsack more comfortably under their heads and laid a towel between their faces so that they would not be breathing each other's breaths. He did not fasten the sleeping sack at the top, but only pulled the neck tight. Well, and then, just as you suppose, his torment began. The girl embraced him closely; he could feel her whole body, her breasts, her belly. He was warmed by the heat of her body; her skin was as smooth as satin. And he had liked her to begin with. It became almost unbearable; but neither said anything.

"At this point, you bums, you ought to take a lesson from my friend. He was sleepless, repeating to himself: 'I've got to go to sleep, I've got to go to sleep.' Sometimes it changed to: 'We've got to go to sleep, we've got to go

to sleep.' Then he thought of the next day and the tramp that lay before them and—I don't know what he didn't think of! At last he fell asleep. I see you're all interested. Yes? Well, listen to what followed. They woke up in the morning, and all was perfectly calm and my friend behaved like a man, but not your idea of a man, of course. In your opinion he was a fool. I know! The two woke, got up and dressed, first she and then he, and tramped on further. They tramped nearly the whole day without speaking to each other, just as if something was wrong between them. But I give you my word, they were pure before the whole world. Towards evening they reached a settlement and spent the night in a Russian house owned by hospitable folks, and in the morning boarded a steamer. Well, and as to how they got home, that's not particularly interesting."

"Another drink will give the story a happy ending," said Andrei. They had another round. Two women appeared at the entrance of the restaurant. They looked about for someone. Peter caught sight of them and jumped up. He went towards them, threading his way among the dancing couples. He gave his arm to the women and led them up to his friends.

"Let me introduce you," he said. "My wife and her friend."

"Dorokhova," one of the women introduced herself in a musical voice.

"How do you do!" said the others, rising to greet the newcomers.

As Dmitri was shaking hands with Peter's wife, he noticed on her right cheek a scar running from the corner of the mouth to the chin.

Fire

The flames were roaring in the furnace of the steam engine. Under it orange lights flickered on the ground between the tracks. Patches of fuel oil were burning on the ground, that was impregnated with coal dust.

Dmitri stood at a distance, watching the play of the flames. Sometimes the reflections lengthened, sometimes diminished, now paling, now flaring. The engine driver's assistant was going over the engine, tapping the wheels and piston rods with a long-handled hammer. He had a big oil can with him. Dmitri watched him at work. The engine was about to start. In an hour's time the long steel body would flash past the slumbering fields, rattle over rivers and penetrate the dark masses of the woods. Right and left it would pass files of giant trees. The train would rush between them as if through a ravine, the reflection from the furnace picking out, like a flashlight, the telegraph poles, the brightly-lit hut of the track man, bushes, pine trunks, rotting trees thrown down by storms, tree stumps, bog water, a hunter's hut, the barrier at a station. They would flash past and vanish. Towns would appear, power stations, the chaotic lights on new construction works, the whitish, swift-changing steam of a pile-driver at work, the magnificent conflagrations of blast furnaces; and vanish in their turn. The forest would rush past again. Speed! How it took hold of you. It was seldom you met with anyone who did not respect speed. Particularly in a country like this where space calls for speed. "And from the taiga to Britain's seas"—sang Dmitri softly; he could not explain why this Red Army song had come into his head just now. He looked along the slick stream-lined form of the engine. This was the country of great deeds and speed. Dmitri was glad he had chosen a profession of movement. Tempo and speed! Good things, both in sports and at work.

The engine driver let out the steam. The white cataract struck the earth, then the steam curled, spread and dispersed. The moist breath of the engine

reached him. He smiled. It was cosy in the engine house at night. As if there were a boiling samovar on the table and the family sitting down to tea. The old engine driver, Trofim Sergeyevich, came and stood beside Dmitri, who shook hands without speaking. Music was wafted to the engine house from a summer garden close by where a band was playing. Dmitri listened. Then the wind changed and carried the sound away from the engine house. Dmitri strained his ears.

"Looking at the fire?" Trofim Sergeyevich asked.

"Eh?"

"Fire's a great power."

"What?"

"Fire—I say—it's a great power."

"Yes."

"It can put such a mass in motion."

"And at such a speed!"

The man at the engine shoveled more coal in the furnace and raked it; the glow on the ground grew brighter.

"But fire means something more than that to me," said Trofim Sergeyevich suddenly.

"Yes?" asked Dmitri.

"You've heard of the partisan Lazo?"

"I've read about him," said Dmitri.

"He was fighting the Japanese in Siberia in 1920. A Red commander—and a partisan. What a splendid chap he was!" said the old man with a shake of his head.

"Did you see him?"

"Yes. I was there, too, at that time. I was an engine driver. But I didn't see how he died."

"Was he killed?"

"Yes. They burnt him in the engine furnace, the swine, the stinking brutes! To burn a man like him!"

The old man was silent for a moment and then went on:

"He was killed at Ussuri station. The Japs took him prisoner and burned him alive. A friend told me about it, an engine driver, who happened to be at the station at the time."

"He saw it?"

"Yes. They burned Lazo, only not in a furnace like this, there weren't any of that kind then. It was one stoked with wood. Have you seen those kind? They gave him a beating first. . . ."

"And he?"

"He? Oh, he didn't let them have it all their own way. As long as he had a hand free he slugged them. It made them savage."

"The swine!"

"They dragged him to the furnace, heaved him up by the legs and started to shove him into the fire. Lazo resisted until he got too weak. They slammed the door shut. Afterwards they opened it to have a look at him."

"Horrible brutes!"

"And they added a couple of logs to make it hotter. . . ."

"Ugh! Ghastly! Don't tell me any more, Sergeyevich, it's too painful to listen to."

The man on the engine sounded a warning whistle, and the powerful engine started convulsively and puffed away along the rails, that bent a little under its weight.

"You put that in your pipe and smoke it. Or perhaps you haven't got one yet?" the old man went on.

"Not yet, but I will some day."

"When are you going to be an engineer?"

"When I finish my course."

"How soon will that be?"

"Not so soon. It isn't very long since I started the institute."

"You ought to do more practical work. Come along and see my engine."

"Where?"

"On Track 7. They've just finished cleaning her. We'll be stoking up in a minute. In twenty minutes we're off."

"Going far?"

"Transit freight. To the frontier."

"Good. I've been wanting to have a look at an engine with your kind of furnace."

Dmitri and Trofim Sergeyevich set out for Track 7. They passed the turntable. A knot of engine drivers were talking loudly. The "X-3161" was standing on Track 7.

"There she is—my beauty," said the old man, pointing to it.

Vassili came running to meet him from the engine.

"What's up?" cried Trofim Sergeyevich.

"Something awful's happened!" Vassili replied.

"What's happened, quick!"

"Three of the fire-bars have fallen into the furnace."

"What?"

"When it was being cleaned they must have been put back carelessly, and three in the back row fell down."

"You lazy devils! What were you doing—not to notice a thing like that!"

"We noticed it, but it was too late. We'd raised steam already."

"You've ruined me. This is the first time I'll be late taking out a train."

The old man ran, groaning, to the engine, Vassili and Dmitri after him. The superintendent on duty in the engine house hurried towards the engine and reached it before the old engine driver.

"What's up, Trofim Sergeyevich? Ruining the time-table, are you?" the superintendent greeted him.

"Don't worry, don't worry. We'll think of some way out this minute. I'll have the engine out on time," the old man mumbled. He climbed on to the engine; Dmitri and the superintendent climbed up into the driver's stand. Trofim Sergeyevich opened the furnace; within—flames were dancing. The hot air beat in their faces, and brought the tears to their eyes. They all blinked. No one could look into that fire.

"We'll have to extinguish it and rake it out!" the superintendent declared.

"No, no, that will take too long. We'll have to think of another way," said Trofim Sergeyevich, greatly agitated.

"There'll be a delay in any case. We'll have to change the time-table!"

"Excuse me," said Dmitri suddenly, stepping forward.

He picked up a shovel and handed it to the superintendent.

"Here you are. Rake the fire to one side and throw some fresh coal over it. And get some more bars; you have some spare ones, haven't you? Look sharp; I'll be back in a minute!"

Dmitri smiled at the despondent Trofim Sergeyevich and jumped off the engine. Vassili was standing down below.

"Give me these," Dmitri said, snatching his big gloves. "Come on with me."

They ran to the water tank. "Get a couple of boards," Dmitri called back to Vassili, pointing to the shed.

Vassili brought out three smallish boards. Dmitri grabbed them and placed himself under the pipe of the huge water-tank.

"Turn the water on, only gently at first," he called out to Vassili. "Wait a minute, give me your cap."

Dmitri pulled Vassili's cap well down over his forehead and picked up the boards again.

"Come on!"

Then the water was turned on. Vassili turned it on half. A broad stream struck Dmitri on the head, and he bent it a little to one side. The water spurted over his collar and streamed down his body. It poured over his face, but out of sheer habit, Dmitri inhaled a supply of air into his lungs as in diving, and waited patiently until his clothes were wet through. Then he held the boards under the water. His clothes swelled out.

"That's enough!" he called out. "Get two buckets of water and fetch them along."

He rushed off to the engine, leaving a wet trail on the ground, handed the slippery streaming boards to Trofim Sergeyevich who was leaning out of the engine, watching for him, and climbed into the driver's stand. The flames were no longer dancing in the furnace, but the heat was so intense that Dmitri, after glancing in, started back. The fire was hidden under a baked crust of fresh coal that had just been thrown on it. In some places the black crust was growing crimson, and you could feel that at any moment the flame would spurt out. Dmitri thrust the boards into the furnace, covering the heap of coal and the bars of the front grate with then. Then, shielding his face with his wet glove, he entered the furnace. Thick black smoke made his eyes smart as he went forward. He would have to be quick. The unbearable heat scorched his chin, his ears and his neck. "Lazo!" . . . flashed through his mind. He must bear it a little longer. At the end of the grate he saw a gaping hole—where the three bars were missing. The new ones were lying on one side of the furnace, where the superintendent had flung them. Dmitri reached out for them and began to fit them in place. One. Two. . . . His breath stopped and he choked. Three! All in place. Back now. Quick! Dmitri backed out, feeling that in another minute he would have to stay there for ever. The red-hot ends of the smoke-tubes resembled a honeycomb, seemed to be moving towards him. Quick! Dmitri stumbled out of the furnace, striking the back of his head on something. He dropped down on the floor of the engine, but jumped up at once and drew a deep breath. His clothes were smoking. He jumped down the steps to the ground.

Vassili poured buckets of water over him. Trofim Sergeyevich jumped out of the engine and rushed up to him.

"My dear boy! What a pal!"

"Oh, it's nothing, nothing at all," said Dmitri, with an embarrassed smile.

He felt his left eyebrow: it had been scorched. Trofim Sergeyevich threw his arms around him and kissed him. Then the "X-3161" started off, the rails vibrating under her weight, and Dmitri strolled into the office. From the summer garden sounds of music floated in.

Height Fourteen Kilometers

Tim was smiling. Both engines of his combat 'plane were working beautifully. The silver bird flew last in the formation. Right and left before his

eyes swayed the short wings of the air squadron. He could see them all. His own machine closed the formation. At times, to amuse himself, he counted the airplanes.

"One, two three. Six . . . nine. . . . Twenty-one. . . Twenty-two."

He smiled. The exalted mood that always came to him in the air returned now. Why was it that he felt so good at great heights? Perhaps it was the speed? But you hardly felt speed at such a height. Tim glanced at the altimeter: four thousand meters. Then his gaze wandered back to the airplanes. Why, of course! They weren't really flying? They were simply hanging there quietly, suspended on cables invisible to the eye. But if he were to open the celluloid window at the left of the cockpit and put out his hand, he would feel the speed! The rush of air would catch his hand, and smack it against the side.

It was no joke, three hundred and eighty kilometers an hour!

Below lay the taiga. Tim glanced down at it; it excited him like the sea. When you flew over the sea your heart always beat tensely. The taiga affected you like the sea. There were secrets in its depths. Perhaps people were looking up at him. The muzzles of guns, masked by foliage, were aimed at the sky. It was a good thing there were his own people down below. They were having dinner probably, eating very hot and tasty cabbage soup with tinned meat. Or porridge with lumps of fat in it.

The thought of food brought back Tim's bad mood, the mood in which he had started from the aerodrome. He needed sleep and food.

Tim took his left hand from the controls and thrust it into a pocket in the upholstery of the cockpit. He drew out a bar of chocolate, tore off the wrappings with his teeth and sucked at the hard sweet mass. The chocolate melted with his warm breath. A clumsy movement of his hands and some drops of chocolate fell on the route map. Timothy flew into a rage. Damn this chocolate! Damn this war! He threw the chocolate back into the pocket, and the fingers of his right hand pressed into the rubber on the gear with the force of his indignation.

If he could only get there. Damn them! He would show them! He had a clear conception of the enemy. He had seen them more than once on the frontier. Fascists! The swine! It was their fault that his hands were numb with weariness, and his eyes closing with fatigue, and his stomach sick with hunger.

Five hours ago, on the frontier, he had smashed the enemy bombers. Two big machines. They had fallen, crumbling like biscuits in the air. Then he had flown back with his comrades and delivered his airplane to the hangar. After that he had gone to sleep, simply flinging himself down on the cot without having anything to eat or finishng his glass of rum. An hour later he had been aroused by an alarm. His comrades, laced up in leather, were standing in a line before the hangars. The colonel was speaking.

Tim had felt very much inclined to step out of the line and say: "Comrade colonel, permit us to have a plate of soup first."

But when the colonel had raised his hand, Tim ran with the others to the airplanes. He had forgotten his hunger. There was need for haste. Enemy bombers were again on the frontier. He had to hurry, to fly. He forgot his hunger, fly! The smile reappeared on his face.

Tim gazed ahead. His cockpit was a long way from the engines. It was in the long, narrow body of the fuselage, nearer to the tail than the wings. Before him rose a kind of stream-lined conning-tower. It was occupied by Vanyusha, his observer, machine-gunner, artillery-man, wireless-operator, electrician and friend. Tim could see the back of his friend's neck through the little window

of the conning-tower. Tim picked up the telephone with his left hand and shouted into it:

"How're you getting on, old chap? What do you say to a plate of soup?"

"Hallo," said Vanyusha. "I've nothing against it. Allow me to pass into the dining-room, please."

They both laughed; then Tim said:

"The commander's slow. This is no height."

"Yes, we're crawling," Vanyusha remarked.

"And in half an hour—"

"Yes."

They fell silent. Both knew what would happen in half an hour. A red lamp gleamed on the signal-board in front of Tim. Attention!

He turned on the wireless.

"Put on your masks. Height ten kilometers."

Tim noted down the time of ascent. He adjusted the oxygen-mask hanging on his chest, and put it on. The fur bordering the mask tickled his neck. Tim tested the armored pipe leading from the oxygen-bags. He turned the tap. A refreshing breath blew in his face. He turned off the oxygen. Everything was in perfect order.

A blue light gleamed. Timothy accelerated. The hand of the speedometer crept towards the fat figures 400. A green lamp glowed. Tim eased the control-stick towards him with his right hand. The engines roared, the nose of the plane reared. With his left he accelerated. Steep climb! Tim rubbed the glass of his goggles and looked at the apparatus. He was not very comfortable in his seat. The parachute was pressing against him. His side hurt. Something was sticking into it. Very painful. But he did not want to bother readjusting the straps. One had to economize one's movements. Oxygen hunger was approaching.

Tim could hear Vanyusha's loud breathing. Now that they had their masks on they were connected by telephone all the time. It was nice to hear his friend breathing.

"We're creeping along, old chap?"

"Yes."

Height—5,000 meters. Timothy turned on the oxygen again. The signal-lamp glowed.

Straighten out the course! Tim pressed the controls away from him. The airplane leveled out and flew straight ahead. Again the calm, silvery wings of the squadron were visible. It became cloudy below. The machines swayed over whitish fleecy clouds. They could not be seen from the ground.

Again the signals. Speed—450! Climb!

With the greatest economy of movement Timothy wrote down the time of ascent, drew the stick towards him, and accelerated.

"I say, old chap?"

Instead of replying, Vanyusha held his breath. He had to economize his strength.

Tim tried not to think. He was flying straight now. Climbing again. His side hurt and his temples throbbed. It was cold. The red signal glowed. Attention! Somewhere far away a hollow voice commanded:

"Speed—550. Height—14."

His thoughts moved indolently. Oho, this was something like height! Automatically his right hand drew the stick closer. Steep climb! Damn whatever it was pressing on his side! He would have to control himself, be patient.

He looked at the altimeter. The hand had passed the figure 12 and was creeping on.

Minutes passed like hours. Height—14,000 meters. The airplanes were again flying straight. Speed—600 kilometers an hour. It was cold.

The enemy appeared unexpectedly. Tim, happening to glance to the right, noticed strange airplanes under his wing, crawling quietly towards the left under the fuselage of his machine. His wing partly covered them. A short sharp siren rang out in the cock-pit. The alarm! The yellow lamp blazed twice. Right turn. Tim threw the controls quickly to the right and stepped hard with the right foot on the pedal. The machine listed and the enemy planes were driven to the right. The apparatus noted the angular speed of the turn. Tim leveled his machine. Now the squadron was making straight for the enemy's face. Vanyusha's tower grew before Timothy's eyes. It moved perceptibly over the wings. Out of the loop-holes obtruded big guns like elephants' trunks, and the bird-beaks of machine-guns.

Signal! Open out! Timothy reduced speed a little.

The spaces between the 'planes of the squadron grew larger. Timothy could determine, by means of an optical instrument, the enemy's height. He spoke into the telephone:

"The snakes are at 12."

"Thanks," Vanyusha replied.

"Goodbye, old chap."

"Goodbye, Tim."

They bade farewell to each other like this before every battle. Tim glanced in the round mirror at the side of the cockpit. Usually he could see the tail-unit very well through this glass. Just now two attentive eyes with dilated pupils stared back at him through the goggles reflected in the glass. He recognized them: they were his eyes.

The airplane jolted violently. An oxygen-mask slid across the mirror for a moment. The enemy was firing. The battle was beginning. The pursuit 'planes in Timothy's squadron were flinging distance-bombs at the enemy airplanes. These were a new discovery in this war—bombs that burst at a given height and broke the enemy front. They were doing it now.

Tim saw white flowers opening amid the flock of airplanes under his. It looked for all the world as though cotton-bolls were bursting. The geometrical formation below was disturbed. The black crosses of 'planes were flying in disorder and were scattering. The white blobs of smoke were slowly dispersing.

Tim's plane jolted again. The roar of an explosion penetrated to the cockpit. The bombers were firing the big guns. A hundred meters below Timothy a pursuit plane was racing, behind it the black tail of a smoke curtain, like the train of a mourning robe. Out of that black cloud Tim knew they would fall on the enemy like lightning. The attack signal. The last signal. After that must come either the signal for retreat or. . . . Tim remembered Moscow as he had seen it the last time—bathed in sunshine. He thought of Zhenya and his mother. He had had to leave them so unexpectedly, having got his orders to fly to the frontier. He had obeyed, thinking it just an ordinary flight. With his right hand he pressed the stick to the right. His right foot pressed the pedal until it would go no further. The machine pitched to one side. A turn at 180°, preparatory to opening fire. The horizon became level, and Tim breathed freely again. Then he pushed the stick away from him. Further and further. With his left hand he increased the supply of oxygen. The plane dived.

It dropped. Tim clung with both hands to the stick. Rags of black fog swirled outside the cockpit windows. Then the 'plane flew straight out into the light. It made him blink. He reduced the angle of diving and aimed at the broad back of an approaching bomber. He could not hear Vanyusha's firing, but he could see the beaks of the machine-guns smoking and the big guns quivering. He kept his fingers on the firing-button. In front of him two machine-guns were working. They fired over the screws of the engines. They were for his own personal use. The bomber unexpectedly folded its wings and broke like a crust of bread. One! Timothy carefully brought the 'plane out of its dive. A turn. To the right! He loved taking curves on that side. Steep climb! A neat turn, and again the 'plane pitched. He took aim. The button of the machine-guns was pressed down. Through the cross-wire of the bomb-sight he could see the tail of the gigantic bomber dropping off. Two! He brought the machine out of the dive and made a new turn. The 'plane was dancing.

Timothy remembered nothing about life, nor did he think of death. He had no time. He was working like the best instrument in all that complicated apparatus. A turn. A steep climb. A dive. Take aim. Fire.

The 'plane soared for the fourth time. It veered. The horizon waved up and down before Tim's eyes. Far ahead, two planes—like dashes—were visible. They were running away. He must overtake them. In an hour, or less, they would be flying over his country, burning and destroying. Timothy kept his left hand working. The hand of the speedometer quivered on the figures 620. The dashes that were the other 'planes were not growing any bigger. Faster! His left hand sent up the speed to its highest. 650! That was the limit. The engine would not yield any more. It trembled. He would never overtake them now. Tim felt like screaming. His nerves would not stand any more. He switched off the telephone! His friend must not hear his screaming. Then he let go and screamed.

"A-a-ah!"

He flung open the window. There was a roaring in his ears. It seemed to him that there was something wrong with the roaring of the engines: an irregularity. It gave him a fright and he slammed the window shut. Then he dashed his left fist into the round mirror. The fragments tinkled, slid along his glove and on to the ground at his feet. This sobered him. He calmed down. Only one corner of his mouth twitched. The tiny dashes that were enemy 'planes were growing larger. Only now they were sailing lower, they had lost height. Tim pressed the stick at the altimeter. He was losing height. Thirteen. Twelve. . . . Eight. Seven. . . . Six. . . . Timothy took aim. The bombers scattered right and left. He aimed at the one on the left. Five thousand meters! Tim pressed the firing-button. Five hundred meters. Three hundred. Two hundred. He dare not go closer. With both hands he pulled the stick to the left and a little towards him. Left foot on the pedal. The tremendous centrifugal force was pressing him down in his seat. All the blood rushed away from his head. He went blind and almost lost consciousness. But it was only for a second. His machine was making a turn. Glancing round, Tim noticed flames spurting from the engines of one of the enemy 'planes. It was drifting along on its wing. Below lay the black taiga.

Tim climbed. He was staring in the direction of his flight. He could see Vanyusha's gun-tower revolving, and it seemed to him that the black muzzle of a gun was turned directly on him. No, it was swinging to the left. At first, the gun was aiming over the tail. Then under it. Again from above it. Then it

swung sharply to the left and peeped out again from under the tail, pursuing the enemy. The big gun quivered and smoked. Again and again.

When Tim turned the 'plane and looked down, he saw the second bomber falling in a tail spin. Finished. Height 5,100. Tim switched on the telephone. He wanted to talk to Vanyusha. Suddenly the airplane was tossed up so violently that Timothy struck his face against the control-board. There was a splintering of glass and when he raised his head the gun-tower was gone. Only broken, twisted ribs of metal remained. And Vanyusha lay crushed in the rubbish. The airplane rolled and described a semi-circle—out of control, rudder not working. Towards the south, away from the frontier an airplane spreading its wings in a sinister way, was flying majestically. It was the third bomber. Timothy had not noticed it. It was quietly escaping.

Tim's 'plane was fast going to pieces. First, part of the left wing broke off. The machine listed and began to drop. Tim did not wait for what would happen next. He tore off his oxygen mask. He did not turn off the engines, because he was dropping towards the enemy. Then, with two movements, he unfastened the cowl of the cockpit. It was torn out of his hands by the wind and carried away. Now for the leap. He undid the straps fastening him to the seat. The machine went into a spin. He clutched at the sides. A jerk. He was flung back into his place. Another jerk. The same thing happened all over again. It came out of the spin. With a roar the machine made a leap sideways. Tim, no longer strapped in, struck the control board again. It cut his chin open. He mustered all his remaining strength and flung his body outside once more. He could only get half-out. He lay on the rib of the cockpit. But this was not for long. He managed to throw his legs out, too. He slid along the fuselage and hung there. The rigging of the parachute caught on a hook at the edge of the cabin. Left to its own devices, the airplane executed the most elaborate figures in the air. It whirled, soared, dropped, spun. Timothy's body struck the fuselage with all its might. His face was as stiff as wood now, he could not feel the blows. It was a bloody mask. He could only see out of one eye. The other was closing; the split eyelid swelled up quickly. Timothy groped and scratched painstakingly at the smooth, polished surface of the machine. He wanted to reach the hook and set himself free. His hands let go. He had no strength left. Still, he strove to embrace the fuselage and press himself against it, so as to rest a minute. He was flung to the side. The horizon was dancing madly. Where its calm line should have been, blue sky and black taiga were spinning. Now he could see sky, now earth. Whenever he saw the sky, he seemed to be flying higher and higher; when he saw the earth—he was shooting down into a dark abyss. But most frequently of all he saw the silvery, smooth surface of the airplane, and along this he was crawling upwards, crawling till he was sick and dizzy.

He was dashed about. Was he done for? No. But perhaps, yes? He mustn't think of that. The important thing just now was height. During one of its jolts the airplane flung him upwards. He flew over the cockpit and saw the figure on which the hand of the altimeter was trembling—1,100. That gave him strength. He was still high. He drew up his knees under him and steadied himself on the fuselage. Then he straightened up, taut as a spring. Something clicked above him, and he felt himself set free. He alone was falling. Down with a whistle and a roar fled his silver machine. It looked blacker than soot to him.

Tim tugged at the ring of the parachute. Something jerked him and then all was silent. It was precisely as if he had passed from a very noisy room into a quiet one, lined with cork, and had shut the door tightly after him. He

wanted to smile at the comparison, but he vomited instead. He seemed to be turned inside out.

When he felt better he looked about him. Calm. He was not rocked from side to side any more. The sky was growing yellow. What a beautiful sunset! Near the horizon the sky was pinkish. He strained his eyes towards the spot where the battle was taking place and discerned a dark cloud that stood out against the yellowish-pink sunset. The cloud was drooping towards the horizon. There was nothing else to be seen. Where were the airplanes? Where was the enemy? Where were his friends? Had they flown away? Were they done for? Probably. All of them! And Vanyusha! Tim whimpered. His loneliness oppressed him, the sudden silence irritated him. He began to worry and fuss. He screamed with pain. His whole body was broken to bits. He looked down and saw the taiga, bisected by a stream. To the left—the hills. He recollected them and recognized them. Here he had flown. To the right of the hills lay the frontier. Nearer to them lay a military post. Behind them big guns were stationed. Yes, yes, these were familiar places. Perhaps he had already been noticed.

"Damn it, I'll not reach the hills!" Tim was agitated. He ought to land before he got there. He went cold. Perhaps he would land on enemy territory? Why was it so quiet? If only there was a bit of breeze to pull him along. He would drop down on a tree. Well, to hell with it. Surely he was used to falls and bumps. If only he would land among his own people.

Tim collected his waning strength and began to rock himself about, hoping to get into an air-current. Three hundred meters off the ground. Two hundred. A hundred. He was being carried towards the frontier, after all. Splendid. He would fall on the fringe of that wood. Very good! He drew up his legs, but they caught in the tree-tops. Land. It rushed up to meet him. Tim fell on a tree flung down by a storm. Curse it! His legs were entangled in the boughs. He fell over sideways. The dome of the parachute collapsed. The white silk was covered by the tree.

He looked up. Two paces away from him stood a small, black-and-white striped post where once an imaginery boundary had been. The frontier! Tim wanted to rise, but could not. A piercing pain shot through his legs. He had broken them landing.

Ah, how that frontier post drew him! Beckoned to him! Tim began to unstrap his parachute. A long, long time passed. At last he rolled off the tree. He lay down on his stomach and crawled, digging his elbows into the earth. His face was close to the damp ground. It was a bog. He could smell the grass. A bird cheeped. He moved his elbows. Two steps more—it was not so much. Now he was right beside it—his own native land. He slowed down. That word—country—home of socialism. He had heard it thousands of times. Repeated it hundreds of times. But now it acquired for him a special meaning. It had become something material, something with scent, color, sound.

Tim reached the striped post. He was particularly careful not to leave his crippled legs on the wrong side of the frontier. Then he stopped. A bird cheeped again. Tim hardly raised his head. Quite close to him he saw some blades of grass, a yellow flower, a blackened chip of wood, a leaf—and that was all. But it was a bit of his country. He flung out his arms and embraced the damp, boggy earth. His Socialist country! His home! He had fought for this. Had striven to reach it from dizzy heights. Up there—he had done his duty. Surely he might die now? No! He must live, live! He was sound and healthy again. He would get to his feet, rise to his full height and run. He could have died before this. But Tim's head dropped. His eyes closed wearily.

His nose touched the ground. There was a roaring in his ears. Tim felt as if he was back in the 'plane. His right hand stirred. The noise in his ears ceased. A knocking as of blows being struck. Again the roaring came and the blows ceased. Now they came together—the noise and the blows. Gradually they both died away. It grew still. It seemed to Timothy that he had died. But he was still alive.

The Test of a Man

"Excuse me, but your face seems very familiar to me. Where have we met?"

"I seem to know you, too. But I can't recall now where we met."

"Wait a minute, are you a friend of Timothy Raushev?"

"Yes!"

"Then, it was at his place we met. My name is Baritsky—Vladislav Baritsky."

"Ah, yes, I remember now! You were something of an artist, apparently, weren't you?"

"Not apparently, but really!"

"Oh, yes. It comes back to me now. It's so many years ago, eh? My name's Korushin."

"Dmitri Korushin! Well, what an ass I am! I should have recognized you at once! I've read about you in the papers and seen your photo. You held the world swimming record."

"Yes, I did. But you can find plenty of famous people here nowadays," said Dmitri, smiling.

"That's true! And they'll all stand shoulder to shoulder with us."

"This is a serious business! This is a general mobilization."

"I should say it is serious! It's an order issued by the Supreme Soviet. We're being attacked from two sides. The war's started long ago on the frontier."

"There've been frontier skirmishes all along. Now it's going to be a real war! They've been dreaming of attacking us for years."

"They'll never rest—until we've wiped them off the face of the earth! And that's going to happen right now."

They were silent for a few moments and then Dmitri said:

"Well, we're going to fight them. It's funny, though; I was preparing for a big race. It seemed the most important thing to me—now it's nothing."

"I can understand that. Let's sit over there, Dmitri. They'll call us when we're wanted."

"All right. Only let's get further away from the refreshment stand, it's so noisy."

Dmitri and Vladislav strolled past the refreshment stand, where young people were laughing and talking loudly. They entered the reading room. Here it was quiet. An orderly paced up and down at the entrance. There were flowers in pots on the tables and piles of newspapers and magazines. Dmitri and Vladislav sat down by the window, which commanded a view of a broad asphalt street running straight as an arrow till it bisected the horizon. Buses and trolleys rolled quietly along by the pavement, while down the center of the street, the zone reserved for fast traffic, swept the motor cars. The asphalt was wet, reflecting the mournful, rainy skies. The town was a pale grey; under the window some splashes of gasoline from a bus made patches

of color like smudged peacock's feathers. But these disappeared too, washed away by the rain. There were a great many Red Army men in the street.

"Looks like autumn out of doors today," Vladislav remarked. "Where did you go to swim?"

"The indoor swmming pools," Dmitri replied. "Have you ever been there?"

"Once. I only looked at it superficially. I was in a hurry. I'm in love with sport, you know. There's a collection of my sport drawings coming out soon. A book I put my whole heart and soul into."

"Any swimmers in it?"

"No. Mostly gliders and parachute jumpers."

"A pity! Water sport is beautiful, a wonderful subject for an artist."

"Yes, it was a mistake on my part to neglect it. But I'll put that right. I'll take my easel to the swimming pools."

"When you come back?"

"Yes, of course, when we come back. I'm quite sure we'll come back. My swimming sketches should turn out well."

"Yes. In summer, especially."

"In the summer? Oh, yes, in the summer of course. When there's plenty of sunshine and the water's dazzlingly bright. When people bronzed with the sun are walking about the sands. You know what: one could draw a girl's smiling face with yellow hair blown back from it and a white towel flung over her shoulder. What a contrast that would be—sunburn and a white towel!"

"Yes, that would look lovely."

"Or—an outdoor swimming pool in the evening—at sunset. Just dip a brush in pure vermilion and sweep it across the paper. Do it in such a way that you would feel space and air."

"Fine!"

"And—stop a minute! In the foreground draw a healthy, muscular shoulder and part of a head. A swimmer standing right in front. I could draw you. Splendid! With your red hair and athletic figure—it should come out strong."

"You're fond of sport, you say? Do you go in for it?" Dmitri asked suddenly.

"I? Well, it's like this," Vladislav began. "I did go in for it, of course. Or rather, I go in for one form—parachute jumping. I've done several jumps."

"I don't specialize in that at all."

"That's a pity. We might have been together now. I think I'll be put in a parachute brigade."

"I've never gone in for parachute jumping. Some people tell me it's cowardly of me."

"What's your army line, then?"

"I haven't any. When I served in the army I was let off ordinary drill. I was in charge of physical culture."

"Now you'll have to show some physical culture in battle!" Vladislav remarked, laughing.

"Do you know," he went on, "I believe, after all, we should be able to get into the same brigade. It's a good thing, really, that you've no speciality."

"Why?"

"You can ask to be sent to a parachute brigade. You've got the qualifications for it. You'll be accepted all right.

"I don't know," said Dmitri.

"Is it long since you saw Tim?" Vladislav inquired.

"Yes, a long time."

"I haven't seen him for ages, either. Not since the evening I met you. Tim was celebrating his birthday then."

"Yes, I remember. You made caricatures of us all and gave us them. I lost mine as I was going home. I was tight."

"We all got tight."

Just then some names were called out in the corridor. The orderly repeated them at the door of the reading room. Vladislav's was among them.

"I've got to go, they've just called me," said Vladislav, rising.

"I'll have to wait a bit longer," said Dmitri.

"Well, how about it? Are we to be together or not?"

"Eh? Oh, together? I don't know. So long."

"Goodbye then."

Vladislav left the reading room. He felt embarrassed. Had he offended that big fellow? He did not think so. It was simply that Dmitri did not want to be an army parachute jumper. Too dangerous for a crack athlete, maybe. Oh, well, to hell with him! As if there weren't plenty of strong fellows in the world. Vladislav entered the room where the medical commission was sitting.

Dmitri gazed out of the window. The Red Army men were all hurrying somewhere. Five motor-lorries, laden with thin mattresses, passed by. Dmitri left the window and went up to the table. He glanced over the papers. War. The paper was full of it, like everything else around him. In every respect the day could be called an ordinary one. It was damp and gray. The town was slashed by the driving rain. A fog hung over the buildings. It was the most ordinary, gloomy day, when even the drop of rain that hung for a moment from the eyelashes, did not shine with rainbow colors. Yet it was a very special day—one could not escape it, could not hide from it.

So it had come, this moment—when he would have to give an account of himself. To himself. To all. To Vladislav and above all, to Tim. It made no difference that Tim was not present; he had to give an account of himself to Tim just the same. Once, a long time ago—in the autumn—Tim had reproached Dmitri and called him an egoist. He had been deeply offended. An egoist! Now he would have to give Tim an answer. The moment had come for him to answer for his right to call himself a man. Dmitri had known that this moment was bound to come once to every citizen of his country. And to him, too. But he had not thought it was so near.

It was a terrifying right—this of calling yourself a man. It did not mean merely eating and drinking, growing and grooming your muscles, and showing off your strength at competitions, and walking arm-in-arm with a woman. No, that was by no means all. You had to know how to bring up your children, care for them and defend them. You had to know how to work, and also—and this was the most important—be fearless and daring, so that at any moment you could face danger and death. Never to be afraid of getting your body scratched and wounded. To march ahead smiling. That was what being a real man meant!

Two young fellows entered the reading room. They were looking over each other's mobilization cards.

"You're in the armored tanks?" said one.

"Yes, that's my special line," said the other.

"I'm in the navy. I served four years in it."

"It's livelier in the tanks."

"There's plenty to do everywhere."

The orderly called out: Korushin. Dmitri's name had been passed along by the orderlies down the corridor.

It was with a feeling of peculiar satisfaction that Dmitri stood before the doctor. His physique had never let him down yet. He took such a stock of air into his enormous chest that the doctor gave him a glance out of the corner of his eye. Eligible! Dmitri had never doubted it. All he had to do now was to make the best use of his strength.

In the Drafting Commission Dmitri talked for a long time to the chairman, a thin, tired military man. He even argued with him. Then he left the room and searched the corridor for a door marked "Parachute Brigades," and went in. Vladislav was sitting there writing, filling up a form. He raised his head and said:

"You?"

"Yes. And I'd advise you another time not to say goodbye too soon. It's bad form," said Dmitri.

Then he walked up to the desk where the brigade-commander sat.

The Attack

The whole panorama of the attack could be seen in the glass of the periscope sight. The scene, transmitted through a series of mirrors, was observed from below in the concrete shelter taken from the enemy the day before. In the shelter sat the staff of the unit. At the binoculars of the periscope sat Andrei. For greater convenience in making his observations he had twisted the peak of his cap round to the back of his head. From time to time he called out:

"Shut up!" and, raising his hand: "I say, boys."

Then in graphic terms he described the enemy's movements. The other commanders were sitting on improvised stools and benches, and talking. They were waiting for the moment when the adjutant would emerge from the dug-out where the commander of the unit was sitting, and give them orders to lead their men to the counter-attack. Smoking was forbidden, so those who were fond of them sucked acid-drops. Everyone wanted to be out in the open air. Waiting was wearying. Would they soon be allowed to run along the trenches and scramble out on top with their men?

At present only Andrei could offer a reply to this question.

"They're creeping on like rats!" he said. "The tanks are in front. They think they can frighten us that way. The infantry's behind the tanks. Well! They haven't got to the mine-fields yet. When they get there—they'll be turned into jelly doughnuts! We won't have anything to do. We might just as well go to bed, boys."

Peter Dorokhov was sitting by the telephone, ringing up the hospital every ten minutes.

"Well?" he asked. "How's she getting on, Pavlusha?"

"Nothing new," was the reply. "Still unconscious."

"Unconscious?" Peter said, replacing the receiver.

"Well, now," Andrei was saying. "It's just what you might expect. The tanks are deploying right and left. They'll clear out just now. Oh, the snakes! They'll cut themselves, they're so sharp! It seems that was just a manoeuver They're creeping through the crack again like tortoises. Well, boys! if our little machine-gun nests stop firing, we'll be going over the top!"

"Dorokhov," said a tall commander with a bandage around his neck, "do you happen to know how to get rid of a boil? It's a damned torment to me. On my neck."

"A boil?" said Peter. "I think a lead-lotion poultice is supposed to relieve it. But—my wife is dying."

"Dying?" cried the other in alarm. "Forgive me, Dorokhov, bothering you at a time like this. What happened?"

"She's an electrician and she begged to be transferred from nursing-work to laying mines. Yesterday, when we had taken that fortified point, they went off to the other side of the hills. You know, to the east of us. They laid mines. She did the wiring. She'd just finished when the enemy's scouts opened fire on them from behind some bushes. She got all excited, jumped up to her full height and flung a grenade into the bushes. Nothing but bits of flesh left there, they say. But she got a bullet in the neck, and she's lying unconscious now."

"Hit in the carotid artery, was she?"

"I don't know."

They were all silent now, listening. The earth shook with the explosions of heavy shells. But now another sound—a hollow rumbling was heard. Then at regular intervals came violent jolts, like earthquake shocks. Then again a rumbling and more quivers of the earth as if mammoths were running overhead.

"That's done it!"

"They're done for!" said Andrei, speaking in a whisper, the involuntary reaction to the ominous noise.

Then he spoke aloud again. "Just what you might expect! The tortoises have started to fly. I thought at first the periscope had exploded. There was a flash right in my eye. But it appears they've hit the mines. Well, boys, I may tell you there's not going to be an attack. Who's the last in the turn for dominoes?"

"You just keep your eyes skinned for what's going on there!" someone said.

"Grey smoke," Andrei replied. "Looks like a spoiled negative. Nothing to be seen. I suppose the tanks have got back to earth now. Nothing for them to do up there in the stratosphere."

But Andrei was not telling the truth. He was simply tired of watching the periscope He had grown rather lazy. There was still something to be seen in the periscope. The grey smoke had lifted. Spectators could see as into a stage interior. In the background lay the hills, one rising above the other. Then—the taiga of a color difficult to determine, part black, part bluish. The foot of the hills, where the trenches lay, was also visible. In front of them yawned a black pit with ragged edges, long and narrow, running right and left. It had not been there before. That was where the mines had been laid. There the enemy tanks and infantry had been blown up. In the dispersing smoke some of the mutilated metal monsters became visible, lying in incredible positions at the brink of the pits, looking out of place and pitiful. Human bodies were heaps of grey earth thrown up by an industrious mole. You could imagine the smell there of gunpowder and oxydized metal.

"Nice clean bit of work," observed the commander with the bandaged neck.

"Yes, but there's a danger there too," said Peter. "A whole regiment could hide in that pit."

Andrei, feeling hot, took off his cap, wiped the perspiration from his brow and sat down at his observation post again. Nothing was heard from

the commanders' dugout where a conference was going on. Peter rang up the hospital.

"Any news?"

"No. She's still unconscious."

"Well, boys," Andrei was saying. "There was once a camel and he hadn't enough fat in his hump and was hungry. And that's me!"

"Talking about food," said the broad-shouldered first lieutenant in a worried tone, "I'd better find out about the commissary."

He went up to the telephone and rang up the section. He was a handsome Georgian with a big nose and kind brown eyes. Peter had made friends with him in a very short time. They were both enthusiastic mountain climbers.

"Lado," said Peter, when the Georgian laid the receiver down, "sit here awhile, and let's have a chat."

"Sure," said Lado.

"It must be glorious in the mountains now."

"I'll say it is."

"I'd intended to climb a particular peak this season."

"Which?"

"It's a secret."

"Why is it a secret?"

"When the war's over, I'll go and climb it—I want to be the first."

"Oh, so that's what you're up to! And won't you take me with you?"

"Yes. I will."

"Thanks for that anyway. You know, Petka, if it hadn't been for this war, we wouldn't have met."

"It's an ill wind that blows nobody any good."

"What?"

"Oh, just a Russian saying."

"We've got one like it."—And Lado repeated it in Georgian.

"I don't get it, in that language," said Peter, smiling.

"You ought to learn it."

"All right, teach me?"

"Sure."

"Shut up," Andrei shouted. "Scene twenty-one. The same characters accompanied by tanks."

"What, again?"

"And more of them," said Andrei. "The crocodiles are crawling up again. The machine-gunners and artillerymen will have plenty to do now. Yes, and there's no avoiding the attack for us sinners this time.

"Hush!" he continued. "I am now about to announce the latest news. There are hopes that the sun will set shortly. A kind of pink liquid stuff has already appeared in the sky. No photographers required. The firing is hot. Our boys are giving it to them; the others are trying their hardest, too. Three iron-witches have got out of line. But that doesn't alter anything. We're going into action."

Peter rang up the hospital once more. No change, he was told. He sat on in the same place. Olga! She should have ducked. Flung herself right down on the ground. Like this—Peter made a diagram on the table, demonstrating how to duck gunfire. She hadn't the knack of it. Or had she got excited? Well, what did that matter now? It would be all over in a few hours. In a day, perhaps. But did that make it any easier? Olga, his wife, his comrade,

would soon be no more. Those swine—to kill a woman! They would kill children too. Well, just wait....

Andrei was saying: "They're at the pit now—coming down. Infantry as well. Now there'll be some dirty work."

"We'll be going into action now," Lado said.

"That's enough!" Andrei shouted suddenly. He pulled down the visor of his cap, but did not leave the periscope. Through the round apertures he could see the tanks climbing out of the pit, blazing away, the infantry behind them, falling to the ground and firing too. For all their fireworks they were in no danger yet; the enemy was calculating on starting a panic, that way, among the attacked. But grenades were bursting around their tanks, flung by mortars from the forts, and from the shelter it was possible to see their infantry thinning under the machine-gun fire.

Peter rang up the hospital.

"Well, Pavel, how is my wife?" he asked.

"Dorokhova?" a strange voice asked him.

"Yes."

"She has just died, without returning to consciousness."

Peter put down the receiver. He did it clumsily, sideways; it did not come to rest on the fork for some moments.

"That's enough!" Andrei was saying. "This isn't a movie. We're going into action."

He sprang away from the periscope and grabbed his automatic rifle.

"Right," cried Peter. "We're going into action! They'll never get through, the swine!"

With a swift movement he pulled his Mauser out of its holster, examined it carefully and polished it with his handkerchief. Andrei was listening to something. A hum like the engines of airplanes could be heard. Andrei made a hopeless gesture and he, too, began to examine his rifle. Peter even smelt his Mauser to see if it was clean.

"Perfect!" he whispered.

"You're making great preparations," Lado remarked.

"Yes, my friend, I want to fight. I'm going to fight like the very devil. I want to go into action. I shall fight for everything, for my Socialist fatherland, for happiness, for my wife and for . . . ." But he did not finish, for at that moment the chief of the staff, pale from sleepless nights, appeared and said quietly:

"Comrade-commanders, you're free now. The enemy attack has been repulsed by our airplanes. Go and get some rest. All report at headquarters at 11 p. m."

"There you are," Andrei declared, smiling. "If it isn't mines, it's airplanes. Taking the bread out of our mouths, you might say."

Peter slipped his Mauser back into its holster. His blue eyes were like bits of ice.

The Blowing Up of Pinchon Bridge

They were caught directly after the explosion. They attempted to hide but it was useless; they were surrounded. Dmitri and Vladislav were crouching under bushes when the enemy found them, dragged them out and began to beat them.

Dmitri got a punch in the face. It made him furious and he returned it with interest. His fist struck softness and he heard a yelp. He was hit again.

But now he was on the alert, he aimed his punches. The two Russians were not bayoneted, strangely enough. Evidently the enemy wanted them alive. Dmitri took advantage of this and began to hit anything that came up to his fists. Rage lent him added strength.

"You swine!" he shouted. "Come on, you bloody swine!"

Hoarse with rage, he fought on. He punched and kicked. It was he who was the attacker now. A heavy boot got him in the belly, but he only contracted his abdominal muscles and did not even stagger. He'd give them something to remember as long as he could hold out. Suddenly they recoiled from his blows and left him. He was panting heavily. Nearby, Vladislav was leaning against a tree, his knees bent under him, clinging to a bough for support. His face was covered with blood and there was a great blue lump on his forehead.

The fight had been stopped by an officer. Dmitri saw him approaching them. His right hand rested on his hip; from his wrist hung a revolver on a strap.

"Good morning," he said in tolerably good Russian. "To whom have I the honor of speaking?"

"To a couple of bums," Dmitri replied and burst out laughing.

As a matter of fact they were both queer sights now. Their new blue overalls were in tatters; even their underclothes were torn, showing glimpses of their skin. Their revolvers were gone; the torn straps hung loose. Their leather helmets had been trampled in the mud. Their faces were badly bruised.

"Excuse us for not being in uniform," Dmitri added.

"You're parachute jumpers?" the officer asked angrily; he hissed out the words with hatred.

"Yes, and you're simply jackals," Vladislav blurted out unexpectedly at this moment. He had straightened up beside his tree.

"Silence!" shouted the officer. "Don't dare to speak one single word!" In his rage he got his Russian mixed.

He rushed up to Vladislav and struck him with his left hand. Vladislav let go of the bough he was clinging to and, unable to stand on his feet any longer, dropped to the ground. To Dmitri it was as if the officer had hit him. He could feel the shameful blow on his own cheek. At one bound he was at the officer.

"You son of a bitch!"

He smashed the officer in the face with both hands at once. The man fell, his round tortoise-shell glasses spinning out and smashing some feet away. The soldiers ran up again, but Dmitri, his back against a tree, worked his arms like a windmill. At his feet crouched Vladislav, holding on to one of his legs, and pressing his face into the torn leg of the overall as if seeking protection. The officer stood behind spitting out broken teeth. Dmitri kept whirling his arms, not letting the soldiers get near him. Finally, one of them got him with the butt end of a rifle. The heavy butt slid over Dmitri's outstretched arm and landed hard on the right shoulder. Immediately his right arm fell limp. The soldiers, roused to fury, raised their rifle butts over the two men. Another moment and Dmitri and Vladislav would have become lifeless pulp, but the officer uttered a command and the soldiers backed away.

The officer, who was short-sighted, stood with his half blind eyes screwed up, stamping his foot and shouting. He mixed words out of his own

language with Russian curses. From his hysterical exclamations Dmitri gathered that he and Vladislav were to be led away and shot.

Dmitri stooped down, raised Vladislav from the ground and supported him with his left hand. Vladislav passed his hand over his disfigured face and whispered:

"It's O.K., Dmitri, I'll manage."

They were pushed forward, Dmitri supporting Vladislav by the elbow with his left hand; the soldiers, forming a semi-circle round them, marched with their rifles at the ready, behind them the officer, still spitting blood and trying to settle his once smart, now crumpled, cap on his head.

Austere nature around them, full of life. The mighty cedars rustled, poplars with knotty branches, firs, elms, and silver-firs; the leaves of the black birch were beautiful; drops of dew trembled on them, for the morning was still young. The air was clear and fresh, and carried no smell of gunpowder. Vladislav and Dmitri were led along a woodland path that ran through a thicket. Troops passing through, not long since, had been bombed from the air. The creates left by bombs were lined with splintered trees and mutilated corpses.

The road now ran along the fringe of the forest. Dmitri glanced up and saw two ancient oaks. They reminded him of his youth when he had seen Robin Hood in the films. Dmitri had sworn then to become as strong as Robin Hood. And he had achieved his desire, through training and sports. Now he would have to take leave of his strong body. For ever! He would die. Only now Dmitri realized how vain had been their struggle with the soldiers. They were on their way to a firing squad. In a few minutes life would be over for them.

The recollection of the night before arose clearly in Dmitri's mind.

He and Vladislav had been summoned by the commander of the detachment. In a brief, business-like way he had explained to them that they must blow up a bridge over which a train with war supplies for the enemy was expected to pass next morning. He gave them directions and instructions. Leaving him, they went straight to the bombers; there they strapped on their parachutes, took explosives in their hands and climbed into a 'plane. The 'plane took off. It was one of a squadron flying south-east. Dmitri and Vladislav sat munching smoked sausage. Dmitri vaguely disliked Vladislav. He had known him for two years now. Formerly he had simply despised Vladislav because he was undersized and slight and looked delicate, while he, Dmitri, was tall and strong, with well-developed muscles. He had wondered how anyone could put him in the same category with a puny fellow who had formerly been an artist. Since they had served together in the parachute detachment, however, Dmitri had begun to treat Vladislav with more respect. The former artist possessed an unbending—an iron—will, and made his puny body obey it in a way that won everybody's admiration.

They sat discussing the job ahead of them. Then they were told:

"Time, boys. We're there."

They made no reply but went towards the trap-door. The fast bombers were going at topspeed. Their appearance was a surprise for the enemy. The dazzling-white blades of the search-lights vainly slashed the nocturnal softness of the sky. Nobody on the ground observed one of the airplanes diving, then flattening out and slowing down.

Vladislav opened the trap-door, and Dmitri thrust out a hand. Immediately

a powerful current of air slapped it against the rib of the trap-door. The gleam of a river could be seen below.

"You go first, you're heaviest." said Vladislav. Dmitri sprang through the trapdoor and dropped, without opening the parachute. He watched the phosphorescent hands and figures of the stop-watch on his right wrist. Suddenly he spun head-over-heels. He flung out his legs sharply, right and left. The whirling ceased. He looked at the stop-watch again and, deciding that it was time to open the parachute, tugged at the ring. The silk dome opened at once. Dmitri descended, counting the seconds so as to be prepared to meet the earth. He brought his feet close together and bent his knees a little. Earth appeared quite unexpectedly. Dmitri rolled over on his side, but got to his feet quickly and unstrapped the parachute. He did not hear Vladislav descend. After waiting three minutes he put his hands to his mouth and uttered an owl's hoot. Vladislav gave an answering call and immediately afterwards joined him. They hid their parachutes in the bushes, covering the brown silk with earth and moss. Then they started off to look for the river. This was not so difficult, because the light wind had not carried them far. Reaching the bridge they climbed up its interlacing steel work. They worked unhindered, the sentries not even seeing them. The two men chose a convenient spot, attached the photo-pile and the primer. Dmitri raised the lid of the box. Then they both started to climb down. Once Dmitri missed his footing and nearly fell into the water, but Vladislav held him up. They made their way into the woods and sat down in the bushes to wait for the explosion.

When morning came the enemy train would approach the bridge. As the cars moved over it, the shadow of the engine would fall on the photo-pile and two seconds later the time machine would set the firing-pin in motion. The percussion cap would explode and train and bridge would be blown to pieces.

Dmitri and Vladislav were whispering together when the bridge blew up. Then had come that hideous struggle, as a result of which Dmitri could not even stir his right arm. Now they were to pay for everything. Oh, the agony of it! Dmitri had never thought of the reality of death before. It had always seemed so far away from him. And now it was at hand. Perhaps there was a way out? No, none whatever. How was he to take leave of this joyful world, where even war had not seemed terrible to him? Ah, what agony!

"Vladek," he said suddenly, "can you sing?"

"No, boy, I've no ear," Vladislav replied.

"No ear?" Dmitri repeated. "But still, we could perhaps sing something? Eh? I can't walk along like this."

He almost shrieked the last words. They were marching on and on and on, the soldiers following them with rifles at the ready. At one time the egoism of this big man had repelled Vladislav, but now Dmitri seemed close to him, dear and comprehensible.

"Give me your paw," he said to Dmitri, taking his left wrist. "I can't sing," he went on, "but I can talk to you."

"Very well," Dmitri agreed.

Vladislav began to talk. He talked loudly, at the top of his voice.

"You know, boy, it isn't death we're going to. Do you know where we're going? We're going to Moscow. We're marching through the suburbs just now. Marching like heroes. Are you listening to me, old chap?"

"Yes."

"Now we're in the streets, those broad streets you remember. We're marching to the Red Square. Treading the road heroes have trodden. All around us are flowers and children. Little children, Dmitri, are throwing flowers to us. Can you smell the roses, old chap? Are you fond of children, Dmitri?"

"I used not to be, but it makes no difference now."

"Right turn!" the officer commanded suddenly.

"We're turning to the right," said Vladislav. "This street's a short cut to Red Square. We'll be met here by girls. Power, innocence, and love! They're calling to us. Can you hear their voices welcoming us?"

"Yes."

"The band's playing. It's a march—tra-ta-tra-ta-tra-ta."

Dmitri and Vladislav marched in step, with long manly strides. A corpse lay in their path; they stepped over it.

"The carnival procession!" cried Vladislav. "Do you remember, every holiday there was a procession. A carnival of abundance! What bright faces! And everything of the best on the stalls. Fruit and wine. They're offering them to us. Delicious! Are you fond of candied peel, Dmitri?"

"No, I like chocolate covered cherries."

"Not bad either! Now it's all over and the music isn't playing any more. Silence. We're entering the Red Square. Now the best part is coming. Have we the right to it? Yes. We've done great deeds and we're entering the square. Oh, Dmitri, look at the red banners! We're crossing the Red Square."

"You're a real artist!" Dmitri exclaimed.

"Halt!" commanded the officer.

"We come to a halt," Vladislav went on. "About turn! We're right before Lenin's Tomb. The stands are crowded. The best people in our country. They're welcoming us. Thousands of loud-speakers, welcoming us!"

The officer gave an order, the soldiers raised their rifles and took aim.

"Then we raise our left hands high. The left hand is the one nearest the heart. We raise our left hands and shout to our dear comrades."

Dmitri and Vladislav stood with raised hands. Their eyes shone; the soldiers took aim, but their hands were unsteady with weariness and strain and the barrels of their rifles shook.

"... And we call loudly, so that it can be heard all over the square.—Dmitri, don't let your hand shake. We say loudly: 'To you, our great Socialist fatherland, we give up our lives.' "

A volley. The soldiers' rifles were unsteady; only Vladislav fell. He rolled over on his back, flinging his arms out wearily.

The soldiers took aim once more. Dmitri took a step forward and shouted:

"What was it he said? Ah, yes. We are shouting: 'To you, our great Socialist fatherland. . . .' "

A second volley rang out and Dmitri felt a powerful blow in the back. He wanted to look round but found that he could not. He seemed to be soaring—up—and up. Then falling. Down—into an abyss. It took his breath away, and his heart beat furiously. Then it burst, and Dmitri dropped down on Vladislav. He rolled over: they lay side by side like brothers.

Around them austere nature reigned; there was a smell of gunpowder in the fresh air.

The Circle of Victory

". . . . And at the same time, you will test it. We are sending this machine out for the first time."

"Certainly, comrade major!"

"You'll release four bombs at the points marked on the map. Then you come back for another load. Keep us informed by radio of the way things are going."

"Certainly, comrade major."

"I believe you've been a glider, and broken records. Is that right?"

"Yes, comrade major."

"This will be a record flight, too. You're to drop bombs on the arsenal, the aerodrome, the radio station and the railway bridge. All in one flight. Well, shake hands."

"Goodbye, comrade major."

Nikolai went out, and hurried to the aerodrome. Alexei was there already.

"Is the glider ready?" Nikolai asked.

"Waiting for you," Alexei replied.

"I'm ready, too. Come along."

"O.K."

They went towards the glider. The huge machine was standing, giant wings outspread, on the concrete pavement of the aerodrome. Its powerful body and wings were of a semi-transparent but tough material resembling celluloid. Nikolai could see the interior of the cockpit in which he was to sit. The parachute prepared for him was lying in it.

"Get out the parachute," he said.

Alexei climbed into the cockpit while Nikolai had another look at the map. His flight-route was clear. When the 'plane that was to tow him had climbed to the required height, it was to release him. A glider was noiseless. Nikolai would fly in a vast circle. All four places on which the bombs were to be dropped were points on this circle. True, the arsenal was rather too far to one side. Well, what about it. The circle would be a bit out of drawing. In the event of his losing too much height—he could switch on the engine that stood in front, on brackets, and could climb again.

Nikolai laid the map down and put on the parachute. Carefully he fastened the straps to his body, squatted several times, stretched out his arms sideways. He wanted to make sure that the slings were not too tight. Alexei testing the outfit hovered about like a brood hen over a chick.

"You're not nervous, are you?" he asked Nikolai.

"You speak as if you'd only just met me."

"Well, Kolya, up to now it's been practice flights; this is war."

"You're a funny guy. You could be smashed up before, and you can smash up now."

"That's true."

"And it's exactly like the Crimea here—a clear blue sky, an aerodrome. There's the tow 'plane. The cable is hanging on to the tail. Now I'll take off. Where ist the war? What war? I've never heard of it!"

"I see you're just the same as ever. Well, go along."

Nikolai climbed into the cockpit, settled down comfortably and strapped himself to the back of the chair. "Comrade mechanic," he said, "when I raise my hand, wave the flag."

"Right you are," Alexei replied. Then he stepped close up to the glider and said:

"Let me kiss you goodbye, Kolya. After all, we're comrades."

"All right, kiss me, then. I'll shut my eyes, so as not to see your pimply old mug," Nicolai laughed.

They kissed. After that Nikolai put on the oxygen-mask, to which wireless earphones and a microphone were attached. They had all to be put on beforehand, so that there need be no fussing afterwards! He closed the cowl of the cockpit and turned the control-wheel, which worked freely. Then he cast a last glance around. Through the blue semi-transparent walls of his cockpit he could see the bombs hanging under the wings. They seemed no more terrible than the sandbags he had flown with before. He raised his hand, Alexei waved the white flag. So long, Alexei!

The glider started. Nikolai could see the shining thread of cable stretch. There was nothing unusual about this take-off, though he was flying to carry out battle orders. What was there unusual in the sensations of a man going into battle for the first time? Alexei was absurd. Why should you get nervous when you did what you were used to doing? The airplane taxied ahead and the glider followed. Faster and faster. Nikolai strengthened his grip on the controls. Although the concrete path was smooth, and there were no jolts, still one had to be cautious with this cargo. The wheels could no longer be heard on the concrete. The glider rose in the air, a little higher than the airplane. The aerial train flew over the woods. The twin-engined 'plane easily drew the huge blue sea-gull after it. It made a right curve. The glider turned with it. Nikolai put the controls to the right, as he was supposed to during a curve, but pressed down the pedal with his left foot. This was to prevent the glider overtaking the airplane in its movement around the circle.

It climbed in a wide spiral. Where was the war? What war? Just now they would soar high and the glider would start on its long flight. It would fly along a curve.

At certain points Nikolai would drop pennants as in a race to register his route. Far from being terrifying, this was dull.

He looked about him. Through the transparent walls he could see the aerodrome and the country around it—as if through a fog. Better to watch the screen. This was a square of glass let into the instrument board. It showed the earth distinctly. When the glider climbed to a height, the scale of which corresponded to his maps, Nikolai would see them duplicated on the screen. After all, his maps were nothing but photographs of the earth taken from the same height. Nikolai could see a red metal arrow under glass, part of a special apparatus. When the point on which he was to drop a bomb came under its tip, Nikolai was to press a red button on the control-wheel. The bomb-rack would relèase a bomb. That, of course, need not mean that the glider would be flying right over the target. The arrow indicated the target several seconds beforehand. It all depended upon the speed of the glider, wind velocity, temperature and other conditions. Clever, the whole thing! Nikolai looked with respect at the apparatus in which the red arrow quivered.

They were still climbing. Nikolai felt as if he were suffocating. He looked at the altimeter. Six thousand meters high. They were not rising so slowly either. He let some oxygen into the mask, and felt easier.

Perhaps he ought to contact the ground by radio? No, there was no point in it. He was still circling like a top over the aerodrome. What message could he transmit? That he was safely pegging himself into the sky? They could see that. If he could only get in touch with Moscow! With Zhenya! Science still left much to be desired! If he could ring her at home! A glider in touch with an apartment in Moscow! That's the stuff. Nicolai

turned on the radio with his left hand. Strange sounds came over the air—crackling, whistles, grunts. How he would like to speak to Zhenya, right now. He had a chat with her just before he left for the front. He was to have seen her again. But mobilization interfered. Why did it always happen like that? He had tried twice in his life to open his heart to her, and each time was balked. So he would go to his death without ever having heard a real word of love. What was that grunting? Nikolai turned off the wireless.

The airplane was drawing the glider higher and higher. The altimeter showed 10,000 meters. It seemed to Nikolai they were climbing faster now. The arrow had passed the 11,000 figure and was creeping towards 12,000. They were no longer spiraling but flying straight. The plane increased its speed. It was not so boring now. The earth of his country was reflected in the screen. The country the enemy had dared to attack. Still he did not feel the war. He had fought before. For records for his country.

According to the map he had crossed the frontier. As a matter of fact, where were they? Was there a frontier? How odd it sounded—frontier. But it only sounded odd in the air, and at this height. Down on the earth frontiers existed. Still he did not feel the war. Show me the war, he said to himself. Down below were quiet rivers, fields, woods, towns, railways. War was carried on in subtle ways now. There were camouflaged tanks and aerodromes and scores of thousands of armed people, burrowing the earth.

It was time to detach the glider. The airplane had to return. Nikolai took hold of the handle of the coupling-gear with his left hand and pressed it down. With his right he turned the control wheel to the left and pressed the left pedal with his foot. A smooth turn to the left. The airplane flew straight. The glider took a small curve. The 'plane took a small curve. The 'plane dived, dropping below to draw the enemy's attention from the glider. Then it flew back to the aerodrome. So far everything had gone on as in an ordinary flight. The 'plane that had held the glider in tow was gone and Nikolai was flying on his own—and that was all.

Now he must begin. Nikolai set his glider towards the west, in the direction of the arsenal. The glider was going fast. The apparatus scarcely showed that it was losing height. It flew silently; it was transparent in the transparent sky. Nikolai glanced at the screen and back at his map. The arsenal lay between a little wood and the branch railway. It was marked on the map with a ring. The red arrow was moving rapidly towards it. He must not lose a moment. There! That was all. The first bomb had been dropped. Nikolai looked in the screen. The arsenal swiftly dropped out of the frame of the screen. When it had all but gone a black cloud appeared in its place. So that was war? Nikolai had read about it, seen it on the films, been told about it. And now he was taking part in a war. Well, he did not notice anything special about it yet. Where was the clash of swords and the clank of armor? This wasn't war, it was simply a job in a factory. You pressed a lever, and set a lathe working; pressed another and stopped it. This was all in the air, of course. Down on the earth the arsenal had ceased to exist; a minute later the aerodrome would go. He pressed the red button on the wheel. The aerodrome, floating slowly out of the screen, bloomed suddenly into a black flower. Silence. Only the wind whistled softly under the wings. He looked at the apparatus. Not down to 11,000 meters yet. All in perfect order. The glider described an enormous circle. Nikolai's hand was

steady and the blue transparent sea-gull did not drift out of its course. Now it was the turn of the wireless station and the bridge.

What a bright day! Just the day for him. Who on the ground could see a transparent glider flying in the sun's rays at a height of 12,000 meters? Oh, the joy of a glider's profession! Involuntarily one became a dreamer. Aha, here was the wireless station. Nikolai pressed the red button. Whatever happened below was soundless; he did not hear the faintest rumble. It was like a silent film. Modern warfare was a prosaic business.

The glider was heading towards the railway bridge, a strategic point, or it would not have to be blown up. He looked at the apparatus. Height—10,000 meters. The glider was still losing height. That was the rule; the engine was not working. A town floated across the screen. He was far in the enemy's rear. No one in that town had the slightest suspicion of death flying just under the sun. But he was not going to blow up people. That was not the custom of his Socialist country. He was all-powerful here in the sunny silence, but he was merciful. He was defending his country. And in order to defend it well—one must attack boldly. Attack the tanks, aerodromes, bridges and arsenals of the enemy. This he knew well. Here was the bridge. Well, it wasn't going to be there any more.

Height 8,000 meters! The glider was dropping. The bombs were all gone. Now he would start the engine and the machine would climb again. And so—home. Nikolai saw through the screen the land over which he was flying. An industrial country. He could see railway junctions and factories. He turned a little wheel that stuck out at the right side of the glass. The picture in the mirror was enlarged at once. Splendid. The railway stations were quite plain; a train sliding out, smoking factory chimneys. Another turn of the wheel. Now even people were visible. What a splendid invention—from a height of 8,000 meters to be enabled to see people walking in and out of their houses.

The glider flew onward. Nikolai watched the screen. The sun was near its setting. What was that? He looked again. Woods? No, something else. He strained his eyes and cursed loudly. And then he laughed.

You couldn't fool him with that. Nikolai began to circle above the spot that had interested him. What camouflage! Nikolai could see below him huge, round benzine tanks and, alongside them, munition drums. Long, narrow buildings without windows or doors. The chief thing was the benzine. But what camouflage! Over the benzine tanks and munition dumps were stretched thin nets with pieces of green material on them to represent trees. What should he do? He had no more bombs. Just as the most interesting part was beginning. He turned on the wireless. At first chaotic sounds greeted his ears. He turned the knob of the receiving set. A familiar crackling. He was being called. He replied:

"I can hear you. Glider Invisible. Glider Invisible speaking."

They could hear him; they said:

"Well, say something."

"Everything's all right," he replied. "The job's done. I can see munition dumps and benzine tanks, but I've got no more bombs."

Audibility grew worse.

He was silent a moment, listening to the grunting and hissing of the ether, then spoke again:

"I cannot leave my post. Am going to do another job. The glider has stood the test."

He turned off the radio. The glider was at 6,000 meters. The blue gull might be seen from the ground now. He would have to be quick. War really started when you got near the earth. Was he nervous? Alexei had asked. No. And now? Not now, either. He would turn the glider nose downwards, switch on the engine and dive straight into the benzine tank. That would be real war!

He put his glider into a dive. Quick! He must do it without thinking. He mustn't let his body become conscious of itself. He had made a resolve and must carry it out as quickly as possible—or—else—Supposing fear were to get the better of him? Physical fear! The terror of the body before its dissolution. What a disgrace that would be! The glider quivered and dived headlong. He turned on the engine, and stared, smiling, into the screen. The earth was coming closer, and with it—the benzine and munition dumps. That was the way to do it! He must forestall himself—and not give himself a chance to think. He must throttle his fear. Perhaps he could still save himself with the parachute? No, that wouldn't do. It might veer the glider off its course. He must give that up. Where had the idea come from? No compromise with danger! The enemy stores must be destroyed. One man's death would save the lives of thousands. Nikolai ripped off his oxygen mask. He must meet real war face to face.

"Zhenya, I'm going to do my job," he whispered.

Zhenya, Zhenya! He had never even kissed her, not once in his life. His life? Why, was he dead now? No. What nonsense! Living, dead? Nonsense! Down! Ah, there it was—war! It seemed to Nikolai. . . . No, nothing seemed to him any more.

With a shriek the glider slashed into a huge, round benzine tank. A column of flame leaped to the skies. The earth shook with the explosion. A minute later the neighboring tank caught, then the rest in turn. The dumps caught fire. All night shells burst and munitions burned. There, earth had become hell.

The Battle Goes On

The two-storied grey building in which headquarters is housed is quite near now, so Tim pulls himself together: the colonel may be looking out of the window. Tim squares his shoulders and walks with a firmer step. To the left of him lies a green field, and away in the distance hangars can be seen. The field is large, and the hangars dip into the earth and are lost in it; no people can be seen at all. The aerodrome is as quiet as if there were no war going on. Not so far from here the frontier once lay. The green field seems to Tim to be smoking; the air quivers above the grass. The summer sun has warmed the earth. A grasshopper is chirruping; the cound cheers Tim. Life is wonderful.

He goes up to the house. A great deal is altered there. Once clean and neat, it looks dingy now. Windows are broken and patched with paper. A gap in the wall is filled with brick work. Over the roof lies a patch of unpainted iron. All around are blackened tree stumps. The young trees are broken. This makes the deepest impression on Tim. The breath of war has blasted this place. A great many things have changed while he was in the hospital.

He goes up the steps and wipes his feet. He notices this and remembers that he always did so in autumn, on entering headquarters. He shows his pass to the sentry, and opens the door. Shouts of recognition greet him. The pi-

lots on the leather couches are smoking cheerfully. They are all in full flying kit: leather coats with helmets strapped to their belts. All complete except for parachutes. The familiar welcoming faces of old comrades—and many new ones. A wall of delighted, sunburnt faces advances on Timothy. There are loud exclamations, friendly embraces. He goes up to the window with two friends, who give him the news, interrupting one another. He knows it all already, but it is pleasant to hear it again.

"Tim," one says, "we're in the reserves now. It's getting dull here—the front has moved so far ahead. Can you imagine—only two flights a day. Do you remember how many times a day we used to go up? Four or five. I'm asking to be sent over there, nearer . . ."

"Do you know what kind of 'planes we have now?" another interrupted. "Regular whirlwinds—some speed—I only wish everyone a machine like that on a rainy day."

Tim listens and laughs at their sallies. They do not inquire about his health. If he were still ill, he would not be here, clear enough. Nor do they speak of the comrades he has lost. It would not be the thing at the first meeting. Tim goes into the next room. The man on duty speaks to him in a matter-of-fact way, showing no surprise.

"Well," he says, "the colonel is busy, you'll have to wait a while. But I have a letter for you. We forwarded your letters to you regularly, but this came a day ago. Here you are."

Tim takes the letter, murmuring thanks. He tears open the envelope, but leaves the enclosure in. It is from Zhenya! He will read it when he is alone. He goes out. Nearby, several motor-lorries are parked. He goes up to one of them and leaning against it, starts to read his letter. At first he takes a quick look over it without taking it in properly. He only perceives its outward appearance. The rustling paper in his fingers bears the water-mark of the "Sickle and Hammer" and is covered with small handwriting. Every line slopes down at the right. Zhenya does not like to carry words over on to the next line.

"Look at the paper she's writing on," he thinks. "It must be something important." Then he starts to read it carefully.

He reads it and the paper rustles again as he folds it up. He does this very carefully, first in two and then in four, then again, his hands moving mechanically. Timothy's thoughts are in Moscow. Guns, tanks, airplanes—all these retire to the background for a while, and their place is taken by something new and gay and happy. "We have a daughter now and she takes after me—don't be upset." This one sentence out of Zhenya's letter flashes through his mind. A daughter! Well, that's nice. He has a son already. Now a girl. Well, let the tender life develop and grow. You will blossom out, little girl, in a Socialist country, and become a worker, and when need be, a fighter. Yes, a fighter like your father. It makes no difference that you are a girl. Men and women are on equal footing here. Tim thrusts the letter into his pocket and looks about him. He would like to talk to someone about children and life. He looks at the back of the sentry. The broad back is held erect, the bayonet glitters. Should he talk to him? It will not distract the man, he will only say what he feels he must say to someone, and then go in to see the colonel. Two or three simple words, to a comrade. No more. About children and happiness. Two words! I want to tell you about my children. You've got children, too, I suppose, comrade? No, one can't very well talk to a sentry. He is on duty. Yes . . .

Tim struck the side of the lorry with his palm. The sentry turned and bent his head, as if listening to something else. Tim gave a start. Somewhere, far away, an electric siren uttered a long-drawn-out howl. To this alarming note were added other exciting sounds; the whistle of steam-engines, then another peculiar whistle, then a ring. Suddenly above the whole chaos could be heard the hollow roar of big guns, crowning the entire scale. Immediately after that a new music began—volleys of anti-aircraft guns followed by the rattle of machine-guns. The siren of the aerodrome screamed, beginning on a high note and ending on low ones.

"An air raid," said the sentry, as if speaking of something quite ordinary.

Timothy did not have to be told. It was not the first time he had heard that music. The war rose to its full height before him. The battle was going on. The airmen rushed out of headquarters and made for the lorries. Their tense faces were stern. Already the dust of the flying-field was blowing to one side, and the air sang with the roar of engines. Five short-bodied airplanes with low-placed wings climbed steeply into the blue sky, described a curve, glimmered for a moment and vanished. "So those are the 'planes!" thought Timothy. "They'll soon catch up with the enemy." Five more light-grey airplanes with red stars on their wings tore away from the aerodrome. Tim saw them draw up their under carriages in the air. Like falcons drawing up their talons. The air trembled once more. A second quintette! There was a sort of rhythm in this. The rhythm of war. It took hold of Tim. A third quintette. He clenched his fists and raised them but let them drop again when a fourth quintette arose. More and more and more. . . The 'planes were flying with a roar toward the booming guns.

"I've got to be in one of these quintettes!" Timothy whispered. Then he turned and ran up the steps. He passed through the deserted waiting-room. The man on duty, never surprised, said: "You can see him now."

Tim entered. The colonel was just putting down the receiver of the telephone, and stepped forward to greet him. He glanced at Timothy with his twinkling black eyes and said:

"Splendid, splendid! I saw you through the window as you were coming along. So you're perfectly well? Fine," he laid his hands on Tim's shoulders. "Well, now you must go and see your family. I can spare you a fortnight. I've got plenty of men here." Tim said nothing. His lips quivered and there was a smarting in his nose such as he had felt in childhood when he was going to howl. The colonel took his hands off Timothy's shoulders and went towards his desk. There he stood, tossing up a box of matches and catching it.

"Well, if it's like that. . . then your 'plane is the SN—102."

Translated by Anthony Wixley

Alexander Barta

The Pension

When I came to Vienna, the first snow was falling. For me, the place was just like any other place. The huge, crazy tenement houses crouched under the banners of smoke from the factories. The gutters ran filth and the stench steamed up through the canal railings.

These cities are everywhere the same. From the moment you arrive in them, you go about as though you had lived there all your life. The same melting snow runs down the same clouded windows. The eaves of the houses are full of similar holes and send similar spouts of water out into the middle of the pavement. The same rain trickles down your neck, the same way. The sky? Shrouded in smoke. Fog morning and evening; it makes you cough. Work is dirt; and what is given the name of shelter is dirt. The unmarried men find a place for themselves huddled up somewhere in the kitchen; the older ones lie on the very hearth and the younger ones around them.

And then the flame of the lamp flickers until somebody puts the wick out of action with a wet hand.

It has been like this for a week now, a week—and forty-nine years. For I have been working at my trade forty-nine years and a week today. Do I like it? It has withered every scrap of flesh on my bones; it has planted rheumatism between my joints; my hands are always damp and they creak like weathercocks.

A grueling place, a steam laundry! It boils up everything in front of your eyes . . . steam, steam, nothing but steam, steam coming out of every corner. The electric lamps look like faded flowers and are tiring to the eyes and brain.

It begins early. By dawn the boilers are already steaming. But the floor is cool; it is as though one was stepping on a corpse. Our heavy black leather slippers in the puddles make frog sounds, splash and squelch. . . The steam rises higher. One can see only with one's hands. We are not given to talking, then. The only sounds we make are the sounds of feet in the puddles.

I have often racked my brains imagining where all this dirty wash comes from. If it only was dirty, though! As it is, it seems hardly worthwhile dipping it in the lye and soda. One begrudges such work and spoiling one's hands for it. But I don't complain. I've seen it through. The cursed lye has only corroded away my finger nails; but there are some who have only their finger bones with which to lift and turn the knotted mass of shirts.

And inside it is not so bad. They say the steam is good for rheumatism. When you come out into the street again in the evening, you almost feel it would be better to spend the night curled up in one of the boilers. Somehow the wind is always against you, outside, and blows the snow right into your eyes. The trams ring their bells furiously as though you didn't know that, for your own sake, you must get out of their way . . . And the motor cars! They glide past like snakes; and the confounded curtain of snow closes upon them again.

Who are they, inside?

Bankers, perhaps, or bishops, or even bigger shots still. One of these days

I must really catch a look inside one of them. If only they wouldn't shoot past at such a devil of a rate. Working in a steam laundry one gradually forgets how to use one's eyes. All round there is steam, nothing but steam, and you learn to feel your way rather than see your way. You have to be careful even, not to bite the end of your finger, instead of your bread.

I once did manage to catch a look inside one of these motor cars.

It had stopped snowing. The tears in my eyes froze to ice. The auto came up so luxuriously on its low wheels and swished past like a disembodied voice. There was no banker, no bishop inside. Only a small electric bulb could be seen shining and beside it a little brass vase with a spray of Lily of the Valley. It was very, very pretty, the way the spray of Lily of the Valley drove past me in the empty glass car. I then went over to the butcher's at the corner. There was the end of a left-over black pudding. I looked up at it, and thought: it's a good thing you're still there. I had a piece of it cut off for me, the size of my hand; and I went on munching it in the kitchen until the lights were put out.

But I had a restless night. My neighbors complained. They said it would be better for an old fellow like me to be smelling the violets under the ground. In the morning I tried to explain; I put the blame on the black pudding I got at the butcher's. But Michael with the big ears shouted: "To hell with your black pudding! All night you moaned: 'If I only knew who was inside!' "

I was warned that if I didn't behave better the next night, I would be brought to the guard room, since the steam seemed to have affeced my head.

The next day I was again on the edge of the pavement, fixing my eyes on the stream of cars, for one I could get a look into.

But the confounded cars rushed past so fast, I hadn't time to wink even.

I said to myself: I'll go over to the butcher's and let the cars go to the devil; I don't care a damn who's inside.

There was still a piece of the same black pudding in the butcher's window, and I thought, it's a good thing there's still some left; and I had a piece cut off, the size of my hand; and again that night, I went on munching it until the lights were put out.

My neighbors made it quite clear in advance they weren't going to stand for any more fooling and that if I gave any trouble that night, they would have me sent to the lunatic asylum. I was afraid to go to sleep. I stayed awake all night so as to keep watch over my tongue. But toward morning sleep overcame me.

Then I heard Michael with the big ears saying, "Sure he's off his head. All night long, I heard him. He wanted to know who's inside."

"Yes, it's quite clear, he's off his head," a grumbling voice answered.

"Up you get, old man," shouted the one with the deep voice. "We're going to see the bishop!"

I opened my eyes until they were as big as two-crown pieces. Then I shut them till they were as small as poppy seeds. It was the cop, Andrisch, from the corner. His moustache looked like a two-pronged fork and on each prong a drop of brilliantine, shining. He had the number 406 like a diamond on his chest.

Then I was laid on a stretcher.

Damn it all, this is no joke. You've become an important person, you old sinner. Look at the crowd of people at the door! They crowd round as though there were to be a procession; they line up on either side like people watching a bride being led to the altar.

Then I said to myself: it's high time for you to get up. But—there was a big, shining motor car on low wheels; in front of it Andrisch was standing. Before I could open my mouth, I was rolled, like some delicate object, into the car.

The butcher was watching. I heard him say: "He won't eat any more of my black pudding now."

I heard another saying: "He was a harmless chap, quiet as a lamb, wouldn't hurt a fly. But they say he was missing in the upper story for sometime." I heard all that. Then we were off. What a ride that was!

Andrisch sat opposite and kept repeating:

"You'll be all right now, old man! A great honor has come your way. You'll get a look at some of the big chiefs."

But I only blinked. I was enjoying the ride. If only it would last on and on till the next day! It was marvelous the way, when the car picked up speed, all the other cars and people and trams seemed to stand stock still.

Now old boy, you've become a toff at last, you can die in peace. The world has taken its hat off to you. No. It's not for nothing that you have spent your life cleaning other people's dirt.

We drove through a large gate. It had blue panes of glass. Two men in white smock-frocks came running out. Ugh! how smooth and oily they looked. I don't think I'd have kept my balance, walking on their faces. They slapped me on the shoulders. They said the Lord Bishop was waiting for me with a spray of Lily of the Valley in his hand.

They said I must leave everything to them; they would see to it that everything was in order.

"What bishop?" I asked.

But they winked slyly.

They said: I mustn't play the fool, that was all. I could speak to them as though they were my own sons.

Then they carried me into a porcelain room. There was a tub filled with good warm water. They carefully dipped me in it. They gave my back a good rubbing. They wound a towel around me and when it was unwound, part of my rheumatism was left behind. Then I was put in a snow white bed. It was a beautiful bed with trestle work and a mattress as soft as a cloud in heaven.

Ah! how my heart softened with gratitude.

But then came the best of all.

They asked me what would I have, tea, coffee with whipped cream or cocoa?

But I said I didn't want anything to eat or drink. I drew the clean smelling blanket over my head and lay flat on the sheet like a piece of leavened dough on a board.

Early the next morning I started out of my sleep at the sound of a bell. No sooner had I opened my eyes than a cup of hot coffee and a roll the size of my head were put on a table beside my bed.

Well, old man, I thought, you've worked honestly for forty-nine years and now you're going to reap your reward for it.

The bosses are going to pamper you now for it.

I began to get a bit of a swelled head. I told the man who had brought me my breakfast that I was quite satisfied. He was pleased at this and at once offered me a second roll. I said that if it was the custom, I did not want to

depart from it. But at the same time he should fill up my cup as that was the custom where I came from.

Oh, he laughed, the blighter, but he filled it up all the same.

"Now old man," I said to myself, "you've done well. You haven't slaved these forty-nine years for nothing. Now you're in a real paradise. The bosses have put you on a pension. And quite right too. Ah, things go well when the government is in the right hands, those who know how to rule. That's why the bosses are bosses. Things wouldn't be like that in the hands of poor devils like ourselves, like Michael with the big ears or that consumptive compositor who wanted to get me to give my last few hellers a week to the Communist newspaper."

I was also given a magnificent suit. All the stripes on it ran in the same direction. It was a real beauty, white and red. And then I had to follow the man who had brought me my breakfast.

It was a grand house. Even the corridors were heated. The bosses were waiting for me, four or five of them in a milk-white hall. When I came in, they smiled so good-naturedly and greeted me aloud. I felt so awkward, I did not know how to thank them for their kindness. It took me some time, clearing of my throat to be able to stammer out: "I don't deserve it, sirs . . . "

But they only smiled and the jolliest of them slapped me on the shoulder, "Never mind, old man, don't mention it."

All right, I thought, then I don't need to say anything. The whole thing is quite clear. I have worked enough during my lifetime and now the bosses have put me on a pension. I have a right to it.

And I said nothing.

They turned me this way and that and questioned me. But I thought, you know everything anyway; there is no need for me to say anything. An accidental word might spoil everything.

And then they said something like "iditus-aditus,"—God knows what their dead men's lingo means—and then they let me go in peace.

After that I kept mum. I ate, drank and slept. But one day I heard one of the men in the white smock-frocks say to the other—I was pretending to be asleep—that they were thinking of sending the old man back to the laundry. The other one said, "Sure, the old man's only shamming."

Then everything fell through. I reasoned with them: I explained how I had a right to the pension. For forty-nine years I had had the steam blowing in my face and for forty-nine years I had washed other people's dirt. Why should I give up my bed and my roll and my coffee?

But they only laughed.

They laughed and I lost my temper. I struck out. Down went the jug and one of the two lay stretched out on the floor with blood flowing from his head.

And then the jolly gentleman himself came running into my room. The scoundrels tied me hand and foot. But I still kept on fighting.

They found me more than they had bargained for. The house shook. My mouth foamed.

"I won't give up my bed, I won't give up my bread, I won't give up my pension."

My voice sounded good and loud.

And how they quaked. The jolly gentleman made the lowest of bows. But I only said that until they took me off the gallows they must feed me on roast beef. I had nothing more to say.

They took me downstairs.

The jolly gentleman is really a very good sort. He told me that I was right all along. Then he gave me some bitter brown drops—to improve my appetite, he said. They make me sleep a lot and when I wake up I feel as calm as the lines on my hand.

And ever since people walk on tiptoe around me.

They bring me my meals and take away the empty plates and I lie in bed all day long. Soon I won't be able to find a pair of trousers to fit round my stomach.

Translated by N. Goold-Verschoyle

Song of Spain

Come now, all you who are singers,
And sing me the song of Spain.
Sing it very simply that I might understand.

What is the song of Spain?

FLAMENCO is the song of Spain:
Gypsies, guitars, dancing
Death and love and heartbreak
To a heel tap and a swirl of fingers
On three strings.
FLAMENCO is the song of Spain.

I do not understand.

TOROS are the song of Spain:
The bellowing bull, the red cape,
A sword thrust, a horn tip,
The torn suit of satin and gold.
Blood on the sand
Is the song of Spain.

I do not understand.

PINTURA is the song of Spain:
Goya, Velasquez, Murillo,
Splash of color on canvas,
Whirl of cherub-faces
La Maja Desnuda's
The song of Spain.

What's that?

QUIXOTE! ESPANA!
AQUEL RINCON DE LA MANCHA
CUYO NUMBRE NO QUIERO ACORDARME. . . .
That's the song of Spain.

You wouldn't kid me, would you?
A bombing plane's
The song of Spain.
Bullets like rain's
The song of Spain.
Poison gas is Spain.
A knife in the back
And its terror and pain is Spain.

TOROS, FLAMENCO, paintings, books—
Not Spain.

The people are Spain:
The people beneath that bombing plane
With its wings of gold for which I pay—
I, worker, letting my labor pile
Up millions for bombs to kill a child—
I bought those bombs for Spain!

Workers made those bombs for a Fascist Spain!
Will I make them again, and yet again?
Storm clouds move fast
Our sky is gray.
The white devils of the terror
Await, their day
When bombs'll fall not only on Spain—
But on me and you!

Workers, make no bombs again!
Workers, mine no gold again!
Workers, lift no hand again
To build up profits for the rape of Spain!
Workers, see yourselves as Spain!
Workers, know that we too can cry,
Lift arms in vain, run, hide, die:
Too late!
The bombing plane!
Workers, make no bombs again
Except that they be made for us
To hold and guard
Lest some Franco steal into our backyard
Under the guise of a patriot
Waving a flag and mouthing rot
And dropping bombs from a Christian steeple
On the people.

I made those bombs for Spain.
I must not do it again.

I made those bombing planes.
I must not do it again.

I made rich the grandees and lords
Who hire Franco to lead his gang-hordes
Against Spain.

I must never do that again.

I must drive the bombers out of Spain!
I must drive the bombers out of the world!
I must take the world for my own again—

A workers' world
Is the song of Spain.

Maxim Gorky

Bawdy Face

One close summer night in an obscure alley on the outskirts of the town I ran across a strange sight, a woman walking into a large puddle, and then stamping her feet and splashing the slush about as small children do—and chanting crazy rhymes in a whining voice, in which the name "Fomka" rhymed with the word "yomkaia" (bag).

A heavy thunderstorm has passed over the town that day, abundant rain had soaked the dirty clay of the alley; the puddle was deep, the woman was up to her knees in it. Judging by her voice, she was drunk. If, when she grew fatigued with the dancing, she sank into the pool, she might easily be choked with its liquid mud.

I pulled the legs of my boots up over the knee, stepped into the puddle and dragged the dancer out by the arms on to a dry spot. At first she was frightened and offered no resistance; then, with a powerful heave of her body, she tore her right arm from my grasp, struck me in the chest and bawled:

"Help!"

And with a determined air, she shuffled back into the pool, dragging me after.

"Go to hell," she muttered. "I won't go. I get along without you. .you get along without me. . . .Help!"

Out of the gloom the night watchman emerged, halted five paces from us, and demanded angrily:

"Who's that kicking up a row?"

I told him I was afraid she would drown in the mud and wanted to drag her out; the watchman looked closer at the drunken woman, cleared his throat loudly and commanded:

"Mashka, come out o' there!"

"Don't want to."

"Come out, I'm telling ye!"

"Well, I won't."

"I'll give you a good hiding, you hussy," the watchman promised, without anger. Then turning to me in a chatty, good-natured manner, he explained:

"She's a local character—an oakum picker, Frolicha, Mashka. You don't happen to have a cigarette?"

We lit up. The woman stamped bravely in the puddle screaming:

"Bosses! I'm my own boss, I am. If I want to, I'll have a bath in it."

"You just try it," the watchman warned her; he was a sturdy, bearded old fellow. "That's the way she goes on every night, kicking up a row. . . . And she's got a son, a cripple, at home."

"Does she live far away?"

"She ought to be shot," the watchman observed without answering me.

"She ought to be taken home," I suggested. The watchman gave a derisive splutter in his beard, turned the glow from his cigarette on my face, and went away, treading heavily in his high boots over the sticky ground.

"Take her then! But have a look at her mug first."

The woman sat down in the mud and, rowing with her hands, screeched wildly through her nose:

"Over the se-e-ea!"

Not far from her in the scummy water a big star was reflected. Then the pool was covered with ripples and the reflection disappeared. I strode into the water again, grabbed the singer under the arms, raised her, and pushing her along with my knees, led her to the fence; she resisted, hitting out at random and challenging me:

"Come then, hit me, hit me! Never mind, hit me. . . . Ah, you beast, ah, you big bully. . .now then, hit me!"

Leaving her leaning against the fence, I asked her where she lived. She raised her drunken head and looked at me out of two dark spots of eyes, and I saw that the bridge of her nose had fallen in; the remainder of that feature stuck up like a button; her top lip, drawn upward by a scar, exposed small teeth, her little fat face wore a repulsive smile.

"All right, come along," she said.

We started off, bumping into the fence as we went. The tail of her wet skirt flapped against my legs.

"Come along, dearie," she grunted, as if sobering up a little. "I'll take you on. . . .I'll make you comfortable. . . ."

She led me into the yard of a large, two-storied house; cautiously, like a blind woman, she felt her way among the carts, kegs, packing cases and scattered wood piles, stopped before a sort of hole in the foundation and invited me in.

Supporting myself by feeling along the sticky wall, with my other arm around the woman's waist, though I was scarcely able to hold on to her loose figure, I descended some slippery steps. I fumbled at the iron-bound, felt covered door, opened it and stood still on the threshold of a black pit, hesitating whether to go any further.

"Mamma, is that you?" a soft voice called through the gloom.

"That's me-e-e."

A smell of worm rot and tar went heavily to my head. A match spurted, the tiny flame lit up the pale face of a child for a moment, and then went out.

"And who else would come to you? It's me-e-e," said the woman, lurching against me.

Another match spurted, there was a ring of glass and a ridiculously small hand lit a tiny kerosene lamp.

"My little bit o' cheer," said the woman, and swaying, fell over in the corner, where there was a broad bed, hardly raised from the level of the brick floor.

The child watched the flame of the lamp, turning down the wick when it began to smoke. The face wore a serious expression; it had a sharp nose and full lips like a little girl's. It was a delicately drawn face and strikingly out of place in this dark, damp pit. When he had managed the light to his satisfaction, he glanced at me with shaggily-fringed eyes and asked:

"She's drunk?"

His mother was lying across the bed, snuffling and snoring.

"She ought to be undressed," I said.

"Undress her, then," he said, lowering his eyes. When I began to pull off the woman's dripping skirts, he asked in a quiet, business-like tone:

"Shall I put out the light?"

"What for?"

He said nothing. While I was busy with his mother, who was like a sack

of flour to handle, I kept watching him; he was sitting under the window in a packing-case of stout boards, marked in big block letters:

"With Care
N. R. and Co."

The sill of the square window was on a level with his shoulders. Along the wall were several rows of narrow shelves, and on them lay piles of cigarette and match boxes. Beside the box in which the boy sat stood another box covered with yellow straw—broad, and serving evidently as a table. With his comical, pitiful hands clasped at the back of his head, the little boy gazed up through the dark window-pane.

When I had undressed the woman, I threw her wet things on the stove, washed my hands at the earthenware washstand in the corner, and said as I dried them with my handkerchief:

"Well, goodbye."

He looked at me and asked, lisping a little:

"Now—shall I put out the lamp?"

"As you like."

"So you're going away—you're not going to lie down?"

He stretched out his little hand, pointing to his mother—

"With her."

"What for?" I asked stupidly, astonished.

"You know yourself," he said with terrible simplicity. Then, stretching himself, added:

"They all do."

I looked about me, embarrassed: to the right of me I saw the face of a misshapen stove, on the hearth dirty dishes, in the corner behind the box pieces of tarry rope, a heap of picked oakum, some faggots, shavings, and a yoke for buckets.

A yellow body was stretched snoring at my feet.

"May I sit with you awhile?" I asked the boy. Looking at me from under his brows, he replied:

"She won't wake up till morning, now."

"Well, I don't want her at all."

Squatting down by his box, I told him, trying to speak in a joking tone, how I had fallen in with his mother.

"She sat down in the mud and started rowing with her arms as if they were oars, and singing. . . ."

He nodded, smiling a wan smile and scratching his narrow chest.

"She's drunk, that's why. Even when she's sober she likes to play, just as if she was little."

Now I got a good look at his eyes, they were really shaggy. The lashes were astonishingly long and even the eyelids were thickly covered with hair that curled beautifully. Blue shadows lay under the eyes, emphasizing the pallor of the bloodless skin. His high forehead, with a line over the bridge of the nose, was crowned by a tousled thatch of curly reddish hair. There was an indescribable expression in his eyes—at once attentive and serene. I found it difficult to bear that gaze.

"What's the matter with your legs?"

He busied himself with the wrappings of his legs, freed a withered limb resembling a cabbage stalk, raised it with his hands and laid it on the edge of the box.

"Here is one. They've both been like that ever since I was born. They don't walk, they aren't alive—they're just like that."

"What's in those boxes?"

"My zoo," he replied, picking up his leg as if it were a stick. He thrust it down among the rags at the bottom of the box and then, with a frank, friendly smile, suggested:

"Do you want?—I'll show it to you. Sit down, comfortably. You've never seen the like of my zoo anywhere."

With deft movements of his thin, disproportionately long arms, he raised his body and began to take down the boxes from the shelf, handing them to me one by one.

"See you don't open them, or they'll run away. Put one to your ear and listen! Well?"

"There's something moving inside. . . ."

"Aha! It's a spider sitting in there, the rascal! He's called 'Drummer.' Such a sly one!"

The wonderful eyes shone with a tender liveliness; over the pinched blue face a little smile played. Moving his deft hands rapidly, he took down the boxes from the shelves and held them first to his own ear, and then to mine.

"Now here," he explained with animation, "is the cockroach Anissim, an awful bragger like a soldier. This one's a fly, an official's wife—and a lower creature never lived. Buzzes all day long, backbiting folks; she even dragged mamma by the hair. Not the fly, but the official's wife who lives behind the windows that face the street. And this is a black beetle—a whopper. A respectable fellow; he's all right only a boozer and downright shameless. When he gets tight he crawls about the yard naked, all shaggy like a black dog. This here's a cockchafer, Uncle Nicodemus, I got him in the yard. He's a pilgrim—and a crook, pretends he's begging for the church; mamma calls him 'the cheap 'un'; he's one of her customers, too. She's got as many customers as she wants, they're like flies, even if she hasn't got a nose."

"She doesn't beat you, does she?"

"Who? She? Well, what next? She can't live without me. She's a good sort after all, only—a boozer. But then, in our street, they're all boozers. She's pretty—and jolly, too. . . .Such a one for the booze, though, the tart. I tell her: stop swilling that vodka down, you fool, and you'll get rich—and she just laughs. She's only a woman, so what can you expect? But she's nice. When she's slept it off you'll see."

He smiled—such a bewitching smile that it made one want to weep, to roar all over the town, out of unbearable, scorching compassion for him. His beautiful little head swayed on his slender neck, like some strange flower, while his eyes glowed and grew more and more animated.

As I listened to his childish but appalling chatter, I forgot for a minute where I was sitting. Then suddenly, I saw again the tiny prison-like window, splashed with dirt from the outside, the gaping black stove, the heap of oakum in the corner, and on the rags by the door, the body, yellow as butter, of the woman, his mother.

"Is it a good zoo?" the boy asked with pride.

"Very."

"I've got no butterflies, though, no butterflies or moths."

"What are you called?"

"Lenka."

"You're my namesake, then."

"Am I! And what sort of a fellow are you?"

"Oh, just—as you see. Nobody in particular."

"Now, that's a lie! Everybody's somebody, I know that much. You're a good sort."

"Maybe."

"Oh, I can see. You're timid, too."

"Why am I timid?"

He gave me a sly grin and even winked at me.

"Why am I timid, though, tell me?"

"Well, you're staying here with me, that means you're afraid to go home at night."

"But it's getting light."

"Then you'll go away."

"I'll come and see you again."

He did not believe it; he hid his sweet, shaggy eyes with his long lashes and said, after a pause:

"What for?"

"To sit with you a while. You're very interesting. May I come?"

"Whenever you like. Many people come to us. . . ."

Then he sighed and said:

"You're humbugging me."

"No. I swear I'll come."

"Then—do come. To see me—not mamma, to hell with her! You'll be my pal, eh?"

"Right you are."

"Well, that's that. It doesn't matter about your being grown up; how old are you?"

"I'm going on twenty-one."

"And I'm going on twelve. I've got no pals, only Katka the water-carrier's girl, but her mother beats her for coming to see me. . . .Are you a thief?"

"No. Why should I be a thief?"

"You've got a terrible mug, thin as thin, and the same nose as thieves have. We've two thieves that come to see us, one called Sashka,—he's bad-tempered and a fool, and another, Vanichka—as good-natured as a dog. Have you any boxes?"

"Yes. I'll bring you some."

"Yes, do! I won't tell mamma you're coming."

"Why?"

"Because she's always pleased when men come the second time. How she loves men, the tart, it's awful! She's a funny girl, my mamma. Fifteen years she managed things alright, and then she went and had me and doesn't know herself how she did it! When will you come and see me?"

"Tomorrow evening."

"She'll be tipsy in the evening. What do you do, then, if you don't steal?"

"I sell Bavarian *kvass*."

"Do you really? Bring us a bottle, will you?"

"Of course I will! Well, I'm off now."

"All right, then. You'll come?"

"For certain."

He stretched out his long arms to me. I took both those hands in mine and shook the thin, chilly bones; then, without looking back at him, I staggered into the yard like a drunken man.

Day was breaking; over the damp pile of tumble-down buildings, the morning star was wavering and fading. Out of the dirty pit under the wall of the house, the panes of the cellar-window looked out at me with square eyes, dirty and filmed over like the eyes of a drunken woman. In the cart by the gate, a redfaced muzhik lay fast asleep, his enormous bare feet wide apart. His thick, coarse beard was thrust up towards the sky; white teeth gleamed through it, and it seemed as if he was lying there and with closed eyes laughing—a deadly, sardonic laugh. An old dog came up to me. It had a bald spot on its back where it had evidently been scalded with boiling water. It sniffed at my leg and gave a soft, hungry whine that filled my heart with useless pity.

In the street puddles, where the mud had settled during the night, the morning sky, blue-and-rose, was reflected, and the reflections lent the dirty pools an odious, unnecessary, soul-destroying beauty.

Next day I asked the children in our street to catch may-bugs and butterflies for me, bought some pretty boxes at the chemist's, and taking these and two bottles of kvass, some gingerbreads, sweets and buns with me, set off for Lenka's.

He accepted my gifts with the greatest astonishment, opening his lovely eyes very wide—in the daylight, they were still more wonderful.

"Whe-ew!" he exclaimed, in a low, unchildish voice. "What a lot of things you've brought! You must be well off! But then, you're badly dressed and you say you're not a thief? Look at these boxes! Whew! It's a pity even to touch them, my hands aren't washed. Who's this in here? O-oh, a whopping great cockchafer! He's just like copper, he's green even—oh, you devil! . . . But they'll run away or fly away, won't they? Well, that's—"

He suddenly called out gaily:

"Mom! Get down and wash my hands for me. You should see what he's brought me, old hen. It's last night's man, the fellow that dragged you home like a policeman—he's brought it all! He's called Lenka, too. . . ."

"You oughter say 'Thank you' to him," I heard a strange, low voice behind me.

The boy nodded his head several times.

"Thank you, thank you."

A thick cloud of hairy dust vibrated in the cellar, and through it I made out with difficulty the tousled head of the woman sitting on the stove-shelf, her disfigured features, the gleam of her teeth, exposed in an involuntary, indelible smile.

"How do you do?"

"How do you do?" the woman repeated. Her nasal tones were not loud; they sounded cheerful, almost gay. She looked at me with her eyes screwed up: there seemed to be something almost derisive in the glance.

Lenka had forgotten me and was munching a gingerbread, and uttering little inarticulate sounds of delight as he carefully opened the boxes. His eyelashes shadowed his cheek, deepening the blue rings under his eyes. Through the dirty window-pane the sun shone, dim, like the face of an old man. A soft light fell on the boy's reddish hair, his shirt was open and I could discern the heart beating beneath the fine bones, raising the skin and the scarcely marked nipple.

His mother clambered down from the stove, moistened a towel under the tap and, going up to Lenka, picked up his left hand.

"It's runned away, stop it, it's runned away!" he cried out. He twisted about in the box and flung out the odorous rags under him, exposing his blue, motionless legs. The woman laughed as she hunted among the rags and cried out: "Stop! There he goes!"

When she caught the cockchafer, she laid him on the palm of her hand, looked at him with her cheerful, cornflower-blue eyes and said to me in the tone of an old acquaintance:

"There's plenty like that!"

"Don't squash him," her son warned sternly. "Once, when she was tight, she flopped down on my zoo and didn't she squash a lot of 'em!"

"Forget about it now, my one bit of cheer."

"How many I had to bury!"

"I went and catched some for you afterwards."

"Catched them, you did! Them was trained ones you squashed, silly-sally-out-th'-alley! Them that dies I bury under the stove. I creep out and bury them, it's my cemetery. . . . You know, I had a spider, Minka, he was just like one of mamma's fellers, one of them she had before—who's in prison, a fat jolly chap. . . ."

"Ah, my little bit o' cheer," said the woman, stroking her son's curls with a dark, small, blunt fingered hand. Then, nudging me with her elbow, she asked with smiling eyes:

"Is it a nice son I've got? Look at his eyes, eh?"

"You can take one of my eyes, and give me back my legs," Lenka suggested, chuckling as he examined the cockchafer. "Look at this feller! Made of iron! Fat, too. Mamma, he looks just like that monk you made the ladder for, remember?"

" 'Course I does!"

Laughing, she told me the story.

"It was a monk, see, a great, strapping feller, dropped in on us once and he up and asks me, he says: 'Could you,' he says, 'being a oakum picker, make me a ladder out of ropes?' And I—I never heard tell of such ladders in my life. 'No,' says I, 'I couldn't do it.' 'Well,' he says, 'I'll show you how.' He threw his cassock open and his whole belly had rope—not very thick—twisted round it. Long rope it was and strong. He learned me how to do it. And when I was plaiting and plaiting away at it, thinks I to myself, 'Now what can he want it for? Is he thinking of robbing a church, maybe?' "

She burst out laughing, putting her arms around her son's shoulders and still stroking him.

"Oh, they're gay sparks! He came round at the proper time, and I up and says to him: 'Now tell me, if this here's to help you to rob, I ain't agreeable!' Then he gives a sly kind o' snigger and says: 'No,' says he, 'this is to help me over the wall; our wall's a big high one and we're sinful mortals, and sin lives on the other side of the wall, if you know what I mean.' Well, I knowed what he means all right; he wanted the ladder so as he could climb over the wall to the girls, at night. We had a good laugh, me and him, we just roared laughing. . . ."

"Yes, you're fond of roaring laughing, you are," said the little boy in the tone of an elder. "You'd do better to put on the samovar."

"We ain't got no sugar."

"Go an' buy some."

"No money."

"Whew, you, you drink every penny. Get some from him."

He turned to me:

"Have you got any money?"

I gave the woman money. She got to her feet at once, took down from the stove a dirty, little, battered samovar and disappeared through the door, singing through her nose.

"Mamma!" her son called after her. "Clean the window for me, I can't see a thing. A smart hussy, I can tell you!" he continued, neatly arranging the boxes of insects on the shelves which were made of cardboard and hung on nails driven into the crevices of the damp walls. "What a worker. . . . when she starts picking tow she kicks up a dust that would choke you! 'Mamma,' I shouts, 'carry me out in the yard, else I'll choke!' And she says: 'Have patience,' she says, 'I'd be lonesome without you.' She's fond of me, that's all. Goes picking away and singing—she knows about a thousand songs."

Animated now and with his thick brows raised over his wonderful sparkling eyes, he sang in a husky, alto:

"Now Orina lies on the feather bed. . . ." After listening for a while, I remarked:

"That's a very dirty song."

"They're all like that," Lenka explained with perfect assurance. Suddenly he gave a start. "Oh, the music's come! Lift me up quick."

I lifted the light bones encased in the sack of thin gray skin and he thrust his head greedily out of the open window and became quite still, except for the withered legs that dangled helplessly, scraping the wall. In the yard a barrel-organ was screeching irascibly, flinging out a ragged melody. A boy with a deep voice shouted lustily, a dog howled an accompaniment. Lenka listened to this music and hummed softly through his teeth, trying to catch the tune.

The dust in the cellar settled, the place became lighter. Over the mother's bed hung a cheap clock, with a pendulum the size of a large copper coin that swung haltingly to and fro on the grey wall. The cups and saucers on the hearth were unwashed, a thick layer of dust lay over everything, particularly in the corners, where cobwebs hung like dirty rags. Lenka's dwelling reminded one of a rubbish heap; the hyper-ugliness of beggary, mercilessly insulting, assailed the eye in every foot of that pit.

The samovar was singing mournfully; it seemed to have startled the barrel-organ which became suddenly silent. A hoarse voice bawled:

"R-ragamuffins!"

"Lift me down," said Lenka, sighing. "They've driven him away."

I sat him down in the box. He grimaced, rubbed his chest with his hands, coughing cautiously.

My chest hurts. It doesn't do for me to breathe real air for long. Listen, have you ever seen devils?"

"No."

"I haven't either. I always look in the bottom of the stove at night to see if they'll come out. But they never do. There are supposed to be devils in cemeteries, aren't there?"

"What do you want with them?"

"It'd be interesting. Suppose one of them turned out to be kind. Katka, the water-carrier's girl saw one in the cellar and didn't she get a fright! But I'm not afraid of awful things."

Wrapping his legs in the rags, he continued brightly:

"I like even horrible dreams, for instance. Once I seen a tree growing upside down, the leaves on the ground and the roots stretching up to the sky.

I got a sweat all over and woke up terrified. Another time I saw mamma: she was lying down naked and a dog was eating her belly; it'd take a bite and then spit it out, and take another bite and spit that out. Another time our house shakes itself, all of a sudden, and goes off down, the street with the doors and windows banging, and the official's wife's cat running after it."

He moved his sharp shoulders as if chilly, picked up a sweet, unwrapped the colored paper, and, smoothing it out carefully, laid it on the windowsill.

"I'll make all sorts of things out of these papers, I'll make nice things. Or maybe I'll give them to Katka. She's fond of nice things, too: bits of glass, bits of broken crockery, paper and all that. I say: if you were to feed and feed a cockroach, he would grow big as a horse, wouldn't he?"

It was evident that he believed this firmly, so I replied:

"Yes, if you were to feed it very well, it would grow just as big."

"Yes, of course!" he exclaimed, delightedly. "And mamma, the silly, just laughs at it." Here he added an obscene word only employed as an insult to women.

"She's a stupid thing. A cat, for instance, you could feed up even sooner, till it was as big as a horse, couldn't you?"

"Well, why not. Of course."

"Pity I've no food for them! It'd be grand!"

He even shook, he was so wrought up and tense, as he sat with his hand pressed hard to his chest.

"There'd be flies the size of a dog flying about! And you could use a cockroach to carry bricks if he was as big as a horse. Isn't that true?"

"Only they've got whiskers."

"Oh, the whiskers wouldn't be in the way; they'd do for reins, the whiskers. Or say—a spider crawling—a monster-like—who? A spider shouldn't be no bigger than a kitten, else—it would frighten you. Pity I've no legs or else —what I'd do! I'd work and feed my whole zoo well. I'd do a bit o' trading and then I'd buy mamma a house way out in the open fields. Have you ever been out in the open fields?"

"Yes, of course I have."

"Tell us what it's like, will you?"

I began to tell him about the fields and meadows. He listened attentively without interrupting me. The lashes drooped over his eyes and his mouth opened slowly as if he were falling into a doze. Observing this, I lowered my voice. Then his mother appeared with the boiling samovar in her hands. A paper stuck out from under her arm, a bottle of vodka from her bosom.

"This is me!"

"That's nice!" sighed the boy, opening his eyes wide. "Nothing but grass and flowers. Mamma, what you oughter do is find a wheelbarrow and wheel me to the fields. Else I'll peg out without ever seeing them. You're a lazy slut, mamma, really!" he concluded in an offended, dejected tone.

"Don't you get swearing now, you oughtn't to swear. You're only little, still," she advised him tenderly.

"It's all right to say don't swear! You can go where you like, same as a dog. You're lucky. . . . Listen," he turned to me again, "was it God made the fields?"

"Very likely."

"What for?"

"So people would have a place to walk about in."

"The open fields!" said the boy with a wistful smile and a sigh. "I'd take

my zoo out there and let them all out to play, my animals! But I say, listen, where are gods made—in God's almshouses?"

At this his mother uttered a screech and rocked with laughter. She flung herself down on her back on the bed, kicking her legs, and shouted:

"Oh, God save us! . . . Oh, Lord! Oh, my little bit o' cheer. Gods are made by painters, didn't you know? Land's sakes, you're a funny kid, to be sure!"

Lenka looked at her with a smile and uttered a stream of obscenities in a tender tone.

"She cackles same as if she was a kid. How she does love a good laugh!"

He repeated the curses.

"Let her laugh," I said. "It doesn't hurt you."

"No, it don't," he agreed. "I only get mad with her when she don't clean my winder; I beg and pray, her—'clean the winder, I can't see anything,' and she keeps forgetting."

The woman laughed as she washed the tea-things, winked a bright blue eye at me and said:

"Ain't he a nice little bit o'cheer, now? If it weren't for him, I'd have drowned myself long ago, by God I would! I'd have strangled myself."

She was smiling as she said this.

Suddenly Lenka asked me:

"Are you a fool?"

"I don't know. Why?"

"Mamma says you are."

"Yes, but look here, this is what I meant," cried the woman, not in the least embarrassed. "You drag a drunken woman in from the street, and put her to bed and then walk out. Now, what do you make of that! I never meant anything bad when I said it. And now you go and tell tales on me, ooh—you're a nice one!"

She spoke like a child herself. The general form of her speech reminded one of a very young girl's. And her eyes were pure and childlike, making the noseless face, with its raised upper lip and bared teeth seem more hideous than ever. She bore a perpetual, nightmarish grin, a kind of cheerful sneer.

"Well, now let's have tea," she suggested solemnly.

The samovar stood on the box beside Lenka. A mischievous curl of steam, escaping from under the battered lid, touched his shoulder. He held his hand under it and when the palm became moist with steam, wiped it on his hair; his eyes were half-closed, dreamily.

"I'll grow up big," he said, "and mamma will get me a little cart and I'll crawl about the streets, and beg my way. When I've made enough, I'll crawl out to the open fields!"

"Heigho-ho," his mother sighed. Then she laughed softly. "To him the fields are Paradise, my dear. And what are they? Only camps with tough soldiers and soused muzhiks."

"It's all lies!" Lenka interrupted, frowning. "Ask him what it's like, he's seen real fields."

"And haven't I seen them?"

"When you was tight!"

They began to argue like children, just as hotly and illogically while the warm evening descended over the yard, and in the reddening sky a dense, blue-grey cloud hung motionless. It was growing dark in the cellar.

The boy drank a mug of tea. It made him perspire. He looked first at me and then at his mother and said:

"I've eaten my fill and drunk my fill, and now I think I want to sleep, by Crikey."

"Go to sleep then," his mother advised him.

"But he'll go away!—You'll go away?"

"Don't be afraid, I shan't let him go," the woman declared, giving me a nudge with her knee.

"Don't go," Lenka begged. He closed his eyes, and, stretching himself luxuriously, rolled over in the box. Suddenly he lifted his head and said to his mother reproachfully:

"You'd do well to marry him. You'd be a married woman then, like the others, instead of running around with bums. . . They only thrash you . . . . and he's a good sort."

"Go to sleep, that's what you've got to do," said the woman softly, bending over a saucer of tea.

"He's well-off."

For about a minute the woman sat silent, drinking her tea with clumsy lips. Then she confided, as if I had been an old acquaintance:

"So this is the way we live—very quiet-like, only me and him, nobody else. They talk about me in the yard; they call me a dirty street-woman! Well, I don't care. There's nobody can shame me. The more so since my looks is spoilt, see? Anybody can see at once all I'm fit for. Yes. He's fallen asleep, my little son, my little bit o' cheer. Isn't he a nice child?"

"Yes, very."

"I never get tired o' looking at him. He's clever, isn't he?"

"Yes, a wise fellow."

"That's it. His father was a gentleman, an old man; one of those—what-d'you-call-'em? They have offices and write papers—now, what's the name of it?"

"A notary?"

"Yes, that's it! He was a nice old man . . . . kind, too. He was fond of me. I was a housemaid there."

She covered her boy's bare legs with the rags, smoothed the dark pillow under his head and began to talk again in the same easy tone.

"All of a sudden—he up and died. It was at night, and I'd just left him when he comes right down on the floor with such a bang!—and that was the end of him! You sell kvass, do you?"

"Yes."

"On your own?"

"No, for my master."

She moved nearer to me and said:

"You needn't be squeamish about me now, young feller. I'm not infectious now, you can ask anyone you like in the street, they all know me."

"I'm not being squeamish."

Laying her small, rough hand with its broken nails on my knee, she went on gently:

"I'm very grateful to you about Lenka, it's been a regular holiday for him today. You did it all lovely."

"I've got to be going now," I said.

"Where?" she asked in astonishment.

"I've got some business to attend to."

"Stay!"

"I can't . . . ."

She looked at her son, then at the sky through the window and said in a low voice:

"Stay if you like. I'll cover my mug with my shawl . . . . I'd like to thank you for what you've done for my boy. If I was to cover my face now, eh?"

There was something irresistibly human in the way she spoke, she was so kind, so full of good feeling. And her eyes—those childlike eyes in the hideous countenance—smiled; it was not the smile of a beggar but of a rich person who possesses adequate means of showing gratitude.

"Mamma," cried the boy starting out of his sleep suddenly. "They're creeping in. Mamma—come quick—"

"He's dreaming," she said to me as she bent over her son.

I went out into the yard and stood there in a reverie. Through the open window of the cellar a nasal song floated out gaily into the yard. The mother was lulling her son, pronouncing quite distinctly the oddest words:

"Bawdy-face is here again,
Brings misfortune in his train;
Brings misfortune in his train;
Tears my heart to shreds again!
Woe is me, oh, woe is me!
Where's my hiding place to be?"

I walked quickly out of the yard, grinding my teeth to prevent myself bursting into tears.

Translated by Anthony Wixley

Georgi Storm

A Reminiscence of Maxim Gorky

A bird's feeding trough was fastened on to a branch of a pine tree outside the window. Alexei Maximovich frequently looked out; a bird could be seen perched on the swaying trough against a background of blue sea. Birds chirped and trilled and whistled around the house and their genial host laughingly remarked, "They don't eat bread for nothing."

He spent morning, afternoon and evening working. In his daily timetable he did not provide a moment for rest.

That is how he lived in his retreat at Tessel in the Crimea, where, avoiding the rains and fogs of Moscow, he spent the last months of his life; and that is how he lived at the little village of Gorki [1] on one of the high banks of the river Moskva.

In the Crimea he finished *Klim Samgin*. The creative process continued without a break in all that he did there, whether it was his after-dinner stroll or his hour's reading before going to bed.

He and I, alone, cleared the park below the house.

Alexei Maximovich, superintending operations, pointed out where to remove the overgrowth of tanglewood and where to burn the blackthorn.

"It must not be imagined we are merely amusing ourselves," he said. "This is a very important business." And at times it seemed to me that this relentless attack on the land with its bristling growth of shrubbery was another expression of the primordial struggle with the "weeds" of culture which he waged all his life.

The hours he spent in the park greatly fatigued him, but there was only one thing he complained of: "I used to walk on my own legs," he used to say, bitterly, "but now I have to ride in that confounded samovar," which was his nickname for the blue "Ford" that brought him up the hill.

The house faced the sea; the front was covered with bunches of mauve wistaria; large dragon flies with iron grey wings alighted on the flowers with a sleepy, humming sound.

There was a view of the old, much neglected park from the high terrace; out of the hollows hovered the blue smoke of Gorky's blackthorn bonfires.

Steamships might have been driven by their heat. Some bonfires lasted two and some even three days. They went out in one place only to light up somewhere else.

We had tea at five. Alexei Maximovich, returning from the park, went up to the window and said with satisfaction: "We've made a good lot of smoke," and then in his deep bass called in a bantering tone: "Tea-ea!" But even at table he did not give himself time to rest.

He had an inexhaustible memory and never tired of recounting reminiscences of his unique life; nor ever tired his hearers, for he told his stories with incomparable art.

Stories of his years in Italy were particularly full of color. Like everything experienced by Gorky, they had formed part of his character, and in their telling, they showed us the living man.

He told how at Capri the fishermen caught a shark, killed it, cut out the heart and placed it on the sun heated shingle. For half an hour the shark's

[1] The name of this village which is close to Moscow has no connection with the author's name but means in Russian, The Hillocks (Translator's note).

heart, its color changing from a bright red to a lilac blue, continued to live on the hot stones. "Like this . . . ." said Alexei Maximovich, clenching and unclenching his huge, blue veined fist.

At that moment I saw Gorky before me as a living symbol of the human mind prepared to test everything. I could see him there on the seashore avidly watching that pulsating lump of matter, so terrible and significant in its isolation from the organism of which, a moment before, it had formed a part.

He spoke of the art treasures left to posterity by the old Italian masters; of the competitions between street singers and composers; of the children of the poor at Naples. He spoke of the strange fauna of the Mediterranean, and a fire seemed to light in his eyes as he described the iridescent ktenophora, appearing on the water like a greenish blue ribbon of light.

He told reminiscences of an eccentric villa owner at Sorrento, and he laughed till his eyes teared when he told stories about the great actor and dramatist Scarpetti, who, having offended d'Annunzio in one of his plays, was brought to court by the latter. When the trial was over, Scarpetti wrote and produced a gleeful and malicious play based on the court scene and the conduct of the conceited plaintiff.

Alexei spoke glowingly about the Italian people, about their great simplicity of mind, and their improvidence. "They're fine people," he said, "but there have been sad changes lately; fascism has strangled everything."

He could not endure silence, and whenever conversation showed signs of flagging, Alexei Maximovich would take a pull at his cigarette and begin a story. It was in this way that the story of the mad postmaster and the devil was told. Gorky later wrote it down and it was included in his manuscript journal, *The Sorrento Pravda.* I give here the version he told me.

One winter's evening, the postmaster was walking through the town, when his foot struck some frozen, living creature in the snow on the pavement. On being questioned by the postmaster, it introduced itself as the devil. The official took the homeless demon in and housed it in a cupboard among a pile of maps. He was frequently heard talking with his strange guest. His neighbors, at first astonished at this association, in time became accustomed to it. Eventually the postmaster came in for an inheritance and went to Switzerland. From here he soon informed the governor that his friend, the devil, had been left behind. He had been refused a passport to go abroad. The governor took this as containing a political innuendo, in fact as nothing less than an insult to the government and he instituted police proceedings over the offending letter.

He also told fascinating stories about Nizhni Novgorod. One was about a young Tatar in the Nizhni Novgorod prison, a gifted young man whom Gorky took it into his head to release. The means was to be baptism—the prisoner must be converted to Christianity. Alexei Maximovich proceeded to the bishop to declare his intention of becoming the man's godfather. He appeared in the bishop's antechamber with creaking boots, an open shirt and his coat unbuttoned. He had a long time to wait. The door of the bishop's study opened several times, disclosing the bishop's appalled face. Each time he looked at Gorky, he crossed himself, sighed, exclaimed, "Lord deliver us," and shut the door again. At length the visitor gained an entrance. The bishop after hearing Gorky out, answered in a bored voice: "What do you want to baptize him for? You're Peshkov, [1] you do not believe in God and have been in prison, and button your coat, will you, button your coat!"

[1] Peshkov was Gorky's real name.

And so Alexei Maximovich did not succeed in baptizing the Tatar.

Gorky used to tell a story about a certain Nizhni Novgorod landowner whose solution for his peasant women giving birth to weak and unhealthy children was to introduce a regiment of dragoons on to his estate, supposing that, as a result, the women would start bringing forth healthy offsprings.

He had much to say about the magnificent handicraft workers of the former Nizhni Novgorod *gubernia* and about one village engaged entirely in the production of cossack knouts. In the village, Gorky wrote an anti-government song. I can only remember a few lines which he read with an intonation I shall never forget.

On the village mainstreet broad,
A table stands of oaken board.
A table stands of oaken board,
At which a young clerk makes record,
Of half a hamlet's mutiny.
For the emperor's decree,
And the emperor's decree,
Is right and ever right shall be.

In the last part there was something about a dog of the tsar's but what was the function performed by the dog in the poem I cannot remember.

Gorky's mind was able to fix the beauty and ugliness of life in its most typical manifestations, in whatever part of the world he found himself.

He spoke with enthusiasm of the cheery young Red Indian chauffeur who drove him round New York. On leaving America, Alexei Maximovich wanted to show his gratitude and gave the Indian a cigarette case, but the young man was indignant and remarked with great justice, "But aren't we equals? I don't give you any presents!"

Another American reminiscence was about a certain Italian artist who sold a sculpture to a New York museum. Later he learned that his work had been declared immoral, and had been relegated to the museum cellar. The sculptor offered to return the money and demanded back his sculpture. This refused, he went to law; and appealed to the consulate to intervene; but all in vain. The pharisees had paid for a work of art and had thereby acquired the right of not exhibiting it.

Whatever his subject, Gorky managed to find the fewest words that would exactly express his meaning; and these words remained in one's memory. I can remember the exact words he used to describe a girl he had seen in London, who earned her living singing in the streets.

"You should have seen her face," he said, half closing his eyes, stretching his arms before him on the table and leaning back, his full length, against the back of his chair. "Beautiful! . . . and evidently one who had seen much in her time. And how she hated all the people who threw money down to her and all the houses and courtyards and all the towns in the world."

Alexei Maximovich had a phenomenal memory. He was most impatient when anything eluded him for a moment and on such occasions, his hand, in front of him, strumming nervously on the table, he would always turn to the people who were with him, saying, "You know the thing, what's it called?" and one became quite embarrassed, so painful was his desire to remember. But he nearly always won in the end, and after his effort, summoned up out of memory the geographical name, the surname or christian name that he had forgotten.

But he did not trust solely to his memory and wrote down, in the most careful fashion, the songs and tales he heard from simple people. He also noted down picturesque turns of speech; and even kept a record of curious names.

He was fond of music and had a discriminating taste. Not long before his death, he told me about the first time music made a deep impression on him.

"It was in my very young days," he said. "I heard a song which went:

The day's last glimmering sheds
O'er the waters its purple display
The diaphanous night shadow spreads . . . .

"The diaphanous. . . . night shadow . . . spreads," he repeated pensively, dwelling on each word and beating out the rhythm with bent fingers, "hm . . . . yes."

His ever young brain wrestled with old age and illness; but illness and age attacked his mind and at times had the upper hand.

One day at Tessel—it was in mid-April 1936—he left his house during the hour before dinner, an hour during which he usually worked. His eyes had begun to hurt him.

I was asked to look for Alexei Maximovich in the park. When he saw me coming he said. "What? Caught somone idling?" He seemed to be apologizing for the fact that he had become tired.

A little later I saw him out of the window. He was standing in front of an oval garden pool with his hands in the pockets of an old black coat and was looking up at the top of a huge white poplar. From the top down almost to the roots, the leaves were all rustling. I looked at my watch. Ten minutes, fifteen minutes passed. Alexei Maximovich continued standing where he was, without altering his position. What was he thinking about? Perhaps the thought he was intent on had nothing to do with the poplar. Half an hour passed thus.

At dinner he complained of a headache. We asked him whether his ear was burning (a sign of fever with him). We said: "You are just a little overtired." "I don't know, indeed," he answered morosely. No one doubted but that the next day his fatigue would disappear and that he would recover his strength and freshness.

That day his usual portion of oxygen was increased.

In the evening he listened wearily to the wireless. The news bulletin was drowned in a roar of static. The European stations were deliberately interrupting the Moscow transmission.

At last the signal was given: "Alexei Maximovich, it's twelve o'clock." "I'm coming, I'm coming," he said angrily, and rising with difficulty went to the door and stopped for a moment to listen to what was going on outside the window.

The day had come to an end.

Quite close to the house an owl was screeching. Tree stumps were burning in the park. A frog chorus was performing in the pond; a cypress was swaying in the wind on its triple stem.

He hated death, illness, war . . . . everything that prevented people from living and working. In them he saw imperfection and unreason—what man must in the future overcome.

Once he asked the noted physician, A. D. Speransky, the question: "Will medicine ever succeed in overcoming death?" Speransky answered: "The term

of human life will be extended, but for all that men will not stop dying."

"Do you really mean that seriously?" said Alexei Maximovich with a mischievous smile. "Then what is the good of all your science?"

But there was a note of sadness in his voicing of these last words.

To realize all one's plans, to finish all one has begun, to quench one's driving thirst for knowledge—one life is too short. And Gorky did everything he could to economize his working hours: he even had a habit of shaving at night so as not to waste precious minutes in the morning.

He was strict and exacting toward himself, to a degree that impressed all who knew him. Although he was one of the best read writers in the world, he sometimes said, "How little one knows and it is all so unorganized, so haphazard."

But he was also strict and exacting toward others.

If a writer was guilty of an inaccuracy, Gorky immediately reproved him and if there were many inaccuracies, he became irritated, frowned and said: "It's a bad business! They don't want to learn, the devil take them."

But then how pleased he was to "discover" among the masses of young workers a gifted author. And he made more than a few such "discoveries." To find them, indeed, was his chief concern, for as he used to say, "Proletarians in the past were the manual laborers of culture; now they are becoming its masters."

Gorky's attitude to folklore and his views of the origin of various abstract conceptions in language are of great interest.

The traditional devil with horns, hoofs, and tail claimed the attention of many Russian writers but it "led them by the nose." Gorky, passing this "problem" off as a joke, nevertheless enriched it with a serious and original contribution.

The story of the postmaster and the devil is one example, but there were many others. We must here mention another.

In Gorki village, a bat was caught and put into a glass jar covered with muslin. The little creature, its long ears looking like horns, spread out its transparent, ashy wings and flapped about inside, trying to gain a purchase, with its suckers and nails, on the glass walls of the jar.

"A devil," said Alexei Maximovich, contemplating the bat, "a real devil. None other exists . . . ." The classical devil of country superstition must have been created in the image of the bat, he declared. In this he was expressing one of his firmest convictions, that a concrete material reality lies at the basis of every abstract conception, symbol or myth. This, in his opinion, must be taken as the starting point in studies of legends and folklore. "The sky was likened to a bowl after bowls had been made on earth," he wrote in his article, "On Formalism." Most of the fairy tales of magic carpets, of "living" and "dead" water, and so forth, he regarded as "originating in a belief in the all-compelling power of labor."

What people did he not meet in the course of his life! A substantial book will, in time, no doubt be written about these meetings. In it a special place will be taken by the pages about Lenin. Alexei Maximovich frequently spoke about Vladimir Ilyich and always with the greatest affection. Once, speaking about Lenin, he became pensive and looking straight in front of him said, with half-closed eyes, not addressing anyone in particular: "A brilliant genius!"

His face became transfigured whenever he mentioned the name "Stalin." His voice was full of reverance and affection when he said, "Our senior comrade—Joseph Vissarionovich—does not sleep on our account."

While he had a profound knowledge of the past history of his native land

and directed all his energies towards its future, he kept in close contact with its contemporary life. At parades or demonstrations, he took delight, like a child, in the spectacle of the growing strength of the country. On such occasions, neither illness nor bad weather could keep him home. When he was asked, "Alexei Maximovich, will you be at the parade?" he answered, "Of course, how could I miss it?"

How eager his response to everything! How proud he was of our airmen, our Stakhanovites, scientists, polar explorers, heroes on the frontiers! Following closely the reorganization of transport he asked, each day, "What was the figure for freight traffic today?"; and on hearing that the previous day's record had been broken, he would exclaim joyously, "Has it really? How splendid!"

In June, 1933, I asked Alexei Maximovich whether he did not think of trying to give up smoking. "In about three years' time," he answered, "I shall be able to give it up, in fact give everything up." And unhappily his prophecy came true. But how unwilling he was to give up life! A non-Party Bolshevik, "chief-engineer of souls" on the building site of the new world, he passionately desired to see this bright world complete in all its splendor.

On the 3rd of June, 1936, the writer of these lines saw Alexei Maximovich Gorky for the last time.

"Man is an organ for cognition of the world," he said as he bade me farewell. "You must never forget that." I asked, "Do you not think that the earth is the only planet inhabited by rational beings?" He looked at me in astonishment and answered, "I admit that that is my secret and profound conviction. That is to say, without any grounds whatsoever," he added hastily. "I just assume it is so: perhaps, in the future, life will spread beyond the earth; everything will proceed from here."

Then he discussed his literary plans, books to be published in the immediate future. He spoke of a collection of folk legends about "Faust," a volume of selected "intelligent" fairy tales, a history of the intelligentsia, of serfdom, a history of towns.

One thing he was concerned about was the production, as soon as possible, of serious books on the history of the peasantry. He would often say, "The hard struggle of the peasant masses of the many different peoples of our Union must be shown, from the first days of their enslavement, to the October Revolution which liberated them for all time."

Once when the conversation turned on the mass sterilization introduced by Hitler in Germany, Alexei Maximovich remarked angrily: "He'll pay for it."

The war menace and question of the defense of culture against fascism occupied his mind during his last days and hours.

When in the evening, a disturbing piece of news was announced over the radio, he frowned, tapped with his fingers on the table and said. "So there's to be war . . . . All the same . . . ." and a minute later, pointing to the dial, "See whether there isn't any cheerful music?" He did not allow either himself or others to be despondent.

A magnificent organ for cognition of the world, a mighty incarnation of human vigor, a tireless hoarder of the gold reserve of culture, gathering it into the storehouses of Socialism.

Translated by N. Goold-Verschoyle

First Meeting With Gorky

Twenty years ago, while still at a very tender age, I was walking through the streets of St. Petersburg with a false document in my pocket and—although it was a cold winter's day—coatless. I had a coat with me, it is true, but I did not wear it from considerations of principle, chiefly of a Tolstoyan kind. My possessions at that time amounted to a few stories which were as short as they were risqueé. I hawked these stories from editor to editor. They did not read them, of course, but if by chance anyone happened to glance at them the effect was most unexpected. The editor of one magazine gave the porter a ruble for me. Another editor consented to hear me and having heard me said of my MS that it was utter rubbish but that his brother-in-law owned a flower shop and that I might have a job there behind the counter. I refused and it became evident to me that the only thing to do was to go to Gorky.

At that time an international magazine called *Letopis (The Chronicle)*[1] was published in St. Petersburg and in the first few months of its existence it succeeded in becoming our best monthly. It was edited by Gorky. I went to see him in the Bolshaya Manezhnaya. I was brought into the reception room. My heart thumped and stood still. In the reception room there was a most unusual collection of people of every sort one could imagine—society ladies and so-called "barefoots," Japanese revolutionaries, telegraphers and Doukhobors.

The reception was to begin at six o'clock. At the stroke of six Gorky came in. I was struck by his height, his gaunt figure, the strength and size of his huge frame, the blue glint of his small steady eyes and his foreign made suit which fitted somewhat baggily but well. As I have said, the door opened at exactly six o'clock. All his life he retained this punctuality—a virtue possessed by the self-confident.

The visitors in the drawing room could be divided into two camps—those who brought MSS with them and those who were waiting for a verdict.

Gorky went up to the latter group. His gait was light and noiseless, one might say even courtly, and he held manuscripts in his hand. On some of them there was more written in his hand than in that of the author. He spoke with each of them for some time in a tone of great concentration and listened to what they had to say with all-absorbing and eager attention. He expressed his opinion frankly and bluntly, choosing words whose strength we realized much later, some years and even decades later, when these words, after completing their long and inevitable journey in our minds, became a rule and a guiding influence in our lives.

When he had finished with the authors whom he knew already Gorky came up to us and began to collect our MSS. He glanced at me in passing. In those days I was a chubby, rosy, half-boiled mixture between a Tolstoyan and a Social-Democrat, did not wear a coat, but had a pair of glasses wound round with waxed thread.

This was on Thursday. Gorky looked at my manuscript and said:

"Come for an answer on Friday."

At that time these words seemed hardly believable. In editors' desks manuscripts usually lay for several months and often for ever.

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[1] In its politics was for the defeat of tsarist imperialism in the World War.

I came back on Friday and found a new lot of people among whom, as on the first occasion, there were Doukhobors and princesses, workers and monks. On coming into the room Gorky looked at me again with the same fleeting glance as before but left me to the last. When we were alone, Maxim Gorky and I, who had recently tumbled from another planet, from our own Marseilles (I do not know whether it is necessary to explain that I mean Odessa), Gorky escorted me into his office. The words which he then spoke to me decided my life.

"There are small nails," he said to me, "and large nails, like this finger of mine," and he lifted up in front of my eyes a long, powerful and delicately moulded finger. "The path of a writer, my lad, is studded with nails, mostly large ones. And you have to walk over them with bare feet. They will bleed all right and each year they will bleed more profusely. If you are a weak character people will buy you and sell you, will pull against you and will administer soporifics and you, my lad, will wither however much you pretend to be a tree in bloom. For an honest man, an honest man of letters and a revolutionary it is a great honor to tread this path, and I wish you well in your very difficult undertaking."

As may be well imagined there have been no more important hours in my life than those spent in the editorial rooms of *Letopis*. On leaving it I became completely unaware of the physical presence of my body. In a black burning frost of thirty degrees below zero I hurried in a delirious state through the magnificent wide corridors of the city, open to the dark distant sky, and only came to my senses when I had passed the Black River and the New Village.

Half the night passed and it was only then that I returned in the direction of St. Petersburg again to the lodging which I had been let the day before by an engineer's wife, a young and inexperienced woman. Her husband on arriving home from work and inspecting my young and enigmatic person had ordered that all coats and galoshes were to be removed from the entrance passage and that the door leading from my rooms into the dining rooms was to be locked.

And so I returned to my room. Behind the wall there was the entrance passage, deprived of the coats and galoshes that properly belonged to it. A great joy was seething and pouring through my whole being, demanding an outlet. I had no choice: I stood in the passage, smiled at something, and then quite to my own surprise I opened the door into the dining room. The engineer and his wife were drinking tea. Seeing me at that late hour they went pale. Their foreheads went especially white.

"So that's the game," thought the engineer and prepared to sell his life dearly. I took two steps towards him and confessed that Maxim Gorky had promised to print my stories.

The engineer, realizing that he had made a mistake in taking a madman for a thief, went a still more deathly white.

"I shall now read you all my stories," I said, sitting down and drawing towards me a glass of tea that had not been poured out for me, "the stories that he has promised to print."

Spareness of plot competed in my stories with want of decency. Some of them, luckily for well meaning people, never saw the light of day. Of those that were printed some, torn out of the magazine, served as grounds for legal proceedings against me under two paragraphs of the tsarist law simultaneously—for attempting to overthrow the existing regime and for pornography. The case was to come up for trial in March 1917, but the people, who were

on my side, rebelled at the end of February, burnt the prosecuting documents and with them the building of the regional court itself.

Alexei Maximovich then lived on the Kronwerk Prospect. I brought him everything I wrote and I wrote at the rate of a story a day (I had later to abandon this program only to fall into the opposite extreme). Gorky read everything and refused everything, but insisted on my going on. Eventually we both became tired and he said to me in his rather hollow bass:

"Apparently, sir, you have no grasp of things but there is much of which you have an inkling. Go among men."

The next morning I woke up as the correspondent of a newspaper that had not yet been brought into existence, with an advance of two hundred rubles in my pocket. The newspaper never made its appearance but the advance came in handy. My commission lasted seven years and many were the roads that I traversed and many the fights that I witnessed. After seven years I was demobilized and made a second attempt to appear in print. This time he sent me a note: "Yes, now you can start. . . ."

And once again, passionately and insistently, his hand urged me on. That demand to go on uninterruptedly increasing the number of useful and beautiful things on the earth was one that he made to thousands of persons whom he sought out and nurtured, and through them to mankind. He was governed by an unbounded passion for the creative work of man and it never weakened for a moment. He suffered when a person of whom he expected great things proved barren and he was happy and rubbed his hands and winked at the world, the sky, the earth, when sparks burst into flame.

Jan Petersen

Travelers

A cold wind blew down the street flinging a wet mixture, half snow, half rain, into the man's face. He turned up the collar of his coat and thrust his hands deep into his pockets. He was chilled through.

Hamburg is not giving me a very friendly welcome, he thought. He was beginning to feel in his bones the effects of being up all night. The last twenty-four hours had been trying. At midday yesterday, they had received the message from Hamburg: "Find rooms for six men. Bring slippers." To find rooms in a few hours and for six men who had to keep out of people's way! It had made Berlin seem to shrink to a little town. The man turned the corner, glanced hurriedly at the name of the street. Yes, he was going in the right direction. I have been here often enough, he thought. Oh, that first trip to Hamburg—with Lisa! He recalled her feeding the penguins in the Hagenbeck Park. She had been as pleased as a child. He recalled her remark: "How stiff and dignified they are—like professors." And then the sightseeing trip round the harbor. She had taken everything in. He could see her now with her closely-cropped, fair hair and retroussé nose, looking up in amazement at the giant ocean liners. That had been five years ago. Why does one remember details? And Lisa,—just what was she doing this moment? The illegal work had swallowed up their married life. Now they saw each other only at intervals of a couple of months; and then only for a few hours.

The man wiped the sleet from his face and brought his thoughts back to the present. "Extremely urgent." The Hamburg comrades had underlined it three times. It was a grave and trying responsibility being the courier from Berlin. They were probably waiting for him now.

Two streets further on he stopped in front of a small shop. The window sign was "Franz Schmoller, Shoemaker," and underneath in large letters "Under German Management." Inside, to the right, behind a wooden railing, a man with a white, pointed beard was sitting cobbling a shoe. He was alone. As the shop bell rang, the old man raised his head.

"What can I do for you?" he asked politely.

"Could you show me a pair of bedroom slippers."

"Very good," said the old man. He laid down the shoe he was working on and stood up. He looked sharply at his customer over the top of his glasses. then he turned to a cupboard behind him.

"They must be plush, a bright color," said the customer, "and I prefer felt soles, good and thick. I suffer from cold feet." Hearing this the old man's arm remained suspended in the air; then he put the slippers back on the shelf. A smile passed over his wrinkled face. He stepped rapidly up to the railing, stretched out his right hand but, controlling his impulse, laid it on the wood.

"Straight behind you, first door to the left," he said, in a suddenly altered and cordial tone.

When the courier opened the door, a tall thin man sprang forward; he shook him by both hands and said:

"My dear fellow, at last!"

The man from Berlin took off his raincoat and shook the water from his hat.

"I only got your instructions yesterday, at midday. You might have guessed how long it would take. Taking the early morning train was out of the question. It would have excited suspicion. Everything has been arranged, I'm glad to say, though it was very short notice."

The thin man's answer was a cordial slap on the back; he turned round to a couple of lads sitting on a sofa behind the round table.

"They're the first who must go, Erich and Willi," he said, introducing them. They shook hands. There was a touching confidence in their manner. For a moment there was complete silence. The man from Berlin drew up a chair and sat down. The first two, he thought. Such young lads. It will be difficult for them in a new town.

He looked round the room. There were two beds with yellow counterpanes, a chest of drawers with cheap knick-knacks on the top around a silvery myrtle wreath under a glass globe.

He looked again at the two lads. One of them had a pale face with strong cheek bones and fair hair, the other had a round face with locks of brown hair hanging over his forehead. They can't go as they are, he thought. They look too much like "our boys." They would attract attention at once. These sweaters, with the rolled collars—especially on boys with open defiant faces like theirs....

The thin man said; "I'll explain everything later. I was with the six. I have worked on the docks. Erich and Willi must leave here as soon as possible. If they hang round any longer they're pretty sure to get pinched."

"I understand," said the courier from Berlin. "They can go in an hour's time. But you must first of all rig them out decently. Collars and ties, coats and hats. As they are, they would immediately attract attention. No one travels like that."

The thin man nodded. "You're right. I'll see to that."

"Do you know Berlin at all?" the courier asked them.

"No—we've never been there."

The man from Berlin whistled through his teeth.

"Hm. That's what we thought." He felt in his breast pocket.

"Map of Berlin—have a good look at it." He spread the map out on the table.

"This is the station where you arrive. You take the second or third coach behind the engine. That will land you directly opposite the entrance to the Underground. You'll see a large sign 'To the Underground.' You must take the Underground and get out at the third station." He could see from their anxious expression that the two lads were afraid of forgetting. His voice became warmer. "You can take the map with you. I'll explain what you're to do. You'll have to keep everything in your head—all the details on how to find your way in Berlin and the secret signs. Otherwise...." He broke off abruptly. A bell rang outside. All four started. They stared at the door.

"It's at the back entrance," whispered the thin man. A man's voice could now be heard outside and a woman's voice answered loudly. But they could not hear what was being said. Heavy steps sounded in the passage. The four men sat motionless. The door opened. A man in a green jersey and a peaked cap appeared in the doorway and stopped. The thin man drew a long breath and jumped up.

"It's you, Rudi, what's the matter?"

The other pushed back the peak of his cap and looked round him, some-

what embarrassed. "I left my pipe behind just now. . . . I'm sorry. . . ." he stammered. No one answered.

He walked into the room, went up to the chest of drawers and found his pipe. At the door he again nodded as though to excuse himself; and the door closed again. The next moment they heard the outside door shutting.

The man from Berlin was the first to speak. "What did he mean—just now?" he asked sharply.

"We had a meeting here about an hour ago," the thin man began, hesitatingly. He shrugged his shoulders. "You see we have too few rooms. It couldn't be helped—"

There was silence for some moments.

Then the man from Berlin said: "You're rated one of the best district groups the Party has. Perhaps even *the* best—" His voice hardened. "But to let two things like that cross!... There's too much at stake." Then after a pause: "Now leave me alone with Erich and Willi. Anyway, it's better to give them the directions—alone."

The thin man was sullen for a moment. He acts like a chief to his subordinates, he thought. He looks like a bourgeois too, clean shaven, full face, carefully brushed hair, immaculate suit. Nonsense, a courier has to look like that. And he is right about the meeting, and about sending us out of the room now. Of course he is right.

The thin man rose and walked toward the door.

"I understand," he said.

Later when the man from Berlin called him back into the room, he heard him say to the boys:

"You must remember all the details, that's the main thing. The time has been worked out exactly for the mid-day train. We've left enough margin too—everything should fit in all right. Now remember, an S. A. man will eventually bring you to your rooms. Is everything clear now?"

"Yes, quite," the two answered.

The Hamburg express clattered into the large railway station and came to an abrupt halt at the platform. Erich and Willi got out and were caught in the crowd of detraining passengers. On the platform they looked round, saw the notice, "To the Underground." As they walked through the tunnel, Willi surreptitiously examined the faces in the crowd. Unfamiliar—all of them; he did not recognize anybody from the Hamburg station or the train. If we were being shadowed, we would have noticed it at Hamburg or on the trip, he consoled himself. In the station they stopped a moment to look at the map. As they went on, Erich said in a low voice: "Right hand track. Third station." Willi nodded. Yes, so far so good. During the journey they had made a careful study of the map of Berlin and had reviewed the "passwords" and other details. Willi felt a thrill of excitement. He always did when experiencing anything new. But it was stronger this time. There was the uncertainty about the immediate future. They were in Berlin, a huge unknown city. And they would have to remain unknown—to the police.

When they reached the third underground station and came into the open they followed the broad street on which they found themselves to the right. The man from Berlin had impressed upon them that they must follow the direction of the train. They did so. Willi's spirits began gradually to rise. They were getting on all right.

"And now?" he asked.

"Second side street to the left, restaurant, 'Zum Grauen Hecht,' " said Erich speaking fast.

"Right!" Willi laughed. (I mustn't let Erich think I'm nervous, he thought.)

It was a small restaurant. At a table near the door three men were playing cards. Opposite the door, at a small table sat a man, staring into his glass of beer. He had a black, bushy moustache. The fat owner was polishing the nickleplated taps of the bar. The lads chose an empty table opposite the bar. The owner laid down his chamois rag and came up to them with heavy steps.

"What can I bring you?" he asked.

"Two light," Willi ordered.

As he set the foaming beer before them, Willi said loudly:

"We'll pay now," and he put a mark piece down on the table.

"Thanks," said the owner.

He went to the bar, came back and slowly counted out the change. They touched glasses lightly and Erich looked at his friend with wide open, earnest eyes. It flashed through Willi's mind—he is thinking of the same thing as I am. "We'll pay now" was the first password for the comrade who was to wait for them in the restaurant. Where was he, though? Where was he? An S. A. man was to come up to them as they left and bring them to their illegal rooms. But there was no uniformed man in the place! Willi nervously turned his beer glass round and round on its mat. A hot frightened feeling suddenly came over him. He looked at the clock above the bar. Twelve past three. They still had eighteen minutes. The courier from Berlin had worked everything out; they were on schedule—even had some minutes to wait. But in eighteen minutes time they would have to get up and leave. Yes, at exactly half past three. That was the second secret sign. Willi thought: We ought to begin a conversation instead of sitting here saying nothing. But what could they talk about? And their Hamburg accents would attract attention at once. Sixteen minutes more. There was still time for the S. A. man to come. There was no reason why he shouldn't come. And then? It was perfectly simple. He would order two more beers and repeat "We'll pay now." But if he did not come before the time was up? Then—then we are in a strange city and in a few hours will be under arrest. That was quite clear. Willi began to feel a thumping in his head. Stop getting the wind up! He growled inwardly to himself. Erich suddenly kicked him under the table and nodded stealthily towards the small table where the man with the heavy moustache sat. Willi answered with his foot. Yes, it must be the man with the moustache! Something about the man must have attracted Erich's attention. He looked like a working man. Rough features, well worn suit, a yellowish overcoat of coarse cloth on the hook behind him and a rain drenched hat above it. The man kept staring into his glass. But now! Was he merely imagining it? No. The man took a small sip and then looked over at him with a long scrutinizing look. A few moments later Willi noticed him looking at them again, but trying to make his glance casual. Perhaps Erich was right. No one else was taking any notice of them. The three men to the right were noisily slapping their cards down on the table and the fat owner went on polishing up his taps. How had it been when he was paying his bill? Willi racked his brains but could not remember whether the man had looked at them or not. A lump formed suddenly in his throat. The man probably knew everything! Willi's thoughts leaped to sickening imaginations. The S. A. man had not come; the whole thing had leaked out. The man over there was from the Gestapo and

was watching them. They were like flies in a spider's web! Erich tried to look at Willi again but the latter did not turn his head. He was playing with the mat under his glass, tearing away pieces of the cardboard. What time was it? Three twenty-five. Five more minutes! Five more minutes and they would have to go.

What else would there be to do? They could not remain sitting here forever! The large hand of the clock crept slowly on. Willi saw it as though distorted to gigantic proportions under a magnifying glass. Half past three! Willi stood up, pushing back his chair along the floor as he did so. Erich got up at the same moment. When at the door Willi said loudly, "Heil Hitler!" He thought, my own voice seems strange to me; and it is clear as a child's.

"To the right," he said in a low voice when they were outside again.

They had only gone a few steps when Erich said hastily:

"There's something about that man inside I don't like, Willi. When you paid, he looked straight at us. He was the only one who did. I looked at them all. Afterwards he kept looking our way."

Willi was alarmed but he said:

"Why shouldn't he look our way, he had to look somewere. It's only your imagination, Erich. There's nothing to fear from him."

"Then why doesn't the S. A. man come?" insisted Erich. "What's going to happen now?"

"We'll soon see," answered Willi, forcing himself to appear lighthearted. (As if I knew what was going to happen! he thought.)

Obeying a sudden intuition, he bent down pretending to tie his shoelaces. In doing so he looked rapidly behind him. The man with the moustache! Close behind them. So he was right! A feeling of great fatigue came over him. As they went on he looked closely at Erich. Erich hadn't noticed anything. What was the good of going on like this? How much longer would it last? How much longer would they go on side by side like this? Willi mechanically put one foot in front of the other. The pedestrians they met on their way swam past him like phantoms. He did not know how long they had been going thus when Erich violently nudged his elbow.

"Look, he's coming straight towards us!" he whispered.

A tall, slim S. A. man in a long brown coat was approaching them, crossing the street obliquely from the opposite sidewalk. Willi involuntarily hastened his steps. Could it be—? But how could this man know they were the two men from Hamburg? Willi could now see the badges on the collar of his coat quite distinctly. Two stars. A company commander—impossible!

The S. A. man had come up to them, stood in front of them, lifted his right arm and said: "Heil Hitler!" He then asked: "Could you please tell me the way to the number 7 tram route?"

The stipulated formula! Willi felt a wave of warmth passing through him. For a second he stared at the S. A. man: the small fair moustache on his upper lip, the flat brown cap.

Then he heard Erich answering:

"We don't know our way around these streets, we're from another town." The right answer! Exactly the right answer! At that moment the man with the bushy moustache passed them on the street, without taking the slightest notice of them, without even turning his head. The S. A. man smiled. Smiled!

"Ssstreets," he imitated their accent. "You're from Hamburg I see." Then he said shortly: "Well, let's be going."

Willi kept close behind him. S. A. company commander—comrade—Com-

munist—company commander, he thought, and then: he must be told at once, at once, or else....

"I feel I should tell you," he said. "The man who has just passed by has been following us. He's been following us since we left the restaurant," he whispered rapidly. The S. A. man looked at him in astonishment.

"Well, what of it?" he asked. "That's just as it should be. If he had not been following behind you, I would not have come up to you."

It suddenly dawned on Willi.

"He was our man then—for the restaurant," he blurted out. "We were only told that an S. A. man would come up and speak to us as we left the restaurant. We thought you would be waiting for us there. We gave up all hope when you didn't come."

He spoke in short sentences. The uniform, the second person singular into which they had automatically lapsed in speaking to one another seemed so strange and unbelievable.

"Yes, you didn't come and the chap with the bushy moustache aroused our suspicions because he kept looking toward us," confirmed Erich softly. "Your not coming made us doubly suspicious of him." They had reached a crossing where there was a traffic signal and came to a standstill. When they had crossed over the S. A. comrade said: "I guess you passed a most uncomfortable half hour. You did not quite understand what was meant by being 'spoken to as you left.' " He paused and then continued in a lower tone: "In cases like this we always make doubly sure of things. In the restaurant another man had to identify you. It was he who afterwards 'pointed you out' to me in the street. I had been waiting for the three of you for about ten minutes. I was waiting at the corner at the other side of the street. Being in uniform, in the pub, I could not very well...." He suddenly lifted up his arm and gave the S. A. greeting in a loud voice. Erich and Willi gave the greeting also. Two men in blue airmen's uniform passed by with raised arms.

The street now went slightly uphill. They walked on in silence as though the encounter had been a warning to them. Here and for the moment there was nothing more to be said.

Translated by N. Goold-Verschoyle

George Lukacs

Narration vs. Description

A Contribution to the Discussion on Naturalism and Formalism

> "To be radical is to get at the root of things. The root of an individual, however, is the individual himself."
>
> *Marx*

I

We shall begin without introduction. There are descriptions of horse races in two famous novels, Zola's *Nana* and Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. How do the two writers approach their task?

Zola's description of a horse race is a splendid example of his literary skill. Everything that may be seen at horse races is described precisely, picturesquely, vividly. It is really a small treatise on the contemporary turf. All phases of horse racing, from the saddling of the horses to the "finish," are described with equal elaboration. The spectators' stands appear in the gorgeous colors of a Paris fashion show during the Second Empire. The world behind the scenes is just as elaborately described. The outcome of the race is entirely unexpected, and Zola not only describes that, but discloses the swindle behind it. But this skillful description remains merely an inset in the novel itself. The racing incident is very loosely joined up with the development of the plot, and could easily be removed. The only connecting link is, that one of Nana's many passing admirers is ruined through the exposure of the swindle.

The other link connecting this episode with the main theme is even less substantial, and has nothing to do with the plot—and is for this very reason the more characteristic of Zola's style. The winning horse also bears the name Nana. And Zola makes the most of his opportunity to emphasize this coincidence. The victory of the courtesan Nana's namesake symbolizes her own triumphs in the Parisian beau monde and demi-monde.

On the other hand, the horse race in *Anna Karenina* is an essential part of the plot. Vronsky's fall is a critical event in Anna's life. Just before the races she had realized that she was pregnant, and, after some painful hesitation, had told Vronsky. The shock caused by Vronsky's fall gave her the impulse for the conclusive talk with her husband. Thus the interrelationships of the principal characters of the novel enter into an entirely new phase as a result of the race. Here it is not merely a part of the scenery, but a series of highly dramatic scenes, and a turning point in the development of the entire plot.

The entirely different functions of these scenes in the two novels are reflected in the very manner of their presentation. Zola's description is from the point of view of an *observer*. Tolstoy writes from the point of view of a *participant*.

Thus, the story of Vronsky's ride forms an essential part of the plot. Tolstoy emphasizes that this ride is not a mere episode, not an unimportant incident in Vronsky's life. The ambitious officer is hindered in his military career by a number of circumstances, among which his relations with Anna play a most important role.

To win the race in the presence of the Imperial Court and high society

is one of the few possibilities still remaining for the satisfaction of his ambitions. Thus, all the preparations for the race, all the phases of the race itself constitute parts of a very important act. They are related in their dramatic sequence. Vronsky's fall is the climax of this phase of his life; the fact that his rival outstrips him may be disposed of in one sentence.

But this does not by any means exhaust the analysis of the epic intensity of this scene. Tolstoy does not describe "phenomena"; he tells about the destinies of his characters. That is why the development of this event is *narrated* twice in a truly epic style, and not picturesquely described. In the first narrative, in which Vronsky, a contestant in the races, is the central figure, everything essential in the preparations for the races and in the race itself had to be related precisely and expertly. In the second narrative Anna and Karenin are the central figures. Tolstoy's exceptional epic skill is shown by the fact that this second narrative about the races does not directly follow the first. He tells how Karenin passed the preceding day and tells about Karenin's relations with Anna in order to make the story of the race the climax of this day. The race now becomes an internal drama. Anna's eyes follow only Vronsky. She sees nothing of the progress of the race, knows nothing of the fate of the other participants. Karenin observes only Anna and her reaction to Vronsky's fall. And this tense, wordless scene prepares for Anna's outburst on the way home, when she reveals her relations with Vronsky to Karenin.

Some readers and writers of the "modern school" may possibly say:

Granting that we have before us two different methods of portrayal, does not Tolstoy's linking up of the race with the destinies of the central figures of his novel turn the entire episode into a mere contingency brought into the novel for the purpose of developing the drama; whereas Zola's description of the episode, complete in itself, gives us a picture of important social phenomena?

The question now arises: what is essential and what is contingent in an artistic portrayal? Without the elements of contingency everything is dead and abstract. No writer can create a vivid, life-like portrayal of anything if he completely rejects all elements of contingency. On the other hand, he must rise above the use of gross, bare accidentals and raise contingencies to the level of artistic essentiality.

Another question: what renders an episode essential from the artistic point of view? The completeness of its description, or the essentiality of the relations of the characters towards the events in which they participate, by which their destinies are determined, and by means of which they perform their acts?

The combination of Vronsky's ambition and his participation in the horse races produces an essentiality of an entirely different character from the precision of Zola's description of horse races. Going to see horse races or participation in them from an objective point of view may be regarded only as an episode in the life of an individual. Tolstoy connected this episode very closely with the important life-drama of the central figures of his novel. It is true that the horse races are only an occasion for the outburst of a conflict; but this occasion, through its concurrence with Vronsky's social ambitions—an important factor in the further development of the tragedy—is by no means a chance occurrence, a contingency.

But we can find even more striking instances in literature in which the contrast between these two methods is expressed with still greater clarity precisely in the matter of presenting phenomena in their contingency or essentiality.

Take the description of the theater in Zola's novel and compare it with the description of the theater in Balzac's *Lost Illusions*. On the surface there are many points of similarity. The premiere with which Zola's novel opens, decides Nana's career. The premiere in Balzac's novel marks a turning point in the career of Lucian de Rubemprés, his transformation from an unrecognized poet into a successful and unscrupulous journalist.

Zola describes the theater with his usual scrupulous completeness. First from the view point of the audience: everything that takes place in the auditorium, in the lobby, in the boxes, etc. The stage is described with extraordinary literary skill. But his tendency towards treatise-like completeness is not satisfied with that. He devotes another chapter of the novel to an equally elaborate description of the theater behind the scenes and as it looks from the stage. And in order to complete the picture, just as scrupulous and brilliant a description of a rehearsal is given in a third chapter.

Balzac lacks this detailed, documentary completeness in his description. To him the theater and the performance are only the arena for internal human dramas: Lucien's rise, Coralie's artistic career, the beginning of a passionate love between Lucien and Coralie, Lucien's future conflicts with his former friends from the d'Arthèz circle and with his present patron Lousteau, the beginning of his campaign of revenge against Madame de Bargeton, etc.

But what is portrayed in all these struggles and conflicts directly or indirectly connected with the theater? The destiny of the theater under capitalism: the intricate and manifold subordination of the theater to capitalism and to journalism, which in its turn is subordinated to capitalism; the interrelation of the theater and literature, of journalism and literature; the capitalistic nature of the association of the life of actresses with open and secret prostitution.

These social problems appear in Zola's novel also. But here they are described only as social facts, without exposing their origin. The theater director repeats incessantly: "Don't say 'theater'; say 'brothel.' " Balzac *shows how* the theater is prostituted under capitalism. The drama of the central figures merges here with the drama of the establishment in which they are working, the things with which they live, the arena where they fight their battles. the surroundings among which their relationships find expression, through which they are materialized.

This, to be sure, is an extreme case. The objects surrounding us are not always and not necessarily so closely connected with our destinies as in this case. They may be, as in Balzac's novel, the deciding factors in our social destinies; but they may also be mere arenas for the development of our activities, our destinies.

Does the contrast indicated here, exist also in cases where we deal with the literary presentation of such an arena?

In the introductory chapter of his novel *Old Mortality* Sir Walter Scott describes a military review held in connection with a popular festival in Scotland, organized by the supporters of the restoration of the Stuarts in an attempt to re-establish the feudal institutions, as a review of the loyal forces and for the purpose of provoking and disclosing the discontented. This review takes place, in Scott's novel, on he eve of the rising of the oppressed Puritans. With great epic skill Scott brings together on this arena all the contradictory forces which are soon to break out in bloody battle. During the progress of this review Scott reveals in grotesque scenes how hopelessly antiquated the feudal relations are and the stifled resistance of the population to the attempt to re-establish them. The shooting contest following the review dis-

closes even the contradictions within the two hostile parties; only the "moderate" adherents of the two parties participate in this popular amusement. The scenes at the inn show us the brutal violence of the king's soldiery; at the same time the figure of Burley, the future leader of the Puritan rebellion, rises before us in its gloomy grandeur. In other words, in the narrative of this military show and in sketching in the vast arena of this episode, Scott at the same time reveals all the trends, all the central figures, of a great historical drama, and brings us with one stroke into the very midst of decisive actions.

The description of the agricultural exhibition and the awarding of prizes to the farmers in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* is one of the most famed achievements of the descriptive art of the neo-realistic school. Flaubert really describes here only the "arena." The entire exhibition serves only as an occasion for the portrayal of the love-scene between Rudolph and Emma Bovary. The place of action is accidental and is truly nothing more than an arena in the literary meaning of the word. Flaubert himself sharply and ironically emphasizes this contingency. Contrasting official speeches and fragments of the love dialogue, Flaubert places the public and private banality of philistine petty bourgeois life in ironic juxtaposition. This ironic contrast is carried out very consistently and with great skill.

There remains now the unsettled contradiction: this accidental arena, this contingent occasion for the love scene, is at the same time an important event in Madame Bovary's little world, a thorough description of which is absolutely essential for Flaubert's main task of giving a complete portrayal of this environment. The ironic contrast does not therefore exhaust the significance of this description. The "arena" has an independent significance of its own as an element of the completeness of the environment. But the figures shown by Flaubert are only spectators. To the reader, therefore, they are homogeneous and equivalent elements of the picture, essential only in so far as they complete the portrayal of the environment. They show as spots of color in the picture. And the picture rises above the ordinary drab genre only inasmuch as it becomes the ironic symbol of philistinism. The picture obtains a significance which is not derived from the intrinsic human value of the narrated incidents—it has on the whole no bearing upon them—but is achieved artificially by means of formal symbolization.

Flaubert's symbolization is ironic, and therefore reaches considerable artistic heights, since it is—at least to some degree—achieved by truly artistic means. But when in Zola's novel, the symbol is supposed to attain social monumentality, when it is supposed to put the stamp of great significance on an insignificant episode, it leaves the sphere of true art. The metaphor is puffed up into a reality. An accidental move, an accidental similarity, an accidental mood, a chance encounter are supposed to give *direct* expression to important social interrelations. Instances may be found in abundance in any of Zola's novels. Take the comparison of Nana with the Golden Fly, which is supposed to symbolize her fatal influence upon Paris of 1870. Zola himself speaks very clearly of his intentions in this direction: "There is in my work a hypertrophy on true details. From the spring board of accurate observations it swings up to the stars. The truth soars up with one stroke of its wings to the symbol."

In Scott's Balzac's and Tolstoy's novels we learn of events, significant in themselves, through the destinies of the persons participating in them, through the role of these persons in public life in the course of the broad expansion of their individual lives. We are the spectators of events in which

the central figures of the novels participate actively. We live through their experiences.

In Flaubert's and Zola's novels the central figures themselves are only more or less interested spectators of occurrences. These occurrences are therefore nothing more than a picture for the reader, or rather a series of pictures. We observe these pictures.

II

This contradistinction of living through experiences as against observing them is not accidental. It has its roots in the basic tendencies of the writers themselves. To be more specific: this contradistinction is the consequence of different basic attitudes towards *life,* towards important social problems, and not merely towards methods of artistic mastery of the plot or definite parts of the plot.

Only upon establishing this fact can we come to the concretization of our problem. In literature, as well as in other branches of life, there are no "pure phenomena." Engels once remarked ironically that a "pure" state of feudalism existed only in the constitution of the short-lived Kingdom of Jerusalem. Nevertheless feudalism is self-evidently a historic reality and can reasonably be considered an object for study and investigation. There is surely no writer in existence who does not use the descriptive method at all. Nor is there any foundation for saying that the great representatives of the realistic school of the post-1848 period, Flaubert and Zola, never at all made use of the narrative method. We are speaking of the *basic principles* and not of the phantom of "pure phenomena," of "pure" narration or "pure" description. The question is: why and how did the descriptive method, originally one of many means of epic portrayal and undoubtedly a subordinate means, a mere accessory, become the principal method of composition? This is important because with this change the character and functions of the descriptive method in epic compositions change radically.

Balzac in his review of Stendhal's *Chartreuse de Parme* had already stressed the importance of description as an essentially modern method of presentation. The novel of the eighteenth century (Le Sage, Voltaire, etc.) contained almost no description. Only with the advent of romanticism did the situation change. Balzac emphasized that the literary school which he represented, and of which he regards Walter Scott as the founder, attached greater importance to the descriptive method.

But while emphasizing his opposition to the "dryness" of the novel of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and declaring for the modern method, Balzac puts forward a series of new essential elements of style characteristic of the new method. Description, according to Balzac's conception, is only *one of many* elements. Along with it he stresses especially the new significance of the dramatic element.

This new style came into existence because of the necessity for adequate presentation of the new phenomena of social life. The relations between individuals and classes became more complicated than they had been in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Le Sage, for instance, could outline the environment, general appearance, habits, etc., of his heroes and still produce a clear and all-encompassing social characterization. Individualization was achieved almost exclusively through a narrative of action, through the manner in which the personages reacted to events.

Balzac saw clearly that this method was no longer sufficient. Rastignac

is an adventurer of an entirely different type from Gil Blas. A detailed description of the Vaugner boarding-house, with its dirt and smells, with its meals and its service, etc., is absolutely necessary to convey a real and complete understanding of the specific quality of Rastignac's adventurousness. Grandet's house, Gobseck's apartment, etc., must likewise be described in minute detail in order to present the types of usurers in all their individual and social variety.

But aside from the fact that Balzac's portrayal of the environment never stopped at bare description, but almost always turned into action (consider old man Grandet repairing his rotten stairs himself), description with Balzac was nothing more than a broad base for an important new element: for the introduction of the dramatic element into the composition. Balzac's extraordinarily multifarious and complicated characters could not possibly be developed with such striking dramatic effect were not their environment shown in such detail.

With Flaubert and Zola the role of the descriptive method is entirely different.

Balzac, Stendhal, Dickens, Tolstoy, etc., portray bourgeois society during different crises in the process of its establishment. They portray the complex regularity of its formation, the diverse and tortuous transition leading from the decaying old society to the rising new society. They personally and actively went through the critical transitions of this formative process. In different forms, of course, Goethe, Stendhal, Tolstoy participated in the wars which accelerated these difficult births; Balzac was a participator and victim of the feverish speculations of rising French capitalism; Goethe and Stendhal actively participated in the administration; Tolstoy, as a landowner and an active member of social organizations (the Census, the Committee of Aid to the Famine Sufferers), witnessed the most important moments of these violent changes. They are in this respect, and also in their mode of life, the successors of the old writers, artists and scientists of the Renaissance and Enlightenment: people who actively and extensively participated in the great social struggles of their time and who became writers because of their thorough and varied knowledge of life. They are no "specialists" as yet in the sense of capitalistic division of labor.

Flaubert and Zola began their work after the Revolution of 1848 in fully constituted, achieved capitalist society. They did not participate actively in the life of this society; they did not want to participate in it. This refusal to participate expresses the tragedy of a notable generation of artists of the transitional period. This refusal is motivated above all by opposition. It expresses hatred, abhorrence, scorn for the political and social regime of their time. Those who took part in the social development of this period became soulless, mendacious apologists of capitalism. Flaubert and Zola were too great and too honest for this. There remained for them only one way out of this tragic contradiction of their position—isolation. They became critical observers of capitalist society.

Through this they became professional writers, writers in the sense of capitalistic division of labor. The book was now completely transformed into a commodity and the writer into the seller of this commodity (if he did not happen to be born wealthy). In the case of Balzac we still see the gloomy grandeur of the primary accumulation period in the cultural field. Goethe and Tolstoy were still in a seigneurial position, not depending exclusively on the pen for their living. Flaubert was a voluntary ascetic. Zola, forced by

material want, became a professional writer, in the sense of capitalistic division of labor.

New styles, new methods of presenting reality never come into existence because of inherent dialectics of artistic forms, although they are always connected with previous forms. Every new style comes into existence with socially-historical inevitability, out of life, and is the inevitable product of social development.

But the recognition of this inevitability of the formation of styles does not make these styles equal in value or rank. The inevitable style may prove to be artistically false, distorted and bad.

Participation and observation are socially inevitable lines of conduct of two different periods of capitalism.

Narration and description are the basic methods of presentation of these periods.

In order to further emphasize the contradistinction of these two methods I shall quote comments by Goethe and Zola on the relation between observation and creation.

"I have never observed nature with a poetical aim in view," said Goethe; "but because my interest in landscape sketching and later in the study of natural history drove me to a continual accurate observation of natural phenomena, I came little by little to know nature in her minutest detail so well that when I need something as a poet the information is there for use and I do not easily fall into errors." (Eckermann, *Conversations With Goethe.*)

Zola also speaks very clearly about the manner in which he approaches, as a writer, the object of his novels.

"A novelist of the naturalistic school desires to write a novel about the theater. He proceeds from this general idea *without as yet having in his possession a single fact, or a single image.* His first care is to gather and register any information obtainable, about the world he is about to describe. He knows this or that actor, sees this or that play.... Then he will speak to people well informed on the subject, check up on the collected utterances, anecdotes, portraits. This is not all. He will then read the written documents. *Finally,* he will visit the place itself, will spend a few days in a theater in order to learn the minutest details, will pass his evenings in the dressing-room of one of the actresses, will become permeated with the atmosphere of the place. After the material is completely gathered, the novel will write itself. The novelist must only distribute the facts logically.... *No attention is paid any longer to the originality of the plot; on the contrary, the more banal and common the plot is the more typical it will be.*" (Italics mine. G. L.) (Zola, *Le roman expérimental,* Paris, 1900.)

Here are two basically different styles, two basically different attitudes toward reality.

III

To understand the social inevitability of a given style is one thing; to evaluate its artistic effects is quite another. "To understand everything is to forgive everything" is not the slogan of aesthetics. Only vulgar sociology, thinking that its single task is to reveal the "social equivalent" of individual writers and styles, supposes that with the explanation of the social origin (we shall not speak here of the fact that it does not know how to do even this) it does away with the necessity for an artistic evaluation. Practically, this method amounts to pulling the entire past history of human art down to the level

of the decadent bourgeoisie: Homer and Shakespeare are just as much "products" as Joyce and Proust; the task of literary science is merely to reveal the "social equivalent" of Homer or Joyce.

Marx considers this question from an entirely different angle. After analyzing the origin of Homeric epics he points out that the difficulty is not in understanding that the Greek art and epic are connected with certain forms of social development. The difficulty is to understand the fact that they still give us artistic delight and serve in a certain sense as standards and unattainable models.

It is self-understood that this comment of Marx' applies also where the aesthetic judgment is of a negative character. In either case the aesthetic judgment must not be mechanically divorced from the historical background. The judgment that the Homeric poems are epical and those by Camoens, Milton, Voltaire, etc., are not, is simultaneously a social-historical and an aesthetic conception. No "master-skill" is independent and distinct from social-historical and personal circumstances unfavorable for abundant, all-embracing, multifarious and vivid artistic reproduction of objective reality. Socially unfavorable premises and circumstances for artistic creation distort also the substantial forms of artistic reproduction.

This is how matters stand in the case mentioned above.

There is an extraordinarily interesting, self-critical review by Flaubert in his novel *L'education Sentimentale*. He says: "The novel is too truthful and it lacks, aesthetically speaking, falsity of perspective. The plan was thoroughly thought over and therefore it disappeared. Every work of art must have a culminating point, a peak, must form a pyramid, or the light must be concentrated on one point of the sphere. But there is nothing of that sort in life. Art, however, is not nature. But I believe that no one has gone further in honesty of reproduction."

This confession, like all of Flaubert's utterances, manifests a relentless truthfulness. Flaubert characterized the composition of his novel correctly. He is right also in stressing the necessity of a culminating point. But is he right in his statement that "there is too much truth" in his novel? Do "culminating points" really exist in art only?

Of course not. This extraordinarily honest confession of Flaubert's is important for us not only as a self-criticism of his significant novel, but mainly because he reveals in it his historically incorrect conception of reality, of the objective existence of society, of the relation between nature and art. His conception that "culminating points" exist only in art, and that they are, consequently, created by the artist, and that it depends on the artist whether or not he will create such "culminating points" is a purely subjective prejudice—a prejudice arising from an external and superficial observation of the symptoms of bourgeois life, of the manifestations of life in bourgeois society—abstracted from the driving forces of social development, and their unceasing action upon the surface of life. This uniformity, it is true, is broken from time to time by "sudden" awful catastrophes.

In reality, however—naturally in capitalist reality—these "sudden" catastrophes have been in the process of preparation for a long time. They do not stand in complete contrast to the calm development on the surface. A complicated, disproportionate development leads to them and this development dissects objectively the seemingly smooth surface of Flaubert's globe. The artist must, it is true, illuminate the important points of these sections; but it is Flaubert's prejudice to believe that this dissection of the surface does not exist in reality.

This dissection is effected through the operation of the laws regulating the development of society, through the driving forces of social development. In objective reality the false, subjective, abstract contradiction between the "normal" and the "abnormal" disappears. Marx sees in the economic crises "most normal" and regular phenomena of capitalist economy. "The independence assumed by elements appertaining to and completing one another is violently annihilated. The crisis manifest the unity of elements which had been believed to be independent of one another."

The apologist bourgeois science of the second half of the nineteenth century sees reality in an entirely different light. The crisis appears as a "catastrophe" suddenly interrupting the "normal" course of economy. Likewise every revolution appears as something catastrophic and abnormal.

Flaubert and Zola are not, in their subjective opinions and intentions, apologists of capitalism. But they are children of their time and as such they are profoundly influenced in their *Weltanschauung* by the opinions of their time. Especially Zola, on the conceptions of whose works the flat prejudices of bourgeois sociology had a deciding influence. This is why life in Zola's works develops almost without any dissection, amorphously, as long as it remains, according to his views, normal in a social sense. Then all manifestations of the life of people are normal products of the social environment. But there are also entirely different, heterogeneous forces at work: heredity, for instance, which affects the thoughts and sensations of men with fatal regularity and brings on the catastrophes which interrupt the normal course of life. Let us recall the hereditary alcoholism of Etienne Lautier in *Germinal,* which causes a variety of sudden outbursts and catastrophes, having no organic connection with his general character. Zola does not even make an attempt to present such a connection. Likewise the catastrophe brought on by Saccard's son in *Money,* etc. Everywhere the normal regularity of the environment is opposed by the catastrophes, unconnected with it and annihilating it, which are brought on by heredity.

It is clear that we are dealing here not with a profound and correct reproduction of objective reality, but with a simplification and distortion of its regularity, a distortion based on the influence of apologist prejudices—upon the *Weltanschauung* of the writers of this period. A true knowledge of the driving forces of social development, an unbiased, correct, profound and complete poetic portrayal of their action upon human life must be given in the form of motion—such motion as would manifest the regular unity of the normal and the exceptional.

This truth of social development is just as true of the destinies of the individual. But when and how does this truth reveal itself? It is clear not only for science, not only for politics based upon science, but also for the practical knowledge of humanity in everyday life, that this truth of life may be revealed in the usages of people, in their deeds and actions. The world of people, their subjective sensations and thoughts show their truthfulness or falsity, their sincerity or mendacity, their greatness or narrowness of mind, after they have been converted into deeds—when their truthfulness is proven by deeds and acts or when their deeds and acts prove the falsity of their words. Only human practice can show concretely the substance of people: who is brave? who is kind? and so on.

Only through deeds do people become interesting to one another. Only through deeds do they become worthy of poetic portrayal. The basic features of the human character can be revealed only through deeds and actions in human practice. Ancient poetry, be it in the form of fairy tales, ballads,

or sagas, or the later spontaneous form of narrated anecdotes, always proceeded from the acknowledgement of this basic importance of deeds and actions. This poetry retains its significance just because it reflects this basic reality, the positive or negative confirmation of human intentions by deeds. It remains alive and interesting to this very day, in spite of its often fantastic. naive, now unacceptable assumptions, because it places this eternal, basic reality of human life in the center of its portrayals.

And the linking up of separate deeds and actions into a continuous chain becomes really interesting through its continuous show of *the same* typical characteristic traits of the individual on a most motley variety of adventurers. Whether it be Ulysses or Gil Blas, the indelible freshness of the chain of their adventures is due to the humanly-poetical elements.

It is clear that in the individual, the revelations of the substantial features of human life are the decisive elements. We are interested in knowing how Ulysses or Gil Blas, Moll Flanders or Don Quixote reacted to important events in their lives; how they overcame difficulties and withstood dangers; how their characteristic traits, which make them so interesting, unfold themselves ever more broadly and deeply in practice.

Without this revelation of important human traits, without this interrelation between the individual and the happenings of the outer world, things, natural forces, social institutions, etc., the adventurous incidents are empty and insubstantial. But it must be remembered that even without the revelation of essential and typical human traits there is present in every action at least an abstract scheme of human practice (even though it may be distorted and faded). That is why abstract presentations of schematic adventures in which only schemes of human beings are shown may temporarily excite some general interest (novels of chivalry in the past, detective novels in our days). In the success of these novels we can discover one of the deepest causes of human interest in literature generally: interest in the abundance, variety, and multiplicity of human life. When the artistic literature of some period cannot show the correlation between the abundant inner life of the typical figures of this period and their actions, the interest of the public turns toward this abstractly-schematic substitute.

This is how things stand with the literature of the second half of the nineteenth century. In this literature observations and descriptions supplant to an ever greater extent, the association of the inner life with action. And there never was, probably, another period where alongside of the official great literature of the time there developed such a large void literature of bare adventure. The contention that this literature is read only by the "uneducated," while the "elite" constitutes the reading public of the modern great literature, does not deceive anybody. Just the opposite is true. The modern classics are read partly out of a sense of duty, partly out of material interest in the problems of the period which they present, though in a distorted and faded manner; but for recreation and real entertainment people turn to detective novels.

Flaubert complained repeatedly, while writing *Madame Bovary,* of the lack of element of entertainment in his book. We hear such complaints from many distinguished modern writers. These complaints confirm the fact that the great novels of the past combined the portrayal of essential human features with entertainment and fascination, while modern art is being pervaded to an ever greater extent by strain and monotony and boredom.

This paradoxical situation is by no means due to the lack of talent of the

literary representatives of this epoch, which has been marked by the presence of a considerable number of extraordinarily gifted writers. The monotony and boredom are mainly due to the principles of their method of presentation, to the principles and *Weltanschauung* of the writers.

Zola censures sharply as "unnatural" the featuring of the exceptional by Stendhal and Balzac. Here is what he says, for instance, about the portrayal of love in *Le Rouge et le Noir*. "It ignores completely the truth of everyday life, the truth with which we are thrown into contact; and we find ourselves just as much in the realm of the extraordinary with the psychologist Stendhal as with the story-teller Alexander Dumas. From the point of view of the exact truth Julien brings me as many surprises as D'Artagnac."

Paul Bourget in his essay on the literary activities of the Goncourts defines very clearly and sharply this new principle of composition. He says: "Drama, as we know from etymology, is action, and action is never a very good expression of the mode of life. What is characteristic of an individual is not what he does at a moment of sharp, passionate crisis, but his everyday habits, which are not a crisis, but his usual condition."

Now we can fully understand Flaubert's criticism of his own composition. Flaubert confuses life with the average everyday life of the bourgeois. This prejudice has its social roots, of course. But it does not cease to be a prejudice because of the discovery of its social roots; it does not cease to distort subjectively the poetic reflection of reality or to hamper an adequate and comprehensive reflection. Flaubert conducted a life-long struggle to get out of this enchanted circle of prejudices caused by social conditions. But inasmuch as he did not conduct a struggle against the prejudices themselves, considering them firm, objective realities, his struggle was tragically unsuccessful. He berated incessantly and most passionately the tediousness and hideousness of the bourgeois themes which forced themselves upon him. While working on his bourgeois novels he would swear never again to lower himself to such filth, but the only way out he could find was into the realm of fantastic exotics. The road to the discovery of the inner poetry of life remained closed to him because of his prejudices.

The inner poetry of life is the poetry of struggling humanity, the interrelations of people in their struggles. Without this inner poetry there can be no epic composition capable of exciting human interest, capable of intensifying and keeping alive this interest. The art of the epic and, naturally, the art of the novel consists of ability to show typical and humanly significant features of the social life of a given period. One desires to find in epic poetry a clear, enlarged reflection of himself, of his social activity. The art of epic consists in correctly apportioning significance, in correctly setting off the essential. An epic work produces an effect the more enchanting and general the more it succeeds in making the individual and his social activity appear not as a contrived scheme, as the product of the author's virtuosity, but as something naturally grown; not as something invented, but as something just discovered.

This is why Otto Ludwig, himself a very problematical German epic writer and dramatist, rightly concludes, as a result of his study of Walter Scott and Dickens: "The human beings seem to be the main thing, and the revolving wheel of events only serves as a means for showing them in natural attractive play, instead of the human beings serving to turn the wheel. The thing for the author to do is to render interesting that which lacks interest and leave alone that which is interesting of itself. The characters are always the main thing. And really an event, wonderful as it may be, will never occupy our

mind as lastingly as the people whom we learn to love in the course of these events."

The descriptive method, in the sense already indicated, becomes the dominating method of epic portrayal during periods when, due to social causes, the purport of this essential moment is lost. The descriptive method is a literary substitute for the lost epic significance.

But here, as everywhere in the history of development of new ideological forms, there is reciprocal action. The dominating literary method of description is not only a consequence; it is at the same time also a cause—the cause of a still further withdrawal of literature from the epic style. The domination of capitalistic prose over the inner poetry of human life, the fact that social life is becoming ever less human, the lowering of the level of humanity —all these are objective facts of the development of capitalism. Out of them inevitably arises the method of description. But this method, once there, and handled by gifted writers, consistent in their art, reacts upon the poetic reflection of reality. The poetical level of life is lowered, but literature overemphasizes this lowering.

IV

Narration differentiates; description levels.

Goethe demands that epic poetry present all events in the past perfect, in contrast to drama, whose action is to be presented in the present. Goethe sees in this contradistinction the difference in style between epic and dramatic poetry. The drama is, from the very beginning, much more highly abstracted than epic poetry. The drama is always concentrated around one conflict. Everything not directly or indirectly connected with this conflict has no place in the drama, it is a disturbing alien element. The richness of such a dramatist as Shakespeare lies in the diversity and rich conception of the conflict itself. But in the matter of weeding out all details not directly connected with the conflict here is no difference in principle between Shakespeare and the Greeks.

The purpose of the transference of epic actions into the past, as demanded by Goethe, is to make possible a surer poetic selection of the essential and its portrayal in such a manner as to create the illusion of a complete portrayal of life. The criterion as to whether or not this or the other detail is essential must therefore be much broader in the epic than in the drama and must recognize even far removed and indirect connections as essential. But within the limits of such a broad understanding of essentiality the selection must be just as rigorous as in the drama. Things not appertaining to the subject are as much a hindrance in the epic, as in the drama.

The tortuous roads of life become comprehensible only at the end. Only the completed course of human life shows which of the many and varied traits of a given individual were really important and decisive. Only through actual life, through linking up of the deeds and sufferings of people can we discover just what things, institutions, etc., affected their destinies in an essential manner and when and how this influence took effect. All this can be seen only at the end. The selection of the essential, in the subjective, as well as in the objective, life of an individual is accomplished by life itself. The epic writer, whose subject is the completed destiny of an individual, or of the entanglement of the destinies of various people whose lives are completed, makes the choice of the essential, accomplished by life itself, clear to the reader. But the observer who is necessarily contemporaneous is bound to

lose himself in a tangle of details, all of which appear equally important, inasmuch as life itself has not as yet completed its selection. The anteriority of events characteristic of the epic is thus a basic means of differentiation laid down by reality itself.

Naturally, the reader does not as yet know the end. He is presented with an abundance of detail, the subordination and significance of which can not always become clear immediately. Certain expectations arise within the reader, which are either enhanced or repressed in the further course of the narrative. But the reader is guided through this thick web of multifariously intertwined, underlying facts by the *omniscient* author, who knows the exact significance of each detail, insignificant in itself, in the final untangling, in the final revelation of the characters; and who operates only with such details as possess such a function for the general action. This omniscience of the author assures the reader, makes him feel at home in the world of fiction. Although he does not know the events beforehand, he can see pretty clearly the direction they must take, due to their inner logic, due to the inner needs of the characters. True, he does not know everything about the relationships and possible development of the characters; but he generally knows more than the acting characters themselves.

To be sure, the details appear in an entirely new light as the essential underlying facts are revealed in the course of the story. When Tolstoy, for instance, portrays in his story *After the Ball* the touchingly human traits of the hero's sweetheart's father, who is ready to sacrifice himself for his daughter, the reader is moved by the forcefulness of this image, without fully comprehending its real significance. Only after the account of the "run the gauntlet" punishment, executed under the brutal direction of this loving father, is the strain completely released. Tolstoy's great epic art is shown precisely in this ability to retain such unfailing hold upon the reader, in his ability not to stultify the elderly officer into a brutalized "product" of tsarism, but to show how the tsarist regime transforms people who are good-natured, unselfish and self-sacrificing in their private lives into mechanical and even jealous executors of its bestiality. It is clear, that all the shades of color of this story could be realized only through the account of the "run the gauntlet" punishment. The contemporary observer, who could not describe the ball retrospectively, in the light shed upon it by the "run the gauntlet" punishment, would necessarily see and describe entirely different, unessential and superficial details.

This spacing of related events, bringing to the fore the essential moments selected by life, is found in every epic work, even when the story is in the first person, *i.e.,* when one of the characters appears at the narrator. Such is the case in the story of Tolstoy's which we have just mentioned. Even in the case of a novel, written in the form of a diary, like Goethe's *Werther,* we can always observe some occurrences put a certain distance in the past, even if only the recent past, thus helping to accomplish the selection of the essential moments, through the action of these events upon Werther.

Only in such a manner can the characters of a novel receive firm and definite outlines without becoming fixed and unchangeable; only in this way can the transformations work in the direction of enriching these outlines and bringing them to an ever more vivid completeness. The real fascination of a novel lies in the suspense with which the reader follows the broadening of the images, in his anxiety to learn whether or not the heroes with whom he has now become acquainted will justify the opinion he has formed about them.

This is why in great epic works the end may be given in the very opening.

Take, for instance, the introductory lines in Homer's epics, which synopsize the story. How do they retain the interest of the reader in spite of this? It is surely due to the artistic interest of the reader in learning how the poet achieves this end. It is due mainly to the human desire to find out how Ulysses is going to exert himself, what difficulties he will have to overcome in order to arrive at the foretold destination. In Tolstoy's story analyzed above we also know at the outset that the hero-narrator's love is not going to have a happy ending. The reader's suspense is therefore not about the outcome, which he already knows. What he is interested in mainly is to learn how the superior, humorous, human ripeness of the hero-narrator developed. Thus the fascination of genuine epic is always due to interest in human destinies.

Description makes everything contemporary. We relate the past. We describe what we see before us and this coexistance with people and phenomena in space, turns into a coexistence in time—into contemporaneity.

But this contemporaneity, this description of events in the present tense, has nothing in common with the contemporaneity of immediate action in the drama. The great "modern" writers know how to introduce the dramatic element into the novel by consistently presenting all events as antecedents. The opposite is true of the "contemporary" observers who put their observations in the present tense. Their method is the exact opposite of the dramatic. They describe situations, the static, immobile state of the human mind, the inactive existence of phenomena, still life.

Thus the portrayal is degraded to the level of mere genre. The natural principle of epic selection is lost. Taken by itself, irrespective of its actions, one state of mind of a person is just as essential or non-essential as another. To a still greater extent is this true of phenomena. In a really epic narrative phenomena are reasonably presented only in that aspect or aspects which are essential to their specific functions in the concrete human actions with which they are connected. Taken by itself every phenomenon has an endless number of properties. When a writer strives to describe some phenomenon in its entire objective completeness he either makes no selection at all and undertakes the Sisyphean labor of expressing in words the endless number of its properties, or he prefers to present superficial and picturesque properties which are the easiest to describe.

In either case it results in a loss of the thematic connection of these phenomena with their functions in concrete human destinies, and in the loss of their poetic significance. They can gain significance only when they are *directly* connected with some abstract principle, playing a decisive role in the author's *Weltanschauung*. The phenomena are then transformed into symbols.

We can now see already how the problems of naturalism inevitably develop formalistic methods of portrayal.

The loss of the intrinsic significance and through this of the epic sequence and subordination does not, however, stop at mere leveling, at the mere transformation of the portrayal of life into a *nature-morte*. The direct portrayal of people and objects, their individualization, has a logic of its own and accentuates the description in a new manner of its own. This results in something much worse than mere leveling; a new subordination, with a reverse sign, comes into existence.

This tendency is an inherent property of the descriptive method. The very manner of describing with equal intensity the essential and the non-essential contains in itself this tendency to reverse the signs. With many writers it

involves a transition to pure genre in which everything humanly significant is drowned.

In an ironical essay Friedrich Hebbel analyzes one of the typical representatives of this genre-like style of description, Adalbert Stifter, who has since, thanks to Nietzsche's propaganda, become the classic of the German reaction. Hebbel shows how the great problems of humanity disappear in Stifter's works, how the "lovingly" sketched details drown everything essential. "There is universal rejoicing on the occasion that moss appears more imposing... (than) the tree upon which it exists; and the tree stands out in greater relief when the forest disappears from the picture. Talents capable of describing the humbler aspects of nature, but which instinctively avoid any greater tasks, are elevated above others which do not describe mosquito dances for the simple reason that mosquito dances are insignificant, invisible when one can see the dance of the planets. Incidentals begin to flourish everywhere: the mud on Napoleon's boots is described with the same timid exactitude as the signs of internal struggle which appeared on his face at the moment of his abdication. In short, the comma pulls on a dress coat and smiles. . . . complacently down upon the sentence to which it is obliged for its very existence." Hebbel here notes the other danger of the descriptive method: the treatment of minor details as something independent, as something important in themselves. With the loss of the genuine culture of the narrative art, minor details cease to be mere mediums for the definite motive forces of important acts; they are assigned an importance independent of the acts and destinies of the characters. But through this, every artistic connection with the complex of the composition is lost. The would-be simultaneity of the description results in an atomization of the composition into independent elements, in a disintegration of the composition. Nietzsche, who watched the symptoms of decadence in life and art closely, reveals this process down to its stylistic manifestations in individual sentences.—He says: "The word becomes sovereign and jumps out of the sentence; the sentence overlaps and obscures the page; the page gains in vividness at the cost of the whole, and the whole ceases to be a whole. This is the common trait of all styles of decadence: . . . life, even vitality, the vibrations and exuberance of life, are driven back into minutest images. The whole no longer exists: it is patched together, calculated, artificial."

This independence of the details has many equally disastrous consequences for the portrayal of human destinies. The writers endeavor to describe the details of life as fully, as plastically and as picturesquely as possible. In this they achieve extraordinary artistic perfection. But the description of things no longer has anything in common with the destinies of the characters. It is not only that things are described independently of the destinies of people and thus acquire undue independent importance in the novel. The very style of their description belongs to an entirely different sphere of life from that of the destinies of the described characters. The more naturalistic the writers become, the more pains they take to portray only average people in everyday life; the more they try to endow them with everyday thoughts, feelings and words, the greater becomes this discord. The sober, flat prose of bourgeois everyday life in the dialogue; dainty artificiality, refined studio art in the description. People portrayed in such a manner can have nothing in common with things described in such a way.

And when a relationship is established between them on the basis of the description the outcome is still worse. The author then describes things from

the viewpoint of the psychology of the characters. Aside from the fact that it is impossible to carry out such a description consistently except within the frame of an extremely subjective, "I" novel (a novel narrated in the first person by one of the characters) this method precludes every possibility of artistic composition. The author's artistic perspective skips restlessly from one point to another. A confusing shimmer of changing perspectives sets in. The author loses control over the whole, he loses the omniscience of the ancient epic writers. He lowers himself to the level of the characters of his novel; he knew as little as the individual characters about their interrelations at a given moment. The pseudo-simultaneity of the descriptions transforms the novel into a chaotic play of colors.

Thus the continuity of the epic disappears entirely from the descriptive style. Inanimate, fetichized things are blown about by non-essential moods. The epic continuity is not just a listing of events in their sequence. The fact that the separate images and miniatures of the descriptive method reproduce a chronological succession of occurrences does not give the effect of epic continuity. The truly artistic reliving of the chronological succession of events in the genuine narrative art is expressed by very complicated means. The author himself must move at will back and forth between the past and the present, in order to really make the chronological succession of destinies comprehensible to the reader. And only the reliving of this chronological succession gives the reader the feeling of really moving, concrete, historical, chronological succession. This reminds us of the double narrative of the horse race in Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. Think of the skill, also, with which Tolstoy, in *Resurrection,* relates the antecedents of the relations between Nekhludov and Maslova, where the clarification of some fragment of the past brings us a step forward in the development of the plot.

The descriptive method brings human beings down to the level of inanimate objects. Thereby the basis of epic composition is abandoned. The writer using the descriptive method makes inanimate things the central issue of his compositions. We have seen how Zola pictured to himself the writer's approach to his theme. A complex of facts is the focal point of his novels: money, mining, etc. Now this style of composition requires that the essentially different manifestations of these complexes form the only divisions of the novel. In *Nana,* for instance, we saw the theater described from the view point of the auditorium in one chapter, from the view point of the stage in another, etc. The life of the characters, the destinies of the heroes are only a loose thread used to tie together and to arrange these self-complete image complexes.

In contrast to this false objectivity we have an equally false subjectivity. For from the view point of epic continuity little is gained by setting up as a principle of composition the chronological sequence of life, by compiling the novel out of the isolated, lyrically construed subjectivity of one person. The succession of subjective moods yields just as little epic continuity as the succession of fetichized objective complexes, even though they be puffed up to symbolic heights.

In both cases we have before us a series of images just as little connected in an artistic sense as pictures in a museum.

Unless it shows the conflicts in the interrelations among people, unless it puts people to the test of real action, everything in the epic composition is left to chance. No psychology, be it ever so refined, no sociology be it ever so pseudo-scientific, can create real epic continuity out of this chaos.

The leveling brought about by the descriptive method makes everything in such novels episodic. Many modern writers look down haughtily upon the antiquated and complicated interrelations used by the old novelists in order to bring the action into swing, upon the complicated interrelations among the characters of which the epic composition was made up. Sinclair Lewis compares the epic methods of composition used by Dickens and Dos Passos: "And the classical ethod, oh yes, it was a troublesome affair! Through an unfortunate coincidence Mr. Jones had to be rushed into the same post-coach as Mr. Smith in order that something very painful and entertaining might happen. In *Manhattan Transfer* people either don't run into one another at all, or they meet in a natural manner."

The "natural manner" means either that there are no interrelations between the people at all, or at most that these relations are casual and superficial. The people appear suddenly and disappear just as suddenly. Their personal destinies don't interest us at all, inasmuch as we know nothing about them. They take no part in the action, but, in their different moods, just pass through.

This surely is very "natural." The question arises, however; to what results does this bring narrative art? Dos Passos is a very talented writer; Sinclair Lewis himself is an outstanding writer. For this reason his opinion (given in the same article) of the portrayal of people by Dickens and Dos Passos is very interesting: "Of course Dos Passos did not create such eternal images as Pickwick, Micawber, Oliver, Nancy, David and his aunt, Smith and at least forty others; and he will never succeed in creating them."

A very valuable and honest confession. But if Sinclair Lewis is right about this—and he is right—what then is the artistic value of the "natural manner" of connecting up the characters?

(To be concluded in the next issue)

Translated from the German by S. Altshculer

Timofei Rokotov

The Plague of the Soul

H. G. Wells' Story, *The Croquet Player*

H. G. Wells' latest story, *The Croquet Player,* deserves most careful attention. The story, another of the author's characteristic fictional parables, has a realistic opening, but soon the material enters into fantasy, a Caligari structure so gruesome that the reader, like the character in the book to whom the story is told, is likely to be unnerved. However, the core of the fantasy is real substance. Within the book itself, Wells explains his resort to fantasy. Dr. Norbert, whom we may consider. H. G. Wells' spokesman, speaking of Dr. Finchatton, says: "He is troubled beyond reason by certain things, and the only way in which he can express them even to himself is by a fable."

The book opens with the Croquet Player explaining himself: "I missed the experience of the Great War by a couple of years, and my life has always been an extremely sheltered and comfortable one. . . My upbringing was unusually banal. . . . I have soft hands and an ineffective will. I prefer not to make important decisions. . . .I suppose there are still hundreds of thousands of people in the world as sure of all the material best of life and taking it in the same matter-of-fact fashion. . . . We are the floating cream of humanity."

H. G. Wells, again and again returns to him, the man who has succeeded thus far in escaping the torment of our time—the man whose chief ambition is a croquet championship, whose reading of the daily news is confined to the sport page and the crossword puzzle. He becomes a symbol of upper middle class England, in all its incredible philistinism, and paltriness. With great skill Wells shows how far from life this "cream" has floated; what an impotent pulp this class has become. And the impact upon it of the terrible realities of contemporary life makes the drama of this little book. But this reality appears in an unusual shape, as though shown "through bottle glass that distorts it all."

At a health resort, the Croquet Player enters into conversation with a certain Dr. Finchatton, a medical man who is recovering from his immersion in Cainsmarsh, a district lovely to the eye, but fatal to the nerves; something in the marsh air, or in the local traditions affects the mentality of the inhabitants. They become infected by a hitherto unknown fear; they have hallucinations of a return to the Stone Age; an archeologist's reconstruction of a cave man's skull, with the stone clubs beside the bones, become symbols of the dangers hanging over the civilized world.

The third figure in the story—the psychiatrist Norbert—interprets Dr. Finchatton's story. "Cainsmarsh," is the modern world. It is infected by a peculiar disease which H. G. Wells calls the "plague of the soul." "A contagion in our atmosphere. A sickness in the very grounds of our lives." Norbert explains: "The story our friend put away into a sort of fairyland and fenland is really the story of thousands of people today—and it will be the story of hundreds of thousands tomorrow. . . ."

Though fascism is not once mentioned in it, objectively the whole story is an impassioned indictment of fascism. Transparent is the identity of the modern cannibals who seek to drive humanity back to the Stone Age.

Dr. Finchatton's narrative is broken, by significant interpolations.

In the midst of his story of Cainsmarsh, and its infecting terror, Finchatton suddenly drops the words: "In that instant I understood why men are killed in Belfast and Liverpool and Spain." Later his narrative is again broken by the aside: "Little children killed by air raids in the street."

And this prepares us for the conclusion which H. G. Wells wants us to draw: "The future opens before us as an abyss that is going to engulf us."

However, H. G. Wells is not satisfied with merely pointing out the menace to the whole world of the enthronement of the cave man or, as we should say, of fascism; his story is a call to active struggle against the menace. The psychiatrist Norbert, we believe, expresses the idea of the author, who, to a certain extent, is a psychiatrist of humanity, when he warns the Croquet Player that he, too, must choose between being "either a driven animal or a stern devotee to that true civilization, that disciplined civilizaton that has never yet been achieved."

Through the lips of Norbert, it is Wells himself who raises his voice in passion: "Only giants can save the world from complete relapse, and so we—we who care for civilization—have to become giants. We have to bind a harder, stronger civilization like steel about the world."

The appeal is addressed to an insignificant person—the Croquet Player. The intention is ironical. The Croquet Player, representative of the ruling classes of modern Great Britain, exposes the futility of appealing to that class to save civilization.

To the terrified Croquet Player, the world suddenly seems to collapse beneath him. But he prefers to shut his eyes and lull himself into the belief that he sees nothing. He leaves Norbert on the excuse that he has to play croquet. Norbert tries to hold him back: "But what does croquet matter, if your world is falling in ruins about you?"

The Croquet Player answers: "I don't care. The world *may* be going to pieces. The Stone Age may be returning. This may, as you say, be the sunset of civilization. I'm sorry, but I can't help it this morning. I have other engagements. All the same I am going to play croquet with my aunt at half-past twelve today."

Like the hero in *The Croquet Player*, the ruling classes in Great Britain try to shut their eyes upon inexorable reality, try not to see the fact of fascist aggression. H. G. Wells' parable is an indictment of the ostrich policy of the British bourgeoisie.

Unfortunately, Wells does not show us yet the forces, the class that is called upon to accomplish the historical task of saving civilization. But, to compensate, there is not a sign in this book of H. G. Wells' theory that civilization will be saved by the technical intelligentsia.

The great merit of H. G. Wells' story consists in the fact that it furthers the consolidation of all anti-fascist forces.

Translated by E. Levin

Alfred Durus

Peter Nikl

Where Children Hate Toys

Outstanding among the young emigrant, anti-fascist, German artists is Peter Nikl.

His metier is etching. He is a gravedigger of the bourgeoisie. He cuts into his copper the significant features of our times. His graver is sharp and pointed like a floret. He does not merely prick, he graves, with a sure and practiced hand; with a few cuts and fewer strokes he deals mortal blows to the object attacked.

Look for instance at his faces of the landowning nobleman Kokeritz, the Hitler Sturmfuhrer, the German fascist factory manager. They are the faces of terror—faces which to describe as human would be an insult to humanity. The dehumanizing of these hideous faces could not be more complete.

They are specters whose portrayal reminds one of the hellish figure of Breughel or Hieronymus Bosch. And yet they are exact copies of reality, the pure essence of reality, as convincing and true as they are repulsive.

These are not caricatures in the ordinary sense of the term. They are far from being merely distorted delineations. They are the portrayal in pictorial form of the unadulterated truth about a type characterized by a bestiality that no wild animal, however savage, could attain.

Expressive and overpowering also are the etchings whose subject is the misery and destitution of the workers, especially the sketches of sweated women and children in the Schleswig home industries. The profound humor of the great German proletarian engraver, Heinrich Zille, seems to be resurrected in one of the Nikl etchings. In it a woman working on Christmas decorations says: "I wonder will we get a chance to sleep on Christmas."

Nikl seems to have kept in mind in his work that he must avoid too premeditated a characterization of his types, too intentional an emphasis on misery such as may give the appearance of a caricature.

As an etcher we learn to recognize in him a late descendant of Albrecht Durer; as a satirist he continues the work of George Grosz in an independent and original way. This linking up of Durer with George Grosz is a characteristic feature of Nikl's work. He thus unites organically the best German artistic traditions with a socialist internationalism appropriate to the times.

Storm Trooper

Communist Underground Worker

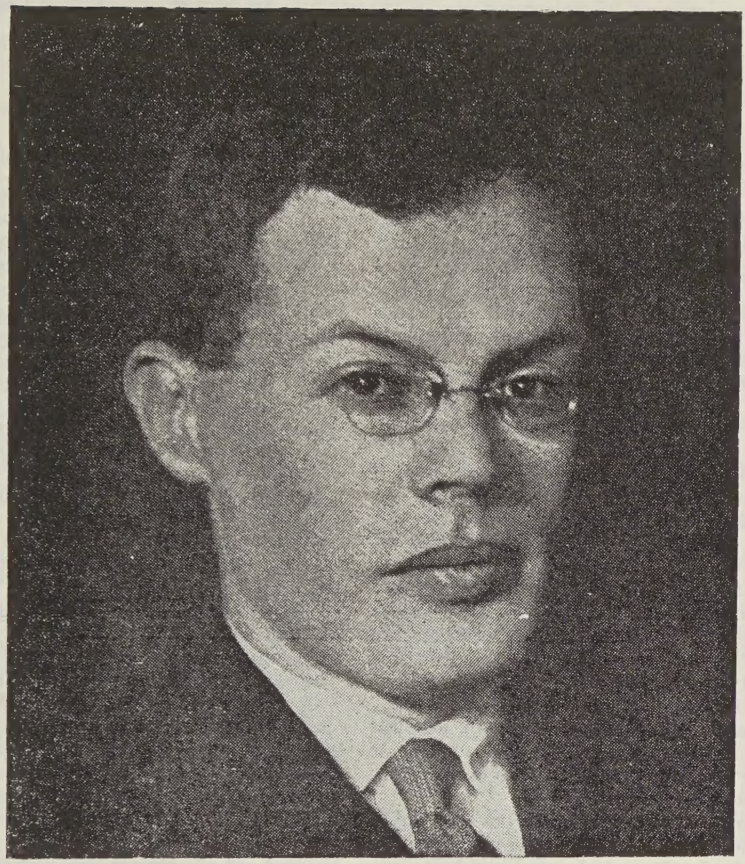
Peter Nikl was born in Heidelberg on October 4, 1896. He studied painting in Dresden, Berlin and Amsterdam. Later he specialized in etchings. In 1925 he took up a teaching post at the Gorlitz School of Art and later the directorship of the Graphic Department of this school. In 1928, he came before the German public with large collections of etchings. At the end of 1931 he organized in the Berlin "Jury-Free Art Exhibition" a large exhibition, "Modern Engraving in Copper, Wood and Stone" to which all well-known German engravers contributed.

East Prussian Landlord

Formerly there were engravings by Nikl in all the most important German museums. We say formerly because when Hitler came into power they were removed; a ban was placed upon them; and they were held up to public ridicule as examples of Marxist art.

In 1934 engravings by Nikl were shown at the International Exhibition of Contemporary Progress held from June 1 to November 1, 1934, in the Art Institute of Chicago, and were there awarded a prize.

Translated by N. Goold-Verschoyle



Death of Ilya Ilf

Ilya Ilf died, April 13, 1937. He was forty years old. He had been a victim of tuberculosis. He was born of a poor Jewish family and became a worker at an early age. He was at various times an electrician, bookkeeper and manager of stables. He met Eugene Petrov, when he joined the staff of the *Gudok*, a railway workers' journal. A warm friendship between the two ripened into one of the most continuous and successful collaborations in literary history.

Ilf's very first works, humorous articles and sketches in the Soviet press, were marked by the satire that characterized his mature work and may give him an enduring place in literature.

His published works, all written in collaboration with Eugene Petrov, include *The Twelve Chairs*, *The Little Golden Calf*, which met with an international success, *How Robinson Was Created*, a collection of sketches, and finally, *One Story America*, a book covering Ilf and Petrov's tour of America, the tour that proved fatal to Ilf.

He was not in good health when he set out. In America he became worse. Their plans included a 6,500 mile tour by auto, across America, including—since they wished to see farmland and villages and small towns—some rough going. Though his illness took a turn for the worse, Ilf undertook the tour which, as it turned out, overstrained him. He never fully recovered from the exhaustion of the trip. He died shortly after his return to the Soviet Union.

His readers numbered millions in the Soviet Union. Grief over his death almost reached the proportions of national mourning. He also had the affection and respect of his fellow writers.

CHRONICLE

SPAIN

On the Cultural Front in Spain

The war news from Spain throws into the shadows the struggle being fought on other sectors of the anti-fascist front, especially in the struggle for culture, and against that backwardness and ignorance on which the forces of reaction in Spain have depended for centuries to maintain their domination. The extent and the success of this cultural work is due to the fact that the reforms introduced from above are in line with the forward movement of the masses.

The following is a typical instance.

The masked "B" train now carries not only machine guns but a library of 150 volumes, including classics and works of modern writers. In lulls in the fighting the men educate themselves. Study circles have been formed on the train in which the more advanced help the others. The illiterates are being taught to read and write. The Madrid non-party paper, *El Sol,* recently published a letter from one of the soldiers of the "B" train, Julio del Campo, giving an account of the cultural work on the train, which is a sample of what is being carried on throughout Republican Spain.

All traces of the old army of the bourgeoisie, writes Del Campo, have disappeared. The light of culture is being brought to the soldiers of our people's army. We are fully conscious that books are important as well as rifles in our struggle. We are fulfilling the slogans of our Communist Party: "Not a single illiterate shall be left among us!" "War to the death on ignorance!"

Similar reports come from all fronts. *Mundo Obrero* frequently publishes correspondence from the front lines. Not only soldiers are made here but educated citizens of a free country. A great deal remains to be done in this field, but striking results have been achieved in the course of a few months. A correspondent arriving on the Siguenza front on pay day in one of the regiments, saw twelve men make their mark instead of signing their names. The officer in command proudly showed the correspondent the page for the last pay day. It carried fourteen marks instead of twelve. Two illiterates had since then learnt to write.

In Carabanchel, Julio Lopez, secretary of the local organization of the Communist Party, told the correspondent that by the end of the war there would not be a single illiterate in the army. Considering the scale on which this cultural advance is being carried out in the front lines one may assume that Lopez's forecast will be realized.

The hunger of the masses for knowledge and culture is directed into organized and systematized channels by the able and energetic leadership of the Ministry of Education headed by the Communist, Jesus Hernandez. The Ministry has formed special cultural detachments recruited on a volunteer basis from among members of the Spanish teaching profession. The program followed by these detachments includes not only instruction of illiterates, but also instruction in mathematics, geography, history, etc., in a manner adapted to the development of the soldiers. Further, all this is integrated with political education. This work is actively carried out on every point of the front except on the actual firing line.

But if such seething activity is to be found on the very battleground, it is not difficult to imagine the intensity of the cultural work behind the lines. Everyone is studying, children and adults alike. Study circles are replaced by schools and other educational institutions. New courses of study, with the most varied syllabi, intended for all types of students, are continually being organized; courses for illiterates, for people who have left school prematurely, for people who have passed out of primary and secondary schools and who wish to complete their education.

The old system of teaching in the schools has been entirely superseded. It is hardly necessary to say that religious education has been done away with. But, as a consequence, the text book problem has become acute; nearly all the old text books were soaked with church doctrine. Apart from this the supply of the old text books is entirely inadequate to meet the enormously increased needs. The Ministry of Education was naturally unable in such a short period and in war time to bring out new text books to meet the requirements raised by the cultural reforms of the republic. The Ministry therefore encourages the lecture method of instruction. At the same time, foreign text books, considered suitable, are being translated into Spanish, as quickly as possible, and printed in large editions.

The demand not only for text books, but for books of all kinds is enormous; and it will be a long time before the Republic is able to fill it. In the meanwhile, lending libraries are being formed at all the intermediate schools.

An interesting scheme was adopted to deal with the teacher problem. The People's Front government dismissed all former teachers; then examinations were held to which both the dismissed teachers and new candidates were admitted. These examinations were arranged on the one hand to ascertain the professional qualifications of future teachers in the schools of the republic and on the other hand to test their political loyalty to the regime of the People's Front. To the honor of the Spanish teaching profession it must be said that the great majority successfully passed the examination and the Ministry of Education now possesses an impressive army of teachers for its cultural campaign. At the same time a special institute has been opened for persons showing an aptitude for teaching.

The figures of the State budget published in the *Gaceta de la Respublica* indicate the importance assigned by the Republican government to the cultural uplift of the people. For the Ministry of Education, 496,559,668 pesetas has been appropriated, more than for the War Ministry (407,000,000) the Ministry of Home Affairs (290,000,000), and more than for the Ministry of Agriculture (111,000,000). The only ministry that has been assigned a larger sum is the Ministry of Public Works (668,000,000). Among the items covered by the appropriations are 50,000,000 for new school construction, 14,000,000 for equipment, 10,000,000 for salaries to supplementary teaching personnel, 10,000,000 for the liquidation of illiteracy.

The remaining items are to be devoted to strengthening and improving what has already been attained. In particular, measures have been introduced for raising the living standard of teachers, the latter having formerly been paid the starvation wage of seven pesetas a day. According to the new budget teachers are guaranteed a fixed salary of 4,000 pesetas a year.

Also the first Spanish Workers' Institute in the history of Spain has been founded. Here the more capable children of workers, peasants and lower paid brain workers are prepared for the university. Students gain admission by a special examination. The requirements are high. The State guarantees board and lodging. At the same time the student's family is paid a sum equal to his wages when working. Students are thus enabled to devote themselves entirely to their studies. They spend most of their time, outside of lectures, in the institute library.

At present the Institute has no more than 140 students, since the only youths now able to enter are those under recruiting age. But these 140 students are fully conscious of their position and responsibility as the future cultural vanguard of the Spanish people. The correspondent of *La Vanguardia* had a characteristic conversation with a student of the Institute, Pilar Medranos, a sixteen year old girl, formerly a dressmaker, who bore signs of great suffering in her face.

"I promised," she said, "over the body of my dead brother, to fight and avenge him and it seems to me that my revenge must take the form of studying twice as hard as before. I consider that in so doing I am fighting against fascism."

Pilar Medranos' brother died at the front in order that the former dressmaker might have the way opened to her to the highest forms of culture. Today gifted children of the people are to be sent to foreign universities at government expense. The Ministry of Education has assigned 8,000,000 pesetas in budget estimates for this purpose, for, as Ramon Ramirez (who edits the organ of the Teachers' Trade Union, *El Magisterio Espagnol)* has said, "Culture knows no national boundaries."

Thus a country, a short while ago starving and illiterate, is forging its way through bloody battles against the fascist descendants of the inquisition, to heights of cultural progress hitherto undreamed of.

FRANCE

A new Film by Jean Renoir

Avant Garde, organ of the French Young Communist League, carries an interview with the celebrated producer Jean Renoir, who is preparing an important new film, *The Marseillaise.*

"Right now," said Renoir, "I am working on a film called *The Great Illusion,* the scenario of which I wrote in collaboration with Charles Spaak. The famous American producer, Erich Stroheim, is also taking part in it.

"I and my friends feel the need of producing a film which we shall be able to offer as a creation of the People's Front to set against the many films which have nothing in common with the real France. The best subject would undoubtedly be episodes from the present day: our victories, strikes, etc. This would be magnificent, but the production of such a film would involve delays. We therefore decided to take the days of the French Revolution. We have no desire to present in our films, women with wild eyes and flying hair. Many historians' of the last fifty years, it should be said, have worked hard at distorting the revolutionary type, so that it has become good form to show revolutionaries as ill-educated and slovenly people. In this respect we shall bring about a little revolution. Our revolutionaries will be dressed as decently as you and I.

"We intend in our film to show, also, that in the mouths of some people the word 'patriot,' has a rather strange ring. We shall show how the so-called patriotism of the upper classes has not been proof against their anxiety over their purses. It must not be forgotten that in the Duke of Brunswick's army [1] there were some 6,000 emigré aristocrats. It is well known how the upper classes met the Prussion soldiers with flowers. It does good from time to time to show films representing things in their true light.

"We shall make it our chief aim in this film to represent 'men in the street,' the rank and file of people taking part in the revolution.

"We are not going to attempt the storming of the Bastille. In such scenes much depends on the scenery and in this respect the Americans, who are richer than we are, can score points over us. We shall content ourselves with the taking of a castle in the provinces. Although we give the chief roles to rank and file participators in the events, there are two historical figures in the film, Robespierre and Brissot.

"The picture will end with a scene at the battle of Valmy. In this connection it is good to remember that an international brigade consisting of Belgians, Russians and Germans fought on the side of the sansculottes under the command of an Austrian colonel who got his military training in the army of Frederick the Great.

"The final scenes of the film, which show the triumph of the revolutionary army, will inspire the spectators with optimism and energy.

"The film will be ready in time for the International Exhibition. The sum of 30,000,000 francs required to produce it will be raised by national subscription."

POLAND

Henryk Sienkiewicz as "Traitor"

The ruling clique in Poland, anxious to please their "friend and patron"—fascist Germany—have carried out a campaign against the works of Henryk Sienkiewicz who, until recently, was regarded as one of the greatest national writers of Poland, "a herald of the Polish nobility" and so forth.

The first step was the removal from school libraries of Sienkiewicz's famous novel *Crusaders*. This novel describes Poland's and Lithuania's struggle with the Germans, ending with the defeat of the German troops by the Poles, Lithuanians, Ukrainians and Russians at the battle of Tannenburg.[1] The novel is a vivid disclosure of the intrigues and artifices of the German Crusaders who strove to enslave Poland and Lithuania under the mask of a religious crusade.

By removing this novel from the school libraries the Polish Ministry of Education have given proof of their complete subservience to their "German friends." It is not necessary to speak of the bewilderment caused among the Polish intelligentsia and the masses of the people by this ministerial ruling.

However, in spite of the unfavorable impression made by this action, the Ministry of Education recently ordered two stories by Sienkiewicz, *Yanko the Musician* and *Bartek the Conqueror*, to be removed from the school program. *Bartek the Conqueror* was removed for the same reasons as *The Crusaders;* it is a powerful presentation of Germany's oppression of the Poles. *Yanko the Musician* tells the story of a ten-year-old peasant boy, passionately fond of music, who is beaten to death for daring to play, in an outburst of inspiration, on a violin not belonging to him.

In connection with the removal of these two stories from the school program the reactionary *Weczer Warszawski* writes: "In this unexpected change in the school program one can see the beginning of the campaign proclaimed by the military authorities directed towards the liquidation of culture-bolshevism, disseminated by certain classes of people in the schools, and in our cultural life in general."

Thus Sienkiewicz, on account of his story, *Yanko the Musician*, has been classed among the propagandists of culture-bolshevism.

The campaign against Sienkiewicz is taking a curious form. The publicist Sigismund Wasilewski in an article in the Polish magazine *Mysl Narodowa* affirms that Sienkiewicz was "surrounded by masons." The American journalist MacMillin, writing from Warsaw, having apparently been supplied with the necessary "information" from "authoritative Polish sources," describes Sienkiewicz as a Jew.

Translated by N. Goold-Verschoyle

1. The German army that invaded France to put down the revolution.

1. Not to be confused with the battle fought during the World War. The earlier battle of Tannenberg was fought in 1410.

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