YURI YANOVSKY

THE HORSEMEN

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Yuri Yanovsky (1902-1954) occupies a special place in Soviet Ukrainian literature. Few writers managed to portray the Promethean post-Revolutionary era with such poetical intensity, romantic spontaneity and stylistic diversity as he did in his main work *The Horsemen.*

Written in 1932-1935, this novel grew out of Yanovsky's experiences during the Civil War and his novel *The Four Sabers* (1930). The latter work epitomizes the writer's concept of "concrete romanticism," which is perhaps best described in Yanovsky's own words: "A condensed story, an extract from many swings of a saber is a song. A synthesis of many deaths is one death in the song. The essence of many lives is one life in the song. A shadow of the struggles of thousands of men is the struggle of one man in the song."

The Horsemen is much broader in concept and range of artistic devices. Alongside the romantic élan and ballad quality of *The Four Sabers,* it has the distinctive features of an epic. Opening with a scene of brutal fratricide — a class cross-section of the Civil War — the novel rolls on to portray the driving forces of the war, its known and unknown heroes, and the burning aspirations of the people for freedom and a new, happy life.

An established classic today, the novel was berated in the 1930s and 1940s for a variety of "faults" — from "nationalist sentiment" to indulgence in the pathology of war. The same fate befell Yanovsky's last novel *Peace* about the ordeals of World War Two and the painful rise of Nazi-ravaged Ukraine from the ruins. His plays were more successful with the official critics.

The rediscovery of Yuri Yanovsky, which began in the late 1950s, still continues. A proper evaluation of the highly innovative work of this writer and its place in Soviet literature is still to be made.

YURI YANOVSKY

THE HORSEMEN

A NOVEL

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РОМАН

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CONTENTS

THE DOUBLE RING

Sabers raged and horses ran riderless; the Polovets brothers did not recognize each other, and the sun glared down from the sky. The jabbering and din called a market to mind, and dust swirled as though stirred up by a herd of cattle. Then everyone scattered over the steppe and Overko emerged victorious. His black hood flapped on his shoulders. "Come on, boys, let the blue blood flow!"

The dust was settling. Some of Andriy Polovets' men had been lucky enough to escape. Others raised their hands in surrender only to have them chopped off. They raised their dust- and sweat-caked faces to the sky and had them slashed with sabers. Then they fell to the ground and gnawed the earth, choking on their agony and despair, only to be hacked to bits at random or trampled by horses.

The two detachments had clashed on the even steppe at Kompaniivka. The sky rose from the horizon in towers of blue. It was August 1919. The detachment of General Anton Denikin's * White Volunteer Army was headed by Andriy Polovets. Overko Polovets led the troop of Chief Hetman Simon Petlyura's ** Mounted Cos-

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* Denikin, Anton (1872-1947) — Russian general; organized and led counterrevolutionary forces in the south of Russia

** Petlyura, Simon (1879-1926) — Ukrainian nationalist; led opposition to Bolsheviks, was defeated and fled to Poland

sacks. The steppe pirates had grappled together broadside on and whirled in a sultry storm on the flat steppe. It was an August of unheard-of intensity.

"Over here!"

Tall steppe men were led over, and heads rolled like watermelons. Underfoot was a watermelon plantation, and horses stopped to eat the crushed fruit. Some of the men screamed dementedly and inaudibly as if in a nightmare, and others went down like so many young elms, losing all their bark and leaves as they fell.

"Just try and escape now!"

Sabers swished, bone cracked, and then Andriy was led up to Overko.

"An officer? Whew — is it you, brother-mine?!" Overko called out.

Andriy raised his head and shoved his wounded hand through the front of his tunic, staining it with blood.

"It's me, you miserable Judas!"

"So did your generals do you any good?"

Tall as he was, Andriy grew taller still; Overko was playing with his hood like a girl with her raven braid. They were both tall and broad of shoulder, with predatory beaks and gray eyes.

"Do you want to live?" asked Overko. "Think of the sea splashing at our Dofinivka and good old Musiy Polovets standing on the beach looking for mackerel through his field glass — remember the field glass you brought Father from the Turkish front?"

Andriy unbuttoned his tunic and raised his wounded hand high as if calling for help; but he was only trying to stop the bleeding.

"Here's a fine thing," Overko's men called out. A horse screamed in pain, spinning in one place. Sweltering heat fell on the steppe, and the blue towers of the southern sky stood on the horizon.

"You crawling Petlyurite scum, you," Andriy spat out. "To peddle Mother Russia to the Galicians! We've already beaten them in the Carpathians; we want no Austrian yoke on our necks!"

Overko laughed, winked to his Cossacks, and signaled a lad who had whipped out his sword against Andriy to hold it. The lad began to poke at a watermelon, annoyed. The swelter was getting worse and worse. Andriy did not put down his arm; the blood flowed freely into the sleeve, and he was ready for anything as he stood there before his brother Overko.

"I wonder what you're thinking about," the victor inquired. "Odessa or Ochakiv?"

"I'm thinking about our father and what he said a long time back..."

"The *maistro's* * starting to blow," Overko interrupted him as he gazed to the southwest, "and it may drive the rain here yet."

"And the words he said a long time back: 'There'll be no end to the family in which brothers live in harmony.'"

"Here's a fine thing," Overko's Cossacks called out. "He's got more blood in him than a bull! I hacked at him but good, and so did you, by the Holy Cross. Now what's Overko going to say? 'Kiss your precious life goodbye,' that's what!"

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* *Maistro* — southwesterly Black Sea wind

"A fine thing?" Overko echoed. "Ours is a large family, men without number and three more studs beside you and me to keep it growing. A family's just a root, and the nation comes first, no matter how you look at it; so if you're up against the nation, let this family weep and brother kill brother!"

"Here's a fine thing," the black hoods called out again, and Andriy paled like a piece of cloth bleaching in the sun. The steppe was getting much too hot for men and horses, and the *maistro* was about to start blowing from the southwest.

"Forgive me, my family, for not keeping harmony. A family can decline and die out, but the nation must stand. Forever and ever, amen."

"I curse you with all of my Russian heart for Mother Russia, great and indivisible from Warsaw to Japan, from the White Sea to the Black, I curse you as a brother in the name of all our kin, I curse you and despise you in my dying hour..."

"Finish him off, for goodness' sake!" Overko shrieked, and Andriy staggered and fell to the roar of the victors. The *maistro* blew out of the southwest, and the sky towered motionlessly above the steppe.

Down by the sea, old Musiy Polovets paced up and down the shore, looking for some wind or wave through his field glass, searching for net bobs and thinking of his son Andriy. "It's a good field glass you brought, Andriy." Over the sea rose the silhouette of the re-enlisted warrant officer of the Imperial Russian Army, selfless fighter for the True Faith, Czar and

Fatherland and hero of Sarikamish and Erzerum.* But a boat was heading ashore, skimming from wave to wave in time to measured rowing. A puff of cloud eddied above Odessa to the west, and no one but old Polovets and perhaps the experienced fishermen rushing for shore could tell that it concealed growling thunder and flashes of lightning. The boat was clearly visible now. The old man lay down on the sand and took another look, level with the sea. There were five men in the boat. And it was the *Swallow*, a vessel he knew well. One of the men was without a hat and standing aft. The description checked on three points. There would also be the password, "Have you got any green mackerel for sale?" and the answer, "You can never get enough, can you?" The old man went down to the water, rolled up his pantlegs, turned the boat around, stayed the stern and pulled it ashore. The boat beached. The men jumped out. The passwords were exchanged and heavy packages unloaded, reminding the old man of his son Panas' smuggling days. "What have you got, dynamite?" "Something even more powerful!" his guests replied laughing.

One of the men, his other son's friend, recognized the old man and said with a grin, "So Ivan's fighting the Whites and you're fishing, eh, old guard?"

"Guard, eh. I'm a fisherman, in case you didn't know."

"Chubenko, tell him that from now on, he's with the Red Guards whether he likes it or not."

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* Scenes of battles between the Russian and the Turkish armies in World War I

Ivan's friend took old man's hand. "Look, we've outsmarted Denikin's men and outsailed the French. The press is all here, complete with the type — workers of the world, unite!" And he smacked the old man's palm so hard, the empty shore rang.

The underwings of the cloud over Odessa stirred in the gathering wind. The sea turned black. Old Polovets listened intently to the sound of waves lapping against the rocks.

"The sea's rumbling... There's going to be a bit of rough weather. A *maistro*'s broken loose in the mountains across the sea."

"The *maistro*'s broken loose somewhere," said Overko Polovets as he gazed out across the steppe enclosed by the blue towers of the sky. His black hoods had gotten down to rummaging through the butchered enemy's pockets. A yellow and blue flag flew from a lance stuck amidst the shambles, and the southwester was picking up over the steppe.

The storm started unwinding from afar. It stood upright like a spindle and blossomed under the sky, a curved-out column of dust obscuring the sun, then slid down the highway, tore into the watermelon field, roared across the battleground, sending caps and shreds of uniforms soaring, men tumbling and horses shying away, broke against the mountain of horse and human flesh, hit the earth in a cloudburst of lung-clogging dust, and was carried away, bending like rain under the *maistro*'s driving force.

The Cossacks sneezed and brushed dust from their uniforms, horses neighed, and suddenly,

horsemen under a black banner sprang out from around the woods and fanned out, letting their *tachankas* * forward. "To arms! Into the saddle! Makhnovites! Machine guns!" But the *tachankas* swiftly pushed past the flanks, four-in-hands gobbling ground beneath them, carts jumping into the air like unclean spirits, and machine guns rattling away Shots flickered dimly through the dust. Searing heat tore at the breast. The *maistro* blew, hot and fitful. Wave after wave of cavalry rolled over Overko's men.

"We're winning — let them have it!"

"Hold fast!"

"Hurrah!"

Wild whistles; the rumble of distant thunder.

"Beat them to a bloody pulp!" Panas Polovets' order rang out.

Machine guns stopped, and suddenly all the shooting was over. The *maistro* evenly carried the dust away. One after another, Overko's black hoods fell under the hooves of galloping horses. Sabers glittered in swinging hands. And the fighting ended as abruptly as it had begun.

Overko Polovets sat on the ground by the wheel of a *tachanka*, his head split open. He pressed his hand to the wound, staring at his feet. He was not dying yet; his fine health would not flow out through the wound. Panas Polovets walked over and peered into his brother's face, pistol in hand.

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* *Tachanka* — horse-driven cart with a machine gun mounted on it; reputedly invented by Nestor Makhno, leader of anarchist bands in Ukraine during the Civil War of 1918-1920

"So this is where we met, little brother," he said, tossing back his hair which reached all the way to his shoulders. "Andriy's here too — funny, don't you think? And I was right there in the woods all along waiting for you guys to stop, and so you did, eh, one dead as a doornail and the other can hardly breathe. So what, do you still want a free Ukraine now?"

Overko did not raise his eyes. Up rode fourteen-year-old Sashko Polovets, grimy with gunpowder. "Hey, let me finish him off!" he said.

"It's Overko, you fool."

Sashko paled, jumped down from his horse, went up to his brother and lifted his head by the chin.

"Overko, my grief," he said in the voice of their mother, old Polovchikha.

Overko spat a mouthful of blood in his face and moaned.

"You blood-crazy Makhnovite butcher," he said softly, staring at his feet, "you're traipsing over the steppe with a knife in your bootleg while Mother Ukraine's weeping tears of blood."

Panas stood sturdy as an oak over him, guffawing; Sashko clutched and let go of his saber and wiped his brother's blood from his face.

"In the name of Nestor Makhno," Panas roared effusively, "I'll give you a fair trial. You'll be drowned in the sea, guilty of your blood brother's murder, and of supporting the Ukrainian state on the territory of Anarchy, Mother of Order, we'll chop off your head."

Overko spat out another mouthful of blood. The cloud in the west was growing ominously fast. The *maistro* had gradually changed to a

grego, its opposite, and now the *grego* was egging the cloud on, prodding it from all sides, knocking it together like a flock of sheep, and a muffled growl was heard in the distance. The sun scorched.

"Give me more water," said Overko.

His eyes drifted along the hedge of feet in front of him. Hatred welled up in him, but he checked it and said, "Do you still remember what Father taught us? There'll be no end to the family in which brothers live in harmony." Thunder rumbled; the rain was nearby.

"Ours is a family of fishermen, all tough as old leather and used to rough weather," mused Panas. "But a family grows into the state with all its rules and restrictions, while we here carry liberating anarchy to the world. So what good is family if you don't need any, if you need no state but a free association of free human beings?"

"Curse you..."

"Hold your curses: I, a free sailor of Nestor Makhno, give you a minute to think, so go ahead and chew it over. There's always time for dying — am I speaking the truth, boys? He could become one of us yet. After all, he's one of the Polovets fishermen, rough and tough as we goddamn come, even though he went to teachers college and played in their folk theaters. Am I speaking the truth, brother?"

"I curse you with my hatred as brother and with our rotten fate, you blood-guzzling degenerate Makhnovite butcher, I curse you in the name of God, the people, and the light of day..."

Overko did not look up to see his death, it flew out of Panas' Mauser and blew his brains

out onto the wheel. A streak of lightning split the cloud. Thunder struck. "It smells of rain, boys — mount up!" A high gray curtain fell a mile away where it was raining, clouds edged up to the sun, the steppe darkened. The earth was trembling, waiting for the rain. The *grego* blew evenly high above.

Pacing thoughtfully up and down the shore, old Polovets watched out for strangers through his field glass while the work was being ground out in a seaside cave. Chubenko was in charge there, working for three, kneading that press so heartily his friends barely had the time to feed paper into it. And paper there was aplenty, a whole heap that would do the whole coast for cigarettes. The leaflets were coming in different languages, for French sailors and Greek infantry, too, because who knew who'd be in Odessa the next day or what language they'd speak, so the committee had said to print enough for everyone, and orders were orders. The fisherman's keen eyes caught sight of a man walking down the shore from Odessa. In the field glass, the man resolved into a soldier. Another figure emerged from the steppe. In the field glass it, too, became a soldier.

The fisherman looked the cave over to see if it were camouflaged well, then went farther down the shore and started fussing busily around the nets hung out on poles there The soldiers were approaching. It was raining over Odessa, and part of it was covered by fog, and cruisers and destroyers lay puffing in the roads The soldiers were approaching. The *grego* sowed the sea with rain, and the patrol wasn't there

for some reason, or maybe it would come by car or cutter later. The old woman had gone to the market, because fish wasn't enough to live on. The soldiers were approaching. They walked with an even military step as though drawn by a magnet. Polovets felt his bony wrists, not knowing why. A man of medium height, he had always felt strange when his giant sons surrounded him like a pine grove. The soldiers were approaching. They were foreigners, and one of them quickened his pace. Polovets pretended he didn't see. What language will you speak with him? The man came up closer; he was dark and slim. What language will you speak with him? "Any green mackerel?" he heard. "Can't ever get enough, eh?" he answered without a second thought, his heart pounding fast and strong for joy like it had when he was young. He embraced the soldier. The sheer curtain of rain over Odessa hung lower, and the sea was almost black.

"We'll have to bury him," Panas said as he reined in by Overko's body. "He was a gutsy son of a bitch, after all." The rain pelted down in small hard drops. Two *tachankas* were stood a convenient distance apart, a blanket was drawn between them, and Panas himself took a spade and began to dig the grave for his two brothers. Sweat rolled down his face like birdshot; he was heavy and beefy, this fourth Polovets, a onetime merchant marine sailor and smuggler.

Sashko curled up on a *tachanka* by the machine gun, oblivious to the rain. He thought he felt his mother's hand tearing his hair, and there

were just the sand and the sea and nets drying on poles and all the time in the world to take a swim, and no need to fear a bullet... So out of reach, this, fisherman's life and the sea smelling so dearly, and why the heck had he come with Panas anyway... Panas treated him like some snotty-nosed punk; but all the same he wouldn't go back — cross his heart and hope to die — just because such was the accursed Polovets seed!

Panas panted and puffed, throwing earth out of the grave, playing with the spade as another would with a spoon.

"That's done. Now just let someone dare to say I've shown my family no respect."

And the funeral was held. The rain flung out its sails, and now and then a swell raced across the steppe and the rain came on harder, piercing the earth. Raindrops ran down Panas Polovets' face, and it seemed that he was weeping tearfully over the grave. All his men's faces were streaming with tears of rain, too, and it was frightening to see an entire military unit crying so bitterly. The rain would not abate.

Then a mirage loomed on the far side of the rain: the red banner of the Internationalist Regiment's cavalry squadron commanded by Ivan Polovets was unfurled in the distance. As the first shots rang out, Panas was up and in the *tachanka*, swinging the machine gun this way and that, Sashko passing him the cartridge belt. But the other carts scattered every which way and the horsemen dashed for him at once.

"Surrender! Put down your arms! It's the Reds! The Reds!"

There was nowhere to run; Ivan Polovets was herding them into bullets, and it was surrender or die. Panas burst into tears of impotent rage. He jumped on someone's horse but it fell under him.

He unhitched one from his *tachanka*, shouting, "Follow me, boys, Makhno's eagles don't surrender!" He tried to break through Ivan's flank and lost half his men. The rain poured unremittingly, and horses slipped in the mud. Finally Ivan pushed harder, and the Makhnovites gave up.

The rain showered its last drops and moved its host of clouds further, levying reinforcements of vapors great and small and rearraying its ranks, leaving the light, puffy, wispy clouds and cloudlets behind and keeping the dark, strong and rain-bearing ones as its reliable support and reserve.

Panas Polovets stood before his brother Ivan and his commissar, Herdt. All the bullets had missed him; hatless, hair falling down his neck, his mud-stained clothes a terrible mess, he stood, big and bulky, in front of his lean, spare brother Ivan.

"So this is where we met, Panas," Ivan said and exchanged a few words with Herdt. The prisoners were rounded up, and the victorious men of the Internationalist Regiment began to arrive from all directions. The sun peeped out, and the smooth steppe shimmered, the blue towers of the sky rising slowly in the wake of the lifting clouds.

Panas stood silently, gazing at the expanses of the sky. Sashko came over and slumped at his feet, his face ashen and twitching. "So Sashko's

here too," Ivan said sullenly, and suddenly, Panas yelled at the top of his lungs:

"You crawling coal-eating underground nit, you! Lenin's lackey, Communist flunky, whom do you serve, you commissar bastard?"

"I serve the Revolution and the International," Ivan said, "but I'll talk with you later." He exchanged a few more words with Herdt, walked silently over to the prisoners, and stared at them closely, examining every face as a checker examines machine parts for a hidden flaw, then paced there and back again and began to speak.

"Boys," Ivan said, "your service with the turncoat and bandit Nestor Makhno is over. Speaking to you is your Panas Polovets' brother, and we're both of us fishermen, and so are all of our kin. My words are plain and simple, but I trust you'll understand anyway. For now is the time two truths are settling their disputes on these steppes — the truth of the haves and that of the havenots. We are retreating before the bloody czarist General Denikin, fighting our way to Kiev, and still, we're beating the enemy without mercy even as we retreat. Here you are, too, and I'll bet there are not a few penniless fools who fell for false prophets' words among you. So we call on you people — for you and we are of the same miserable fate: Stand by our side to fight for the truth of the poor together! The village poor and the workers are with us, and we'll march to victory as one, three cheers for Soviet power and the Red Army, hurrah!"

Herdt gave a command, and a few men went off to the left and stopped. The rest headed into

the steppe in a throng. They just walked away slowly in a throng. All eyes were glued to them, and silence reigned. The throng moved farther and farther away; some quickened their pace, some trotted; and then one broke into a run, then a second and a third, and they all stampeded into the steppe like a flock of sheep, fleeing death, afraid to glance back. Then Ivan Polovets ordered the machine guns readied. At a signal from him, several machine guns opened fire and did not stop until the task had been accomplished.

Panas expected no mercy for himself: he had seen his men die, men he had hand-picked like seeds of grain, and the rest of them had simply ceased to be his. His childhood flashed through his head: salad days in the boat and moonlit fishing trips, and the sea's endless expanses, and the smell of Mother's dress.

"It's because my death is near," he thought, and spoke to Ivan the words he had heard from Overko: "I say, Ivan, two of us are dead as it is, and remember, 'There'll be no end to the family in which brothers live in harmony.'"

"It's a good family in which there are no black sheep, too. Some of us are honest working men, tried by misery and steeped in class consciousness, and some bushwhacking bandits and muddle-headed fools, our enemies, and their hired hands. So you see for yourself — the family breaks up, but the class stands, and all the world is with us, and so is Karl Marx."

"I curse you; I curse you in my dying hour!" Panas screamed in agony, snatched a small Browning from his tunic and put a bullet through his mouth. For a moment or two he

stood still, then began to rock and sway, curled up like a scorched leaf and crashed heavily to the ground, wet earth flying from under him.

"Shoot me too, then," the disgusting Sashko shouted at Ivan, "shoot, you bastard!"

"You dratted spawn of Satan, you," Ivan muttered as he grabbed Sashko by the hair — a gorgeous Makhno-style forelock tucked out from under the boy's hat — and yanked at it angrily. Herdt smiled.

It was hot in the steppe at Kompaniivka one day in August 1919. The *maistro*, the fisherman's wind, blew up and high pliant columns of dust swirled past. Then the *grego* brought on a long teeming rain, and in the meantime, bloody battles were fought, and Ivan Polovets lost three of his brothers "in blood but not in class," as Commissar Herdt put it.

CHILDHOOD

The Perekop plain, this Ukrainian Texas, stretches from across the Dnieper, south of Kakhovka, all the way up to Melitopol. Sands and virgin steppe straggle along the river from the southwest to the northeast. To the south are the Black Sea and the Jarilgach bay. The town of Perekop stands on a neck of land, which has, since time out of mind, served as the gate to the Crimea. Endless open spaces (at least on the scale of two human feet), bare plains without a stream or tree where villages and homesteads are few and far between, and where the large scorching sun moves across the sky and sets somewhere beyond the land, as though sinking into the sea. The sky is not dark-blue as on the other side of the Dnieper, but the delicate turquoise of Persian silks — the color of the Crimean sky over the infinite steppe.

This wild steppe has been a battlefield at the juncture of many an epoch. But this does not prevent it from bursting into bloom every spring and burning out in summer, being soaked with rain in fall and freezing in winter when cruel snowstorms rage and steppe men are conceived in snowbound huts. One of them was born in that boundless plain just a few hours' walk from Perekop. He grew on the steppe and was scorched by the sun and parched by the wind; and he was always hungry, because the hut he had been born in was a poor one, and the steppe was his first childhood memory.

A stranger is unable to understand how people can live on a bare empty plain, but little Danilko would steal out of the hut, leaving behind his baby sister, whom he'd been told to sit with. He would wander deep into that steppe which sprawled before him like a magic valley where grasses and flowers oozed a heady fragrance and even the sun smelled of beeswax when he held his hand up to its rays for a time then smelled it. How many different dainties he found in the steppe and ate his fill of... Then he strolled to his father, who was tending the master's sheep, a flock as big as an army, and was given a crust of bread with a tiny onion and a pinch of salt to go with it.

Many edible plants grew in the steppe; he only had to tell the good herbs from the bad, or he might wolf down enough henbane or toad's poppies to make him sick. Now crocuses, goat's beard, spurge (not the kind that grows on pastures), nightshade, and wild poppies were all scrumptious goodies and the steppe's welcome gifts. On the steppe, he could walk and ramble and follow his nose, then drop down, put his ear to the ground, and listen very closely to hear it rumble and boom. If he lay face up and peered hard into the sky where clouds sailed in the blue, he felt as though he were soaring high above the ground, pushing clouds apart as he flew, growing big and strong in the sky. Then he got back to earth and saw how many friends he had in the steppe.

There was a lark singing its heart out to its mate so high above the boy couldn't see it; an eagle hovering in the wind, barely stirring its wingtips as it peered down, looking for prey;

a stork striding through the grass like a land surveyor; a lizard, green as a leek, scurrying across a swath; wild bees buzzing along in search of pollen; a gopher whistling and grasshoppers chirping one and the same tune like the village fiddler at a wedding.

He was curious to know where the sun fell every evening. His feet were just itching to walk and walk across the steppe to the very edge of the earth so he could look down into the deep pit where lots of dead suns had surely piled up. He would be able to see how they were lying down there and what they looked like — sieves, frying pans or five-kopeck coins?

The little shepherd (who, by the way, might in time learn to be a shepherd's helper, then a shepherd's mate and finally, take the place of his shepherd father) drifted back home at dusk. Not far from home, he was met by a friend who told him how Mother had thrown a fit, because the baby Danilko had left on its own had nearly choked to death crying. Mom would probably give Danilko a few licks, but he needn't be afraid, the friend said. They'd go in to eat supper together, and while they were together, she wouldn't hit him very hard. And even if she did, it wouldn't hurt much once he'd eaten well anyway, so all he had to do was eat and keep calm. Thus they strolled into the yard and up to the hut, Danilo the Greatgrandson and Danilo the Greatgrandfather (like young, like old, people said upon seeing them together). Inside stood a low table with a royal feast upon it — white-bread *kvass*, so sour it set the teeth on edge, and barley scones.

And later, when he came to see Greatgrand-

father who slept out in the shed, Danilko wiped tears which seeped out of his eyes against his will, because Mother was mean, and she sure had a hand. Any other mother would have gotten over it a long time ago, but not his, oh dear no. "Did it hurt a lot?" Greatgrandfather would ask. "Never mind, my boy — after all, she carries this house upon her shoulders and works like a horse. He who feeds, beats... And your father's a lazy bum and a drunkard. He's probably going to get chucked out of the herdsmen again one of these days. Then he won't crawl out of the tavern at all... He's proud man and won't bow to anyone, but that's something you have to do — bow to people and show them respect. You can't live any differently unless you want to be like me — naked as the steppe and not a crumb of my own." But Danilko was already sleeping the sleep of the grass after a good day of swaying in the wind. Snuggling up to Greatgrandfather, he was warm and deaf to all those wise thoughts which never made anyone any wiser before his own time anyway.

All the springs of his childhood then merged into one, and Greatgrandfather rose above the ground like the keeper of steppe lore, a sorcerer who knew all the secrets of spring. Every spring that came was livelier and lovelier, and it was announced by the *babak,** a wind that awoke on St. Eudokia's Day** before dawn and whistled away like a marmot indeed.

Greatgrandfather made a point of noting the direction of the wind on that day. If it blew from

* *Babak* (Ukr.) — marmot

** March 14 (March 1 by the Julian Calendar used by the Russian Orthodox Church)

the Dnieper, there would be good fishing; if it came from the steppe, it was good for the bees; from the south — for crops. When you saw your first swallow, you had to throw her a handful of earth and say, "Here's for your nest, Mother Swallow." The swallows don't fly away to warmer climates, they sleep through the winter at the bottom of the sea, a river or well, hooking themselves down there with their tiny claws.

Then primroses peeped out of the earth for a few days, and Greatgrandfather told Danilko to pick them quickly and trample on them, repeating: "Lord, help me trample them before I go, then I'll live another year or so" If a body was slow about it, he was sure to land in his deathbed before next spring, so Danilko thought primroses to be a magic cure-all and intoned this rhyme whenever someone was seriously ill. When they recovered, he repeated after the grownups: "Look, he's fit enough to trample primroses!"

And the first thunder was a vernal alarm bell that made the earth thaw out like there had never been any winter at all. The girls raced to the nearest well to wash up and dry their faces with a red sash for beauty, while the lads grabbed hold of the corner of a hut and pretended to lift it for strength. Only after the first thunder would the villagers dine out in the yard and not in the house... O First thunder of spring!

On the Day of the Forty Martyrs *, when day and night are of equal length, every pupil was supposed to bring the teacher forty small bagels. Wheat larks with tiny beaks and a pair of

* March 22 (9)

wings were baked in every house, and all the children ate them with relish at school. But poor Danilko's lark was of barley meal, and Mother had cried, because she hadn't even a handful of wheat flour in the house. Danilko did not understand why she was so unhappy and showed off his lark all around school, trilling and making a nest for it. And its wings were so neat — oh, Mother could make a lark, Danilko's was the nicest of them all! A pinch of a herb as sweet as honey was baked in its tummy, and his rich classmates even offered a big store-bought bagel from town for it, but nothing doing! Who'd ever seen a lark like his in town?

Danilko put the lark on his desk and glanced at it every now and then as he wrote in his notebook, and his pet sat there by the inkpot gazing at Danilko's painstaking work out of the corner of its eye as though it really were alive. The whole thing ended with Danilko trading it for five wheat larks. He carried them home in the bosom of his shirt, happy that they would all taste of a wheat lark now: Mother, Great-grandfather Danilo, his drunkard father, he himself, and even little Vustya would suck at one, because she had no teeth to chew with yet.

On Warm Alexis' Day *, their neighbor put his beehives out in the sun, and the bees went mad with joy. The poor little things crept out of the hive weak and barely alive, but then they warmed up in the sun, took to the air and buzzed around till the boy's eyes began to smart from

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* The Day of St. Alexis, the Man of God — March 30 (17)

watching them; and before long, swarms were circling above the apiary, and the neighbor burned incense. Soon after came Mid-Lenten week when Lent broke in half and, the old people said, you could even hear the snap.

It was cold in the hut. No bread, just unleavened scones and pickled beets. Mother stood Danilko in the corner and prayed to God with him, saying her prayers for Danilko to repeat after her, while Danilko strained his ears, waiting for Lent to snap in two, but no snap ever came, and the prayers were said to the end. Then he prayed alone and with genuine inspiration, saying the prayer he loved best and which Greatgrandfather Danilo had taught him: "God help me find some potatoes, a little milk, and a sound mind."

On Willow Sunday * morning, Greatgrandfather came home early from the morning prayer and whipped Danilko from his warm bed on the stove with a pussy willow branch that had been blessed in church, repeating: "Willow dear, strike a tear! It's the tree, it's not me, in a week Easter'll be. May you be tall as the willow, healthy as the water, and rich as the earth!" The blessed branch was put away behind the icon because it was the best remedy when a child started to yellow and wither and waste away. Then Mother would boil the branch in water, pour the infusion into a trough and bathe Vustya in it under a full moon out in the yard, whispering this incantation: "Moon Adam,

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* Palm Sunday. In the Russian Orthodox Church, pussy willow branches take the place of palm fronds

whom they call Abraham*! Pray grant flesh to these bones, or take them back if you won't." And Greatgrandfather Danilo laughed, standing in the moonglade in the middle of the yard: "What do you want her to be, a cow?"

Of an evening, the village girls sang spring songs, sitting together in a circle or row, and the lads did not dare sing along, for it was girls' business to praise spring. So they went: "Now spring is there, lovely and fair, the roofs are adrip, the roofs are adrip, the roofs are adrip. The young Cossack's horse smells a trip, a trip, a trip." At work and at leisure, in the master's field and on their own, sprinkled with tears, on an empty stomach and after a meal, the girls would sing and praise the spring after the hungry winter, and the lads would throng about them, for such is the steppe-man's nature that he sings wherever he roams. There is hardly anyone else in the whole world who sings the way he does...

Amid grueling work and singing passed March and came April, the month when everything blooms — the white birch and snowdrops, the golden lychnis and downy silvery-lilac anemones. Cherry orchards stood lost in reverie like white lakes shimmering on the hot steppe. When the rain fell in large drops, beating down the light dust, the earth was steaming and dirty-faced, hungry children scampered on the street, singing: "Rain-o, jolly rumbelow, I'll cook you

* The moon was sometimes invoked as 'Adam' and 'Abraham' — the final phase of an ancient Slav moon worship in which the moon became the progenitor of the human family. The moon was prayed to for the health of children

some borsch, bring it out on the porch, the pot will tumble and thunder rumble!"

But Danilko was rocking little Vustya and could not run out into the rain. When in the world would she die, so they could put her on the bench * as if she were a grownup? Great-grandfather Danilo would read from the Psalter for her (as though she could understand a thing from that leather book) and Mother would make tasty pies with mashed potatoes or beans in memory of her soul even though it was so small and mean, because a human soul wouldn't fly out of the house until it was remembered properly.

And how sweet the dead smelled when they were put on the bench and Greatgrandfather Danilo read aloud from the Psalter and the sun reached through the window with its hands, and the candle flame twisted on the wick like a bee around a flower... The house smelled of the dead man and pinewood shavings, and the boy could sit in a corner and stare at the stranger on the bench for a very long time. The corpse's face was as yellow as God in the icon, his soul hovering above him. The boy tried hard to keep an eye on the glass of mead standing on the icon shelf for the soul to sip from. Time passed, and there was less and less mead left in the glass, but still Danilko hadn't seen any soul. So he wondered what it really looked like — a lark, swallow, butterfly or maybe a big nippy bumblebee?

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* By tradition, the dead lay in state, as it were, on a bench (peasant cottages generally had no chairs, only long benches)

The bean pies were so tasty and soft! Danilko ate with inspiration, conscious that they were for remembering that dead uncle; his wife was so dumb, she plain forgot how many pies she'd given him. He could easily have taken a tenth if he'd wanted to, and she wouldn't have said a word, not the way she was wailing away with her women neighbors. It was fun when somebody died, because they never could do without him, Danilko. Greatgrandfather was called to read from the Psalter, and Danilko came along as his helper. So thus they earned their bread. It was spring, and a warm rain sprinkled the dust down, and Lent rolled along like a hazelnut.

Now in White Week * when houses were plastered and whitewashed and yards tidied up, Danilko's mother, poor though she was (they did not even have a milk goat), would sweep and scrub and clean her yard, then paint the newly whitewashed hut all over with a bright polka-dot-and-rose pattern. Then she fluttered around the stove with her brush all day long: no one in the village could paint a stove as cleverly as she.

All the village knew that and called her, Rihorikha, to decorate their stoves. She painted them the way her late mother had taught her — blue and red, black and ocher, and yellow and green — and reminisced about her faraway home village near the town of Zolotonosha, from which she had been taken in marriage. Amid these chores White Week passed, and Easter came; it was associated for Danilko with Mother's tears, because Father would not crawl

* Holy Week

out of other people's homes, drinking with anyone who stood him a treat.

And there wasn't ever a man who wouldn't stand that shepherd Rihor a drink! Rihor might swear at the rich farmers he drank with, spin yarns about the clergy and their goings-on, or shout and curse his wasted life, but no one ever broke him off, knowing that any moment now, Rihor would strike up a song, and after hearing him sing, no one cared for anything else.

Danilko went and found his father and led him home. On the way, he called Father every name he had heard Mother call him, but Rihor just staggered on, trying his best to walk straight, and cried the whole road home. Some of the boys taunted Danilko about his father the drunk, but then Danilko propped his father against the nearest gate, chased after the scoffers, and plunged into a ferocious battle, fighting on his own against two or three of them. He returned blood-stained and tattered, but victorious, having gotten the enemy to respect his father's drunkenness and taken all their Easter presents away as trophies to make his triumph complete.

At home, Mother and Greatgrandfather were sitting at the table with a scanty meal to break the long Lenten fast. Sternly and solemnly, Mother handed Father the blessed Easter cake. The drunkard cut it in four as if making the sign of the cross, then sliced it up and handed the slices out to his family, as master of the house. Tears rolled down Mother's hard face and dropped onto the bread. Danilko sat tightlipped and grave after all his battles for family honor. Greatgrandfather's eyes flashed fire from under

his bushy brows, and Easter Sunday was a real curse for Danilko to whose lot so many fights fell on that joyous spring holiday as would do any other boy for a whole year. He confiscated Easter cake and eggs from rich milksops, swung in the swings of those who observed neutrality, and fed blessed cake crumbs to mice to see how they would turn into bats from committing such a sin.

So Easter seemed not like a real holiday in the bright procession of spring days. It was much better on Remembrance Sunday *, when all the villagers gathered at the cemetery to remember their dead. Every family would bow to deceased fellow villagers first, then sit down at the graves of their own dead and drink "so they will lie in peace and wait for us" and "so they will sleep easy and hold this earth," passing the glass from old to young. When Father struck up his favorite song about the coming of the Doomsday, people came over to listen from all over the graveyard and beggars hobbled along, "pray don't begrudge us your grace, good woman." Mother sat sad and distant by Grandmother's grave; "and Doomsday is close at hand," sang Father.

Greatgrandfather Danilo would down a whole glass and chase it with an onion. "Come Doomsday, everyone must die, and rich men kiss their wealth goodbye," he intoned, and all the springs of Danilko's life melted into one, the vastness of the even Tauride steppe filling his mind always to remain there — an indelible picture of childhood. Then passed St. George's

* First Sunday after Easter

Day * and May burst into bloom. This was the month when grasses and herbs grew for the farmer's hay and medicine.

Fields were blessed at that time, too. Priests in beautiful vestments with gold-thread embroidery swung their censers, and Danilko was a choirboy. They went singing, "That three good rains in May give us bread for three years and a day," and blessed wells and springs, water and earth, taking note of where the cuckoo had first called ("not from a bare tree, God forbid, or the harvest will be bad"). They collected St. George's dew, which was curative for the eyes, and put it into assorted little bottles. Cowherds and shepherds fasted that day to appease St. George into keeping the wolf, whom they believed to be his hallowed dog, off their herds. Thus came May, and blackthorn blossomed generously.

So one day Danilko and Greatgrandfather Danilo left the village and headed dead south and straight into the steppe. The blue distance melted before them and fluffy puffs of cloud swelled above the skyline and the distant sea like a blooming cherry orchard at the end of the earth.

Greatgrandfather walked away with a sprightly step, singing an old Cossack song about a gentry schoolboy: "Now here comes a scholar of good Polish stock, in fine leather pants off the rump of a hog." Danilko rambled along, watching the white cherry trees run riot in the sky. They had grown so big and heavy they hung over the fence, and now and then boughs

* May 6 (April 23)

of white blossom were snapped off in a clash of two contrary winds blowing high above.

Danilko shut his eyes in the face of the enormity of the world as he strolled beside his ancient greatgrandfather who walked on and on with his sprightly step, singing old songs and telling Danilko proverbs and the names and uses of every flower and herb they passed.

"You've got to do a great deal of walking to see the world, my boy, and when you've seen it you won't feel like dying. Our family have always used their feet a lot, my grandfathers and their fathers too, so I guess you'll also roam around till you've walked your legs off... Oh, we've always been a restless lot. Some of us were Cossacks. Some tilled land. In time they all settled down on the river Psiol and named the village Turbai *. Always stirring up trouble, seething with rebellion, rousing others... and that greedy pig of a landlord who lived nearby took it into his head that he'd make them his serfs. But Catherine the Great had a Zaporozhian Cossack named Hritsko Nechosa ** for a lover, so he warned them what was cooking. Our troublemakers insisted that they were entitled to the privileges of Cossacks, but the landlord stole their birth papers from the church and burned them, and the court couldn't restore their rights to them So they killed the landlord and beat up the judge and defended themselves for five years in a row until troops lay siege

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* Turbai (Ukr.) — troublemakers

** The nickname of Grigory Potëmkin (1739-1797), Russian statesman and favorite of Catherine the Great, in Ukrainian folklore

to the village and death was looming over them. But this Hritsko Nechosa was a sorcerer like all Zaporozhian Cossacks; he slipped through the siege and led the villagers out. He took them to the free lands — on the Dniester and here at Perekop. We come from those Turbai people, too, and never have we been anyone's serfs and neither will you.

"'They stood the poor wretch in the corner to pray and went to the tavern their sides to sashay...' Today is the day Vernal Nicholas * blesses the water; let's go and steal a glance to see him walk on the waves and bless the sea, sprinkling it with holy water so people could bathe. He walks up and down the sea, sprinkles it with holy water, and if anyone happens to drown at this time, he'll pull the poor beggar out, dry him, and take him to the tavern to boot. 'The Lord is my Shepherd, if it be Thy will, lead us not to cucumbers but to sweet melons,'" and on and on he went, and the old Cossack song seemed to have no end at all.

They walked all day long, and all the land they crossed belonged to the landlord ("he's as rich as he's mad"), and finally they saw the sea and had a bite to eat with some fishermen on the shore. "No bread to match a fisherman's, is there? What do you know, sowing your buckwheat... Look, this gaffer's so dark and withered you'd think he's walked across the other world, too! Let's have a drink, grand-

* May 22 (9). There are two feast days of St. Nicholas in the Russian Orthodox Calendar of Saints, in the spring and fall; the vernal one, St. Nicholas the Thaumaturge, was the patron saint of sailors, among others

father, St. Nicholas himself is walking on the sea today while we're lying around on the beach here."

Greatgrandfather Danilo drank his glass while the sun was setting unhurriedly, and a heavily laden schooner was sailing west. Greatgrandfather regaled the fishermen with his anecdotes and ancient drinking songs. They listened with mouths agape. "My word, the devil himself wouldn't get the best of this old gaffer!" Danilko was amazed, too. He had never seen his greatgrandfather like that before and had never realized how much vital energy still remained in that rawboned body. Twilight was closing about land and sea, and waves lapped against the shore, and it smelled of the boundless evening steppe.

The fishermen went to bathe and swam far out to sea. Greatgrandfather kept to the shore and Danilko splashed beside him, diving into the salt water till he was blue in the face and had to run and jig about the beach a good deal to warm up some. Greatgrandfather scooped out a snug hole in the sand, nested Danilko in it and remained standing over him. He stood there gazing at the countless stars and peering into the darkness. It seemed he was rising into the dark-blue sky as though he couldn't see his fill of it; and then Danilko fell sweetly asleep, squeaking like a puppy in his dreams.

It was late morning when he woke up, but Greatgrandfather was still standing there like the night before. The shore was empty — the fishermen had put out to sea. "Let's go, boy," Greatgrandfather said. "Today is Simon Zealot's Day when healing herbs must be picked. We'll

go look for the king of all herbs on an empty stomach, so you will tread this earth for many long years, for soon I will stand before my Maker."

Greatgrandfather's voice was solemn and seemed to be coming from a long way off. They left the shore and struck off deep into the steppe. In the ravines, gossamer steam was still rising from the grass. A large steppe bird was circling about under the dome of the sky. Not a breeze, not a whirr; finally, they came upon what seemed to be high ground. It was hot and torpid in the sun. Danilko was carrying an armful of herbs, roots and flowers which smelled richly of sweet bread. "Now here are Turkish marshmallows for you, Danilko," Greatgrandfather said, bending over a flower. Suddenly his knees buckled, and he fell and hugged the earth as though he had heard some terrible secret. His white beard poked out from the grass, and his filming eyes blinked at Danilko. "Tread the earth, my boy," he whispered, and died.

Then Danilko looked around him and felt really lonely for the first time in his life. As if blown by the wind, he broke into a mindless run under the broiling sun of the steppe. The distance between Greatgrandfather and Greatgrandson was growing fast as if Nature were suddenly in a hurry to restore her balance of old and young.

THE BOAT IN THE SEA

The *tramontane* * was blowing from the land — it was January or February, and the bay had frozen for a good hundred meters out; the waves were picking up, black and white-capped on the horizon, and as they raced to the shore against the wind, it knocked their white caps off. Right by the shore, the ice had been broken by a mild storm a few days before, and there was every sign that a real one would come roaring in before too long. Standing on the shore was old Polovchikha, Musiy Polovets' wife, tall and stern as they sing in sailors' ballads, her clothes flapping about her as if she had turned to stone.

Odessa could be seen across the bay: blown by the *tramontane*, it rose on the coast like the hulk of an old schooner which had been stripped of her sail to be equipped with a motor. The city was living through a regular seaside winter; winds from every direction did not bypass it and sometimes, thick, muggy gray fogs would come around. This time too, a sudden fog had rolled in from the sea and screened the city from sight. Polovchikha stood perfectly still as fishermen from the artel puttered around by their boats, and the sea washed chunks of ice ashore. The cold pierced to the bone, and the *tramontane* brought on broad sheets of slashing rain. It was a seaside winter and a winter fog, and

* *Tramontane* — a northern wind on the Black Sea

behind its screen, a storm was bellowing out on the sea already, driving ever higher and mightier waves, and the Odessa lighthouse lit up, sending out its warning in rays and flashes of red and green.

Polovchikha was looking out for her husband whom she had seen off to sea that morning. Her wind-blown heart was ready to burst out of her breast, and the cold and the rumble kept creeping from the sea, which roared and scowled, clutching her Musiy in its grip. She did not show it her fear as she stood there silently by the shore, tall and severe, and it seemed to her that she was a beacon of unextinguishable light.

"Oh Musiy, Musiy," she wailed in her thoughts, "you put out to sea and the brine has washed away your trail. If only I could see that far, I'd upturn it with my own hands and guide you back to shore. Blow, wind, blow, drive the dirty weather back and this fog, too, and I'll keep standing here, lonely as can be, and even if I turn into a tree, I'll wave my branches and rustle my leaves to show him the way home."

After what seemed an eternity of time, the boat peeked out very far away in the sea. Barely visible amid the waves, she hid behind the humps of water for long moments, flicked out for a twinkling and plunged down as though into an abyss. She fought the storm breast to breast; only the rustle of waves reached the shore, and it was frightening even to look at that boat, forlorn as a man amidst mountains of water. The sea rocked and flung her over the waves, and she cut through them like a knife, and the cold spray was scalding hot, and their wet clothes froze to their bodies, but the fisher-

men would not give up — Musiy and some stranger were rowing slowly but steadily shoreward.

Polovchikha could not keep her eyes off them; her heart was one with the boat. Some fishermen from Musiy's artel were arguing further down the shore and children came running from the village. A crowd had grown on the beach, and standing to the side, the old steppe woman Polovchikha looked boldly on as her man battled the waves. The fog billowed above the sea, and she was numb with cold.

"Trying to row here, they are," somebody offered, "but how can we help them in this storm?" The younger fishermen dashed to their boats, but the older ones barred their way. "Keep your wits about you, boys — you'll sink the boats and wind up feeding the crabs. Our artel's so poor, and Musiy's our leader. He'll tear our heads off if we lose these boats — providing he gets out alive."

Old Polovchikha saw an oar snap, and the boat began to spin around and around in full view of the shore. A wave slapped her broadside. Another hugged her, tossed her up, and capsized her. The boat went under. The fishermen rushed to the boats and pushed the *Swallow*, the pride and joy of the artel, into the water. Four giant men clambered aboard and oars flew into the air, for the boat had to saddle a rough, enormous wave at once. But the *Swallow* was thrown on her side in an instant, and broken ice rammed into her bottom. Water swept on board, dumping the fishermen. Yet they struggled to rescue her. The waves knocked them together, and the ice slashed their heads, but they hung onto the

Swallow like grim death. Then a lasso was thrown to them; they tied it to the boat, and the *Swallow* was pulled ashore.

Musiy's boat could still be seen drifting amid the waves, keel up The crowd of fishermen took off their hats, and it was then that they saw a hand wave from the sea. Someone was swimming shoreward, pushing through the ice floes, striking out with measured overhead strokes. Waves carried him back into the foggy sea. But the swimmer plodded shoreward.

A giant fisherman stepped forth with a bundle of rope in hand, downed a glass of pure spirits, strode into the water, and turned blue in the face at once, but the rope was being reeled out from the shore as he swam on toward the man. Hunks of ice slashed across his face. But he made it to clear water, the rope slithering after him. The other man was clearly breathing his last as he lay there on his back, being tossed every which way. The giant fisherman kept swimming.

But the man wasn't dying: he had lost consciousness from the cold, and when he came to, he struck out shoreward with all his might again. The meeting occurred between two waves and the swimmers could not catch each other's hands for what seemed like ages. Waves broke them apart again and again; but finally, they succeeded. The rope then strained toward the shore, taut as a string, and scores of hands grasped it, pulling it all at once. The swimmers rushed to the shore, breaking the crust of ice, choking with water. The stranger crawled onto the shore but could not haul himself onto his bare feet. Polovchikha recognized Chubenko. He

was frozen through and through, except for his heart which still pounded in him, hot and alive. The fishermen grabbed him under the arms to support him. "Comrades," he managed to get out, "I'm crying for the hero of the Revolution who freed me from a French prison ship." Everyone walked away, but old Polovchikha remained standing on the shore, as tall and severe as they sing in sailors' ballads.

The upturned boat could be seen out in the sea where her husband Musiy Polovets had died. He had lived not a few years on earth, and she had suffered no evil from him. He had been a real fisherman; so why was it always that way — the young escaping and swimming to shore, while the old went under? A boy came running from the village. "Granny, Grandfather Musiy won't be back, because that man said Grandfather Musiy dived two times and was gone, and that man dived after him and bumped his head against the boat, so Grandfather Musiy won't be back."

The shore was empty now, the fishermen gone, and no one was surprised that old Polovchikha did not so much as stir. She was holding a quiet wake for her man, the *tramontane* blowing about her as if she were carved of stone. The storm did not abate. Ice floes crashed together, the fog crawled to the shore, and the Odessa lighthouse kept blinking red and green.

Polovchikha was thinking about her maiden years in Ochakiv. Schooner owners had asked for her hand in marriage, to say nothing of the masters of skiffs, caiques, motor boats and yachts. She was of good fishermen's stock and of good steppe blood, and she was taken in

marriage by a village fisherman by name of Musiy Polovets, a plain-looking lad who stood a solid head lower than she. For such is love, and such are the ways it pairs male and female in nature. Polovchikha had stood beside her man in their struggle for fish and survival; she had stood by her Musiy and borne him a houseful of sons.

The boys grew up by the sea, too broad of shoulder to feel at ease in the smallish cabin. But Polovchikha kept her house on a tight rein, standing at the head of the family like a rock in a storm.

The sons grew up and went their separate ways: Andriy took after his uncle Sidir, also a good-for-nothing and God knows what, while Panas brought her smuggled kerchiefs and earrings, brandy and silks, and Polovchikha put it all away in a chest, fearing for his life. His birth had been difficult, and he became the dearest to her. She would go down to the sea at night, because she thought she heard his oars splashing and she had to go rescue him from the chase. Overko was an actor and played in the amateur theater along with the local Greeks. He read books in Ukrainian. His uncle had paid Overko's way through college, and though he was no good as a fisherman, she felt sorry for him, too, because he hadn't been heard from for so long. And nothing from Panas either. Andriy must have been killed, too, because she'd seen him under a nuptial crown * in a dream.

Ivan alone worked in a factory, making arms

* During the Russian Orthodox wedding ceremony, gold crowns are held over the heads of bride and groom

and revolution, and Musiy hid their rifles, even though the French were in Odessa. True, there were revolutionaries among the French, too. One day two of them had come for leaflets and scared Musiy to death.

The upturned boat was rocking in the waves, the storm raged on without respite, and suddenly it seemed to Polovchikha that the boat had drawn closer. When the sea had washed the boat ashore, Polovchikha would have to go and drag her out because the artel couldn't fish without boats, and they would be grateful. Inexorably, implacably, minute by minute and meter by meter, the boat drew closer to the shore.

Polovchikha was waiting to salvage communal property. She went down to the water, and a wave splashed her knee-high. The boat had edged up closer still; the old woman could hear the ice beating against the side and see the tarred bottom and the keel sticking out of the water. Waves splashed over the flattish black bottom. Suddenly Polovchikha's heart went cold as she saw something dragging after the boat — something in a pea jacket bubbling on the water.

The woman stared, fearing what she might see. The sea was laying its tribute at her feet; it must have been washing Musiy Polovets' body ashore for her to weep and wail over and bury in the fishermen's cemetery, where only women and children lay and men only dreamed of lying, for they were always laid to rest in the sea deep beneath the wave's green sail.

Polovchikha stared in fear. She wanted to shout and call to her Musiy. The waves lashed

at her legs, and ice scratched her feet. The boat was almost within reach. The boat was nosing ashore, and pebbles rumbled under the waves in a shallow spot. Polovchikha was going to haul the boat out first then cry over her husband; she could already see his body in the turbid water; her heart was aching, her hands did not feel the weight of the boat. And then she heard a voice. She cried out, for it was her husband's voice, so exhausted and so dear.

"Our artel's a poor one," the old man said, "and it's no good throwing our boats around. I'm the head, so I had to rescue my boat, didn't I? Chubenko made it, I'm sure; he's strong and stubborn as they come. He didn't want to leave me till I dived under the boat, but still he shouted and dived, looking for me."

Old Polovets stood in the shallow water, boots in hand, then tossed them to the shore and busied himself with the boat. Polovchikha rushed up to help him. The furious *tramontane* was freezing them to the bone. The stormy sea raged by the deserted beach, and Odessa loomed vaguely through the fog like the hulk of an old schooner.

And the Polovets couple set off home. The *tramontane* blew hard into the faces, the sea churned behind them, and they embraced tenderly as they walked home together, stepping out confidently as one — the way they had walked through the whole of their lives.

THE BAREFOOT BATTALION

Lindens bloomed with suffocating vehemence, cobblestones roasted and the sun blazed down in a southern sort of way on that new July noon in 1919 in Kherson — a town of clerks, fishermen, and Greek exiles. The fragrance of the blooming lindens was incredible, and marching, flowing through the streets like a river was a two-hundred-strong partisan detachment from nearby Oleshki. This was the barefoot battalion of Comrade Shved.

Comrade Danilo Chaban, its young commissar, was in the lead, and the lindens bloomed so profusely, so lavishly the town seemed to be floating in a thick shimmering fog. Behind the men from Oleshki, a sailors' detachment stepped out with a steady beat of nailed shoes — black pea jackets, bell-bottomed pants, and streamers flying from sailors' caps. And in front of the men from Oleshki, the garrison brass band struck their cymbals with all their might. The bandmaster twirled his baton and adjusted his pince-nez, and the cornetist of townwide fame, who had recently cast his lot with this battalion and would become a hero before long, was holding the local Tchaikovskys and Rimsky-Korsakovs in awe.

The lindens bloomed, each tree a boiling fount, their inebriating spicy scent soaring above Kherson. Marching in front of the band was Comrade Shved — that brave sailor and commander of the barefoot battalion — in per-

son. His rowel spurs clanked, and his long nickel-plated cavalry sword rattled over the cobbles: like any other sailor, Shved dreamed of the cavalry and was certainly making headway in that imposing genre of the military profession.

Oh, Nineteen-nineteen, year of defeat and triumph, gory year of historic battles and inhuman carnage, horrible strain and unbending will, crucial, pivotal, sleepless and dear Nineteen-nineteen! And now Kherson, too, stood drowning in the sweltering July 1919 heat and linden blossoms, and the Whites were just across the Dnieper. Kherson was like a peninsula in that hostile sea, and General Denikin's troops were rolling implacably on to Moscow. Great battles loomed in the distance, and the all-pervasive, ecstatic solemnity of the Kherson lindens was whipped to a fevered pitch. Oh, Nineteen-nineteen, so accursed and so dear!

The bandmaster waved his baton as inspiredly and grandly as if he were conducting all the orchestras of the Revolution and the scent of the Kherson lindens, too. The band blew dutifully into their brazen monstrosities. Commissar Chaban led his barefoot battalion of Oleshki sailors, who step by step and bit by bit had been forged into a regular unit and had even been issued old army uniforms of khaki complete with yellow cartridge belts specially for that day. So they were keeping pace well and setting their feet down firmly.

The day before, Shved had taken a long time mapping out the path of the march and ordered a tract of the town's parade ground cleared of burs, sticktights, broken glass and other sharp

foot-cutting objects so his battalion could march past the guest of honor — an old Bolshevik veteran of czarist penal servitude — in a properly ceremonial fashion, placing their bare soles flat on the ground without as much as a glance below. The Oleshki Red Guards Battalion was eager to show that apart from fighting the Whites in the simple peasant way, it could also put anyone to shame at marching.

And so the Kherson garrison with Comrade Shved in the lead was making its way to the square, where on a platform stood the revolutionary committee and the visiting guest who had shuffled in irons from prison to prison half his life. He had attempted escape and been caught more often than not. His lungs had been crushed by autocratic boots, his kidneys squashed by rifle butts, and his eardrums had burst from police fisticuffs; his eyes were myopic from the murk of punishment cells, and his bones rheumatic from wonderful life in czarist jail.

As he stood there on the platform, the sun beat down, the scent of linden wafted across the parade ground, Oleshki and the marshes and meadows stood out in a blur on the far shore, and fields of sedge and osier showed verdant above the river. And then Shved, the band, the red velvet banner, and Commissar Chaban at the head of his barefoot battalion — which had covered itself with glory in battle but admittedly knew nothing of troop reviews — made their glorious appearance.

The townsfolk surged closer to the parade ground, eyeing the defenders of the Revolution. The band marched, blowing and glowing, blar-

ing and glaring, and the hot blue sky rose higher and higher, becoming lighter and clearer.

While the old Bolshevik was making his speech, sending the Kherson garrison into battle for the Revolution, the Whites began bombarding the town from Oleshki, and the spectators ran home to hide their cattle; the parade continued in due course. Shved inconspicuously kicked a sharp splinter of glass out of the way as he went; his partisans marched on like saints. but the sailors who had come from Mikolayiv broke into a run for some reason, although no one had given them any such order. Then a shell howled and burst near the square, and they dropped to the ground right where they were running.

Unfazed, the bandmaster bashed out a polka, and the band forgot its fear in the heat of playing. "Attention, my eagles, my brave Guards!" shouted Shved, saluting to the best of his ability with his sword. The sweltering day smelled of steamy linden leaves. "Three cheers for the Guards!" the old Bolshevik called out. Squinting in the sun, he breathed the wonderful Dnieper air, and the explosions seemed like a salute to new life and freedom to him.

The men from Oleshki went marching on, stoically tolerating the burs and bombardment and thinking of sweet kitchen smoke, White officers' kid boots, Shved's sword, and other things military.

The bombardment persisted; shells fell in the streets, gardens and houses. Meanwhile, the sailors decamped in the direction of the railway station. Once there, the said sailors feigned an

impending mass meeting, demanding an engine to head for home. Obviously, they were no sailors at all but port riffraff, unaccustomed to fighting against cannon. They had probably joined up just to get smart navy uniforms.

They were neither beaten up nor disarmed as frontline discipline dictates. Nor were they marched off to the rear, because there was no rear to march them off to. Instead, they were lined up in the garrison yard and fiddled with until the counterrevolutionaries, who had wanted "Bolsheviks without Communists and commissars," and the ringleaders of that masked-ball detachment were found out. They turned out to be ex-officers who smelled of the White Guard and hired ex-cons who were handy at armed robbery and murder. In a word, the so-called sailor detachment was to have used the first opportunity to join the other side. The scent of linden was everywhere; it was a day of unheard-of repercussions. The White batteries in Oleshki alternately ceased and resumed bombardment. The garrison's only six-incher snapped back.

Standing by the gun, Commissar Chaban observed Oleshki through his field glass. There, houses were on fire and mothers with babes in arm ran down the streets — wounded women and blood-spattered babes. He saw tiny hands raised to the sky from which the implacable shells were falling, and he saw many things that couldn't be seen through a field glass, no matter how powerful.

"We're firing at our own homes, Comrade Commissar," the gunner said with a wan wry smile. "Three hundred rounds."

Commissar Chaban rode on horseback to the

Dnieper, where preparations for a night expedition were underway. Shved himself was inspecting the caiques which delivered farm produce from the local villages. He picked out the best boats and hired them, carefully taking all the necessary precautions.

Toward night, the shelling stopped. From the reed jungle returned the two small tenders, *Thunder of Victory* and *Aurora.* Sandbags, machine guns and brave crews on deck, their captains were real sea dogs, even though the town's consciousless petty-bourgeois element called them frog-squashers and croakers.

The evening was breathtakingly limpid and generous with its July beauty. Copious rains had fallen in June; they had done nothing to help the crops, but the grass and weeds had run riot. The year Nineteen-nineteen roared in subterranean streams, and evenings fell flat upon the Dnieper with all their might — evenings pitch-black and violet and smelling of the river, while the river smelled of the tremulous grasses of the night, osier, and smoke. The smells reminded Commissar Chaban of his childhood and youth, and a pain was born, and fear for his life was growing within him, while words of books yet unwritten were being recorded in his brain.

The croaker captains reported the feats their corsairs had performed that day to Shved. Several bell-bottomed mugs from the fake sailor detachment were marched on board a cutter and taken to some empty beach down the river to be disposed of by firing squad, as the tribunal's verdict read. From the town, the evening fragrance of lindens was oozing down to the

water — the unsettling sweet odor of mad exaltation.

Halfway between the villages of Oleshki and Bare Wharf were the firth and the town of Kardashin, where, according to some eggplant growers from across the Dnieper, the Whites had only a small outpost. They could take Kardashin at night, advance to Oleshki by flanking movement and approach the enemy before light with the aid of St. Nicholas, the fishermen's patron. So they pushed off in the darkest hour, some thirty boats in all, commanded by Shved in the lead boat, with Commissar Chaban bringing up the rear.

They sailed across the Dnieper and down its branches. In the reeds, a swarm of mosquitoes set upon them, biting for all they were worth. The partisans silently crushed them on their faces, bare feet and sailor and fishermen's leathery necks. Shved sat at the prow, holding his Hussar saber between his knees. It was nearing midnight, because suddenly there were fewer mosquitoes; the pilot led the boats through a maze of rush-choked branches of the Dnieper. It was muggy. Frogs croaked, reeds rustled, and fish splashed.

Commissar Chaban was bringing up the rear of the landing party. Following the Army Staff orders to conduct deep reconnaissance, the fleet dispersed in the darkness, heading for Kardashin; Shved's men were born experts in navigating at night without a chart or compass.

How many times in later years would Danilo Chaban reach out with his hand and mind to that July night — all the wonderful nights of his youth — as he would sit late into the wee

hours of the night, bent over a pad of paper, trying to catch some image which slipped away like the shadow of a fish into the weeds... But so far his boat slid behind a clump of reeds and into the Kardashin firth.

And an abyss yawned beneath her. Clusters of stars were flickering at an immeasurable height like silver dust and numberless tiny fires, red and green, vacillating in the unfathomable depths. The boat sailed on her own in the abysmal height of the firth, oars splashing gently. Suddenly they noticed that the battalion had vanished without a trace. They were all alone.

"We've lost them, and no mistake," the noseless boat owner twanged.

"We'll knock the living daylights out of you, so you'll know what navy discipline is all about, you rotten eggplant! Where the hell will we find them now? We'll sail right into the Whites' hands."

"Bear to the right, sonny, and by that willow there," a calm voice called from the reeds. "There'll be a branch in the river, and next you'll hit the main current."

"Did our boys pass here, good man?"

"They sailed down the other side," someone in the darkness answered. "Just don't throw those bombs of yours, or you'll scare all fish away, and I won't catch a tinker's damn. There aren't any Whites in Kardashin. They're waiting for you in Oleshki."

"Get a move on," Chaban ordered his men.

The fisherman's voice dissolved in the darkness. They groped around for the branch for some time, then found it; the boat owner got such a shove in the ribs that his teeth rattled.

The men plied the oars, and after a few minutes more in total silence and darkness, the boat softly touched sand.

They stepped upon the shore, came upon a hacked-up White, and realized that the banquet was over and the guests had walked away to wash their hands, perhaps. And all without a single shot or cry. Some time later, they met a living man who all but shot his revolver at them. He turned out to be the commander of a friendly outpost.

Shved had deployed his battalion as per regulations and led it on to Oleshki, where they would arrive in about two hours. Meanwhile, everyone at that outpost was to keep his eyes peeled and beat off the Whites when they rushed from Bare Wharf by way of Kardashin.

"You say we won't catch up with Shved?"

The outpost commander was scared and confused.

"Shved and I had hardly stepped ashore and squashed the Whites when all our boats took to the reeds. Now what am I supposed to do?"

Having explained what he was supposed to do, Chaban and his men got back into their boat and set sail for Oleshki in gravelike darkness which was about to break and let in the timid dawn.

Once again the mosquitoes came on — singing, ringing, buzzing, stinging, pestering, harrying and worrying the landing party's rear. They were a sure sign that daybreak would not tarry. The stars faded from the sky, a breeze rustled through the reeds, the mist wobbled on the water, and then the night paled. All at once, everything became ghastly and dreadful.

A rifle shot rang out hollowly from the shore; they even glimpsed the flash. The echo rolled far above the water and reeds. More shots flickered. One of the men was wounded. Danilo ordered them not to return fire but to bear harder on the oars. So they rowed with oars and rifle butts for dear life, bullets singing overhead. They careened into some branchlet, going all out. It took them some time to catch their breath. They wiped the sweat which had at once begun to trickle down their faces and drank water, scooping it with their cupped hands and a dipper. They had hardly had time to look around when dawn broke.

It swept across the sky, blue-eyed and rosy-fingered, and gently touched the willow tops. A July morning was rising silently, without theme or prelude, from the reeds and over Kherson. Light cascaded from above like a high waterfall.

Puffs of morning fog drifted along above the clear water, and then rifles and machine guns began rattling from afar as if on command. A big gun suddenly boomed. "Shved's led his boys in an assault," Danilo Chaban said, having made a rhythmic pause.

There was no need to hurry the rowers now — spates of shooting rang out above the water ahead of them. The shots were repeated and amplified by an echo. "The Mikolayiv sailors are landing," said Chaban, feeling genuine fear. But being a man of courage, he let none of it show.

Hand grenades exploded. Screams and shouts came from all around. Commissar Chaban's

boat sailed into the main stream to join the battle and fired broadside from all ten rifles.

Her captain was sitting aft, steering. The Mikolayiv squadron numbered just a few caiques — the rest had not even gotten to Oleshki: they landed en masse on a peaceable shore halfway down the river to sleep it off in the wheat and proceed to Mikolayiv by land. True, a handful of the boats had stuck to their orders and reached the target area. They were to have disembarked in some deserted place and kept out of the fighting until Comrade Shved had started his assault of Oleshki.

But they had felt like tasting of a real sea battle, so they disobeyed their new commander and set off all those fireworks. The sea battle that ensued was, as a result, somewhat different from those of Abukir, Trafalgar, Tsushima or Jutland, for here, only one of the adversaries was on the water, while the other controlled the shore.

Like all regular naval engagements, this battle had a sudden beginning and, unfortunately, an equally sudden end. The Mikolayiv men, made no attempt at maneuver under fire, looking rather like a bunch of operetta holiday-makers in their sailor suits.

From the shore, the Whites met the squadron with crippling rifle fire. In the parlance of the sea battles of old, this is what was happening: a corvette of the attacking fleet lost her fore and main and had her side pierced by an enemy cannonball. There was panic on deck, and the captain jumped overboard and swam for the shore. A frigate rammed full-tilt into a friendly

brig, and five masts with sail fell as though mown down. A swift-going clipper was knocked out of the fighting when it got stuck in the reeds. Only a smallish brigantine with the admiral and staff on board was offering gallant resistance.

So Chaban's boat gave up its futile attempts to check the runaway squadron and rushed headlong to the shore, shooting from all ten rifles.

Disorderly small-arms fire could be heard in the town, and there was no way of knowing if the White bastards were finishing off Comrade Shved's partisans there. The boat skimmed shoreward, and at the most critical moment, the Whites fled to the town, and the morning grew like a red ball of wool in the east. Suddenly everything was as light and easy as in a dream.

And then, skirting Oleshki by way of the shore to steer clear of the Whites and find out where friend and foe were and who was finishing off who, skirting that town of free sailors, fishermen, eggplant and apricot growers and retired old generals who flocked to Oleshki in droves to live out their days on dirt-cheap southern provender, Danilo Chaban and his men came upon two of Comrade Shved's partisans.

They were sitting on the ground, pulling soft kid boots onto their bare feet, two dead officers and a well-fed dog of an unknown foreign breed lying a little to one side. As they led Commissar Chaban to Comrade Shved, they told him that the offensive had been like the one at Warsaw: they'd hoofed it in a line through sand and steppe; there was no time to look down, and what could they see in that darkness anyway,

so sure enough they were fagged out and foot-sore; why, they'd even stormed Oleshki with all those burs in their heels.

"So we closed in on their battery, Comrade Shved waved his saber, and boy, did we yell, did we strike! One of those guns went off, though, but they never even put the cartridge belt through their machine gun. The officer shot himself right then and there. He had damned fine boots on, by the way. And the rest fired back some then turned tail. So we cut two bastards off — no harm in telling the truth, is there — and chased them into the water. Traded a couple shots, but no, they wouldn't give up, the curs, and that dog with them, too. So we fired a few more shots and went to collect the boots. But the dog wouldn't let us: he jumped for our throats. And boy, was he strong, damn his counterrevolutionary hide! We stabbed him to finish him off, no harm in telling that, and he tore at our bayonets with his teeth! Now what a fine-smelling morning in our Oleshki today, Comrade Commissar..."

Something sailed from around the corner, glittering with gold embroidery; it seemed that an archpriest in his festive chasuble was being led by the arms, and for a moment, the air even smelled of incense from the sheer surprise of this vision. But it was only a gendarmerie general, a doddering old cur living out the last of his bloody life in the salubrious climate of Oleshki, under the escort of two strapping sailors.

He was wearing a chamberlain's formal coat, its front and back lavishly sown with gold, while the collar was of sheer bullion. His trou-

sers had carmine stripes, and he was wearing a hat off some other general's head — all of gold, too, with a funny tuft of white plume. His chest, belly and back were studded with orders, ribbons and stars, which the sailors had torn off all the other Oleshki generals to pin on this one alone.

He was potbellied and bug-eyed, and he stopped, panting asthmatically. "Move on, Excellency," said the stately sailor.

"Where in the world are you taking him?"

"To his mooring anchor," the sailor replied as he egged the old general on with his knee.

Oh, Year of avengers and debt-payers, worthy year of reckoning and filling out the account book of the Revolution, distant year of living gendarmerie generals panting with asthma and fear... Year of never-found similes and tragic metaphors, love and death, throbbing hearts and unostentatious sacrifice, sweetly aching wounds and lofty class feelings. Oh, dear and elated Nineteen-nineteen!

"Oh, everlasting heart of man," Commissar Chaban said to himself as he walked home. On the way, he saw Shved standing in the middle of his yard, arms thrown around his ruddy-cheeked, buxom sailor's daughter of a wife. The yard was filled with flowers — fluffy head-turning roses, velvety yellow marigolds, pungent carnations, sunflowers and all shades of hibiscus.

Shved interrupted his welcome-home to say over his wife's shoulder, "Go home quickly, Danilo, and let's pack up. The Whites'll come to any minute now, and we may catch it this time.

I hear your house got hit. Well, a shell can't tell Red from White, brother."

Chaban moved on, his legs suddenly numb, his eyes carrying away the picture of Shved's long white sword and flower-filled yard, and no one dared touch him till the very last moment before pulling out, although a lot of things had come to pass in Oleshki in the meantime.

Shved's men had given the local bourgeoisie a good shaking-down and took some of those good folk to account. Some uniforms, two artillery pieces, a few horses and a pair of frazzled camels were dispatched to Kherson as trophies.

Then the remnants of the routed squadron slipped out of the reeds and onto the Oleshki shore. Those casualties of the morning sea battle were in tatters, their hats and pants lost in the marshes and reeds, their feet slashed by sedge and flayed by snags. The barefoot casualties rushed into Oleshki, looking for whatever uniformed enemy there might still be as well as the easily-frightened citizenry to rustle up some food.

Shved fished out those phony sailors and bundled them off to Kherson by barge, along with the camels. The day was a dry and windy one, an anxiety-filled day of retreat, retreat from their home town either to return as conquering heroes or die on the roads of war.

The day had passed in constant anticipation of the White counterattack, and the clouds were high and translucent and scattered all over the sky by the wind. Comrade Shved's detachment was seen off in a warm and moving way; the women's eyes and lips were puffy from crying and voices low because a long road lay ahead,

and the boats were shoving off one by one. Shved was standing in his, leaning nonchalantly on his magnificent sword.

Up came Commissar Chaban carrying a baby, which was all he had left, and it was taken from his arms and into the boat by the stately sailor from the old general scene. His stern face brightened from the baby's smile. "Poor orphan," he said, giving the baby a tickle with his grimy finger.

And then the last boat sailed away across the river.

Halfway across the stream, the gold-sown gendarmerie general in full regalia was standing on the bottom, fastened to a massive anchor on a short chain. He moved his arms as he swayed in the clear water.

A LETTER TO ETERNITY

A Bolshevik uprising against the Hetman and the Germans was about to break out at that time, but then some wretch divulged that it would flare up on the river Psiol and roll all the way to Hadyach, with Sorochintsi its base, and the whole district would catch fire. The Whitsun Eve sky seemed without rim or bottom as it flamed blue above the village. Wagonloads of maple, hazel, oak and blackthorn branches and freshly mown grass were brought from the woods to spruce up the cottages for Whitsuntide. The yards smelled of wilting grass and the lovely village looked lovelier still in its fluffy green attire, the huts white and severe, the yards cleaner and cozier than usual, and the breathtakingly blue sky pouring and pouring down.

Down in the valley, the beautiful Psiol rolled leisurely in the shade of the trees. A detachment of the German Kaiser's army wandered about the valley, peeking under every bush and shrub, while a detachment of the Hetman's troops was combing the shady banks. A Hauptmann of the Württemberg Regiment directed the search, his Dobermann pinscher jumping around him and barking up every tree. The captain in command of the Hetman's troops lay on his coat under a willow, cooling off after the first few hours of hogwild enthusiasm. Directly ahead of him, three local lads were looking for a bog oak on the bottom of the river, disappearing underwater for a long time then diving up again.

It was sleepy and boring on the bank of the Psiol, but the men of both detachments continued their meticulous search of every nook in sight. A wagon with two smallish-looking men stopped by the captain. "Mister officer, sir," they said, "you aren't locals, begging your pardon, you won't find him till kingdom come. These lads here are making like looking for a bog oak, but in fact they're watching you. Now we are locals and wholly for His Excellency the Illustrious Hetman and we want to help."

The two little men told the captain that there were ponds in the meadows, quiet backwaters fringed by cattail and reeds which they could count on the fingers of their hands. So now the postman was lying low in one of them breathing through a hollow reed in his mouth and waiting for nightfall so he could escape all the way to Sorochintsi.

The search was at once reorganized on a proper basis. The soldiers examined the ponds carefully and hurled hand grenades into the water. The lads gave up diving for bog oak and sauntered off to the village to set fire to the two little men's houses. The little men got home just in time to see their huts spruced up with beautiful scarlet-leafed boughs, and within an hour, both huts burned to the ground. The two little men got their heads singed in the flames as they attempted to burn along with their property. Meanwhile, the Germans and Hetmanites methodically threw hand grenades into the ponds and shot through every suspicious clump of reed, but the postman was nowhere to be found, and then they came upon that puddle in the middle of a glade.

It was a shallow pondlet fringed by young reed. The Hauptmann's dog splashed into the water, and he ordered his men not to throw grenades. The pondlet was clearly empty, and everyone had moved further on when the dog began barking frenziedly at some log which lay amid lilies in the scum-covered water.

Herr Hauptmann dispatched a man to inspect the log. It was the unconscious postman, his bare feet, arms and face black with countless leeches, and when they undressed him there was not a white spot on him; the leeches clung to him in clusters.

Herr Hauptmann called his men over and they opened their knapsacks and shook out all the salt they could find. The brine made the leeches fall off. Some of the Hauptmann's rum was forced down the man's throat, and slowly he came around, life and barby hatred flaring up in his only eye. "So you've found me," he said in a listless voice.

He had lunch off the Hauptmann's table, and there was good rum in his glass and fragrant fresh grass strewn over the floor and green boughs in every corner and flowers on the walls. It was quiet in the hut until he had eaten his fill. He felt new strength course through his veins and began to doze off. He was dreaming a wonderful dream that he was carrying countless letters and could not deliver them all no matter how he tried. And in the meantime, the day leaned toward evening and the appointed hour was drawing near. What he wished for was coming true, but then again he was carrying all those countless letters with no way of handing them all out, because time passed and

there weren't any fewer, and no force in the world could harm him until the last letter had been delivered to its address.

The Hauptmann dispelled the dream by speaking gently and kindly of the magical summer and serene stars in the sky. There were no stars like those that shone above one's fatherland, he said. He spoke of the postman's life in that enchanted wilderness on the banks of the beautiful Psiol. The Hauptmann even resorted to lyricism to warm the cockles of his listener's heart, the interpreter translating after him; but the postman sat detached and aloof, straining his will to forget all those things which Herr Hauptmann so wanted to hear from him.

He forgot that he was on the underground Bolshevik committee and that he'd been at the meeting which had scheduled the uprising for that night. He forgot the place where he had buried the rifles and the machine gun — and that was the hardest to forget, the hardest to push into a corner of his memory so far that no physical pain could reach it. The memory of the weapons would lie there like a recollection of his distant childhood to brighten and warm his last suffering and lonely death.

The German talked and talked; the postman had almost forgotten his own name, leaving himself nothing but his bare resolve to live till night and pass the arms on to the rebels. The Hauptmann spoke of the far-off exotic lands where the postman could travel or live on the Hetman's government's money — provided he told them where the arms were buried, when the revolt would begin and where its leaders could be found.

As he sat there at the table, the postman suddenly felt the uncontrollable urge to die and stop thinking of anything, thrust that knife through his breast and lie in the ground with a sense of duty well done. The Hauptmann's voice was losing its kindness. The Hetmanite captain went up to the postman, glared into his only eye, and saw a dark abyss of hatred and determination. An electric charge seemed to bolt through the captain. His fist crashed onto the postman's temple.

The Hauptmann went out to eat his lunch in the room next door, leaving the prisoner to the captain, and when he returned, the postman lay on the floor with his mouth full of grass, which he had gagged down lest he should moan or cry out for mercy. The captain was staring furiously out the window.

The postman had no right to die, for he had to carry his blood-covered body through the flow of time till nightfall. He could accept any suffering save death itself, and how hard it is to fight on one's own with no recourse to merciful death. With his comrades beside him, he would scoff at torture and spit in his torturers' eyes to bring his unvanquished fighter's death nearer. But now his life was like a boat of glass, and he had to steer it carefully through the dark stormy waves because his brittle life encased the cause of the Revolution. He asked himself whether his hatred of the enemy was strong enough for him to die for its sake, and the blood of his entire downtrodden class churned in his veins. It is a great honor to stand above one's own life!

He led them to the buried weapons. He walked

through the silent village and felt the sun's warmth on his skin and touched the gentle earth with his bare feet, and thought he was alone and treading some spellbound steppe. He was but a shadow of his own life, growing stronger from his hatred and resolve. He thought he saw people on either side of his path and knew who sympathized with him and who hated him; he was treading a crack between two worlds, and they would never merge together again after he had gone to his death.

Presently he came to a mound of sand on the edge of the village and stopped. The sun had passed its late zenith, the sweltering earth was trembling with quiet, and the Germans started to dig in the sand and wasted almost an hour. The postman stood gazing at the far horizons, the Psiol and the lands beyond. A hoopoe called two or three times, and the wind was rich with the fragrance of rye.

Enraged at being tricked, they threw him face down on the sand and two Germans straddled his arms and legs. He lost consciousness after the twentieth blow, and when he came to, he saw the sun hanging low over the horizon. The captain unclasped his holster, and the Germans averted their eyes. Then he cried out and owned up that the arms were buried in a different place and he would show them where. "You've got all the time in the world to kill me, I can't escape from you anyway."

Once again they passed through the silent village streets, and it was beyond human strength to look at that doomed and wretched soul, resisting to the bitter end, who would not hand the enemy his life like a letter. The village

men looked on from behind bough-bedecked fences and exchanged mysterious remarks, waiting for nightfall and help from without. The postman was kicked through the streets like a sore-covered beggar. They dragged him along and mashed him with their boots and hoisted him to the lintel in a barn and scorched his face with a candle to make him talk, but he led them back and forth, on and on, his tears burning holes in the sand. He showed them this place and that, but nothing was found anywhere. So they mauled his body with growing bitterness, and grief loomed over the village and changed to hatred and rage, and hearts were enflamed with an unbearable desire for revenge. Then night crept up on the village, the communal herd was driven to the meadows across the Psiol, and the church bell called everyone to vespers.

The postman could no longer walk or move. He thought he was a torch blazing from head to toe. His heart was bursting out of his breast, blood trickled from his wounds drop by drop, and pain was stringing out into one shrill note. It was the scream of every fiber and nerve in his body, and the maimed joints groaned hollowly. Only his obstinate will was dying like a soldier — holding the line, scraping up reserves, saving stamina.

He was believed the last time and taken in a wagon across the Psiol and into the sands. The Württembergers walked and the Hetmanites rode on horseback, and old hunched Vasilikha who had been brought to talk reason into her son limped by his side. The Hauptmann had spoken his final word: he would shoot both mother and son if the postman persevered. The

postman had spoken with his mother and she had kissed him on the forehead as if he were already dead. She hung her head, mopping her dry eyes. "Do as you see fit," she said, "I've only repeated what they told me." She shambled after her son to the other side and the sands and he even joked, knowing that everything would end soon, and the night was starry, dark and absolutely empty.

They reached the sands and the soldiers began to dig. The Germans lay down in a circle around the diggers. The postman was resting in the wagon, listening to the night quietly. Suddenly a voice called out and a spade struck metal. "Wait," said the postman, "don't you hear messengers coming for my soul?" And countless lights came to life far away in the darkness. They resembled flickering candles. It was as though waves far higher than man were carrying hundreds of lit candles on their crests. The lights undulated, rising and ebbing with a steady rhythm as they approached from three sides. No noise or voices were heard. The Germans opened fire. The lights drew nearer and nearer, sailing high above the ground.

"This is who's going to get the rifles," the postman cried, "and now shoot me so I won't suffer anymore! Villages will rise up in arms, and the committees of the poor will take power — now farewell, life, on this dark night!" The captain went up to the postman and fired at the supine body, and a message from a rank-and-file soldier of the Revolution was off on its way to eternity. The villages on the Psiol struck their bells and were heard for miles around; the villages on the Psiol lit huge bonfires and were

seen for miles and miles around, and the rebels surged out of the darkness and toward the Germans, fighting their way to the arms, the burning candles sailing in the air behind them. Battle cries and distant fires raged in the immobile air. Rebels, take courage, up and at them! The uprising was at hand!

Chubenko went up to the abandoned wagon with the dead postman. A few paces away, oxen were calmly chewing their cud, the candles tied to their horns burning with an even bright flame in the solemnly still night air. Old hunched Vasilikha sat by her dead son, her eyes fixed on his face. Chubenko took off his cap and kissed the old woman's hand.

The letter to eternity had blazed and disappeared with the sender's life like the light of an exploding supernova.

THE LONG ROAD HOME

Chubenko rode on horseback, and the horse was tired and stumbled all the time. His detachment was groping its way through a forest, and pines surrounded them on all sides, first sighing and lisping and sowing whispers in a sleepy singsong, then creaking like the rigging of a ship and rumbling like sails in the wind. It was as though a sylvan fleet were sailing out onto the wide expanse of the sky, where blue lakes splashed amid snowy waste, and floe rammed into floe, and icebergs clashed in the chaotic struggles of the winds.

Now and then Chubenko dozed off and let go of the reins, and his mount stumbled over the roots in the path. A festively solemn autumn bent over the column. Many of the men were wounded and carried their bandaged arms in front of them like white earthen mugs. Others held their chests or abdomens. The bad cases were carried in stretchers, and the two-wheeled ammunition carts looked like huge clusters of grapes for all the wounded and simply exhausted men clinging to them for support. Unshaven grim-faced giants with cartridge belts and hand grenades marched up front, setting their feet down firmly.

Chubenko's detachment advanced slowly through the forest, and their native Donbas *, so

* Coal- and ore-mining area, industrial heart of the Ukraine

distant and so longed for, was in everyone's eye. Miners, fitters, rollers, glassblowers, stokers and open-hearth and blast furnace operators all trooped after Chubenko the blacksmith, their tightlipped, hard-ribbed, bullet-headed and cross-grained regimental commander.

He was but slightly wounded, while the regiment's commissar had been mangled by the Poles in action on the Vistula and had had to be collected from the battlefield in pieces. They had buried him with honors and plodded on toward Warsaw. Their regiment had held its ground against any attack and was among the last to withdraw. Now Chubenko led it east, long out of contact with friendly troops. The Donbas loomed smoky and dear ahead in that early fall of 1920.

"Wait," the redhaired medic said as he pulled abreast of Chubenko. He rode without a saddle, a bottle of iodine dangling from his belt on a piece of bandage like an ink flask of a regimental scribe of old. "I'll tell you fair and square, Comrade Commander, we aren't long for this world. Everyone's sick, the wounded are rotting on their stretchers, and the forest reeks of pus; let's find some village and get our hands free. The going'll be easier, Chubenko. Things look very black whichever way you turn. The Poles are breathing down our necks and we've got all these wretches on our hands, and some of them have typhus, but I'm telling you that in secret."

Chubenko waved him off and licked his parched lips. "I'm thirsty all the time. Why am I so thirsty? And my head's humming like a furnace. Save your breath, medic. The boys want to see

the Donbas and lie down on the grass of their homeland. So I'm leading them forward to link up with the division. Our Donbas is puffing smoke five hundred kilometers away, expecting us back, and I swear we will make it back and call on the mines and factories for help, and the regiment will rise up even stronger! We can't throw our men around, medic, so you'd better go and isolate the typhus cases somehow."

Chubenko took off his tattered hat to feel his forehead. His head was burning, and his heart was racing under his leather coat. The medic took the wrist of Chubenko's hand and they rode a few paces in silence. "You have it too, Chubenko — hand the command over to someone else and lie down. You've done your dancing."

Chubenko stared him into silence; the pines creaked like the rigging of a ship. "I order you to keep your mouth shut. And I won't get off this horse, but my gun can get you through any one of these pines."

The redhaired medic turned fiery with rage. He tore at his iodine bottle, hurled it to the ground, and all but choked swearing. Chubenko did not even glance back. He rode on, looking at his map, and the path disappeared behind the pines again and again. Autumn and decay were everywhere.

The pines rose straight up around them, propping the sky and swaying and creaking like the rigging. The detachment was making its way slowly through that somber solemnity while a tragic spectacle was taking place in the sky: glaciers crept over mountain ranges and covered entire continents, icebergs roamed through

the seas, and the continents cracked and drifted apart in the ocean.

Million-year cataclysms came to pass in the sky, but the detachment went on and on and on, and there was no end to that forest in sight. The wounded moaned weakly and begged for a quick, painless death. The going was torture; feet swelled and arms grew numb and the desire to sleep — without ever waking up — was overwhelming. Their goal barely glimmered ahead, and it would have been so easy to lose their good fame and turn into a brainless herd, straying off the path into the woods and never linking up with the Red Army. Only the ammunition-hung vanguard seemed forged of iron.

Chubenko led them on, staring at his map.

It was as though they were crawling along the bottom of a sea, puffs of cloud rocking like boats on the dark-blue film between the tops of the pines and the sun. The detachment had to rise from that sea and onto the shore and look back upon the negotiated main. The Donbas would be puffing smoke there on the shore — mills, mines and smokestacks and the openfaced beauty of an even tract of land. Breathing would be easy too, as if the Donbas stood somewhere in the foothills, shaking the entire mountain range with its working zeal.

Chubenko's eyes were glued to the map. A forester's hut was to show up any moment, a landmark he couldn't do without. And his desire to see it was so strong that he did and spurred his horse on.

A white wall peeked through the yellow pine trunks, a window flashed, and smoke quivered

and twisted, rising heavenward. The hut vanished and reappeared time and again, and then they saw that it was no hut at all but a cluster of white birch in front of a dark stagnant lake. Pine needles had been falling into it for a thousand years, and the water had become black as in a fairy-tale pond or chemical plant waste tank.

The column stopped off by the lake, some to bathe their wounds, others to slake their thirst. The horses whinnied over the water, and the tops of the ancient pines swayed. "Move on," Chubenko called, "move on, Donbas Republic!" And he reeled in the saddle as if he were fooling around. He felt the typhus breaking him every which way. It was hard to breathe, and hammers pounded in his head. "Follow me, working class!" he shouted, fighting off the sickness. But no one stirred, and he realized that a mutiny was afoot.

"Let's have a meeting," the partisans shouted, "where have you led us, Chubenko?"

Out stepped the old smiths, baring their sores and wounds. Out stepped the stokers, hurling their rifles on the ground. "Enough's enough! No more traipsing around, he's sold out to the Poles; he'll lead us straight to Pilsudski * yet; the steelmaker's lost his way. He's got typhus, and he ought to be bound hand and foot, yeah. The medic for commander!" But the ammunition-hung vanguard stood silent.

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* Pilsudski, Jozef (1867-1935) — first marshal of Poland (1920); virtual dictator of the country until his death

Million-year cataclysms came to pass in the sky, the forest creaked like the rigging of a ship over the black lake, and Chubenko was tongue-tied as he sat on horseback, but his blood was boiling, and a white fog stood in his eyes. He drove it away with his open hand and silence fell, for everyone saw that he wanted to speak. Chubenko never opened his mouth for nothing; he ranted about the Donbas and their goal and the Revolution and looked a man in the eye and make him feel like he'd looked into the depth of his own heart. Chubenko would turn a man to steel all right, but he would also give his head for any one of his men and turn them inside out, too, if he saw fit; because that was what he was like — not a man to be trifled with. You'd think his ma had bathed him in boiling water and his pa had caressed him with stinging nettles.

But he was silent as he stared into their eyes, and then he dropped the reins, jumped to the ground and said, "Got to move on," in a businesslike way, and walked down the path. His horse followed him. The pines were creaking. Silently, the detachment trailed after its leader, some on horseback, others on foot, still others lying in carts.

And when the movement had taken shape and it had become clear that there was no stopping it and the wounded had swathed their stumps anew and trudged after the vanguard, a shot rang out from the rear. Chubenko reeled before their eyes and turned to face the detachment. He stood there calm and resolute, even though it seemed he was bidding farewell to his men and the whole bright world with his eyes and

would fall soundlessly like a flag in front of them all any moment now, and there would be no raising him back up and making him whole again.

Yet he kept standing there without moving or saying a word. The pines were turning upside down in his eyes; through an eddying fog, he saw his open-hearth plant and fettlers whamming their pneumatic chippers into metal. He stood and stood, and to his men he seemed made of iron, able to withstand all storms. Then several pairs of hands grasped the one who had shot. One of his eyes was put out and his mouth mashed to a pulp right then and there. As he was being shoved through the column to Chubenko, they all recognized the redhaired medic — that low-down shaft-giving skunk — and did not spare the skin of their hands.

He rolled out of the ranks straight to Chubenko and fell, then propped himself up on all fours as if to howl at the sun, and finally scrambled to his feet, holding his bloody eye sockets and bellowing with pain. Chubenko unhurriedly opened his holster, took out the revolver and shot him dead point-blank, then mounted his horse and continued to lead his men forward, dying of typhus and knocking himself on the head to drive away the pain.

The setting sun hung level with the treetops and sunk lower still. Its slanting rays got entangled in the forest, quivering and swaying with the branches, weaving around the trunks and reaching across the path like an obstacle from some fairy tale: an enchanted river. Chubenko entered it and rode on in a nimbus, its radiance dazzling his men. Rank after rank,

they followed their leader through the light and could not recognize one another as they began to glow with strength and beauty, growing young and forgetting their wounds. The wagon with the typhus cases tarried in the sun, and the men started to rave: one about his coal mine, another about his steel mill back home.

Chubenko sank into the twilight of the woods. He clung to his horse's neck for a second and started back, floundering under the wave of delirium that swept over him. He yelled at the teemers, swore at the molders, called the foreman to the furnace, bickered with the stockyard and had a smoke with the engineer. The engineer turned into the French counterintelligence interrogator, and the warm Odessa wind breathed in his ear. His head hummed with the roar of the surf, and the forester's hut stood right on the shore. Chubenko walked and walked but could not reach it — trees sprung up one after another from the ground in front of him, filling him with despair. Without the forester, he couldn't let the steel out of the furnace, and momentarily Chubenko woke up to realize that his typhus was taking over in earnest and he had to shake it off and lead his men on to the Donbas.

He pummeled his head, suppressing groans, and his aide rode over and suggested that they stop for the night. The sun had set, and pink and mauve clouds shimmered in the west, foreboding bad weather. A new moon rose high above the forest. Puny and pale at first, it waxed ruddy and hot and soon began to shine full-out, for night had fallen, and Chubenko's detachment had bivouacked.

They encamped amid tall pines and got down to their simple workaday chores under the new moon. Sentries were posted within proper distance around the camp, machine gunners took to pieces and cleaned their machine guns and riflemen their rifles. The doctor swabbed wounds with iodine, and a man who had died of typhus was carried off to one side to await the two wounded who lay dying. Their comrades were taking leave of them, promising to pass their last words on to their workmates and families in the Donbas.

The two dying men were dying good deaths. One can always tell how a person lived from the way he dies. The two men left this world with dignity, having evoked not pity but respect and a still stronger desire to win in their comrades, the image of the night forest and the otherworldly new moon forever reflected in their eyes. The living buried their dead and stood over the graves lost in thought.

The pines creaked like the rigging of a ship. The late commissar's deputy made a speech, and it was heard out in silence, without a salute or music. Suddenly, subdued voices struck up the old miners' ditty *Suffering*. The weary men sang over their dead with inhuman force. Chubenko did not dismount; he was fighting back the typhus and was afraid of losing his balance on the ground. He hummed along as though in a dream or against his will, and when the song was over, the commissar's deputy continued with his speech.

"Scientific socialism," he said, "as well as the slogan of peace to hovels and war to palaces demand such a doctrine which will fight the

enemy without mercy. Our comrades will turn over in their graves if we ever forget these words. Petlyura's army has hooked up with the Polish bourgeoisie and Marshal Pilsudski and is out to grab the Ukraine along with our unconquerable Donbas. This army of bourgeoisie and rich peasantry is flaunting the yellow and blue nationalist flag and making counterrevolution. Our comrades have fallen, and we know who caused their deaths — a Petlyura sword and a Polish bullet, and so socialism demands that —".

But Chubenko was already riding through the woods and past the lookouts, whom he ordered to keep their eyes peeled. He was going on reconnaissance in hopes of finding the forester's cabin or some other landmark to get his bearings. The horse trod the path warily, pricking its ears and sensing the importance of the venture; the black trunks and shadows evoked some atavistic images in its equine memory, and it made shy attempts at whinnying to them. The dense virgin forest straggled on for three kilometers or so, then a broad clearing cut a moonlit design against the darkness, and farther on, the forest obviously ended.

On the right, the ground sloped towards what could be a river. Saplings scattered from the clearing downward, first in the groves and copses, then in clusters and clumps; and finally, lone trees rambled all over the plain and the musty smell of damp straw and earth came from the fields.

Abruptly, Chubenko's horse stopped dead in its tracks. Without thinking, Chubenko dug his spurs into the mount's flanks. The horse's

anxiety passed to the rider. Beyond the clearing, the path turned into forest again, and there the horse balked and wouldn't move. But its master spurred it on, and they found themselves under the trees.

The forest smelled of man. Revolver at ready, Chubenko was going to turn back when something wooly fell on him like a nightmare. Losing consciousness, he cursed all typhuses in the world and clutched the horse's mane, hoping to God that his mount would carry him back to the camp.

"Dear Comrade Chubenko..." A paraffin lamp stood on the table, lighting a pile of documents and Chubenko's map case. A thick oaken beam on which the cross was charred with a candle cut the ceiling in two. Someone was coughing terribly on the big Russian-style brick stove. Chubenko rose from the bench then sat down, his head swimming and splitting with pain. But he regained control of himself. Silently, he looked over those present and propped his hands on his knees, pressing them with all his might, trying to calm down and let his blood cool and prepare himself for an agonizing death in enemy hands. His revolver lay on the table, too, and there were three men in the room. A woman was puttering around by the stove.

The room was of ancient beauty, with long benches and a chest along the walls and rows of motley-painted dishes on the shelves. Again, the man on the stove broke into a fit of coughing so nasty he might be dying. His eyes, large and washed-out, glowed from the semi-darkness.

"Dear Comrade Chubenko," the sturdy broad-shouldered man said again and flashed a toothy smile, "I'm glad to greet you in our parts on behalf of the local Red partisans. We'd been wondering what kind of fish had swum into our nets, and it's none other than the commander of the Donbas Regiment — on his own at that; so we're rather curious to know where the rest of your regiment might be at the moment."

Chubenko was silent as he sat on the bench, his sick body racked with chills and fever. He had to strain his attention and marshal all his strength to listen, think, and decide. Then another one, a teacher or student from his baby face, spoke up. "Do believe us, Comrade Chubenko, we would never have scared you so if we'd known that you were our man and not some bloody Polish or Petlyurite spy. We are fighting them till our last drop of blood, Comrade Chubenko." The third, taciturn man broke into a gentle well-meaning smile which hung lifelessly from his lips.

"Tell us what you lack, what you've run out of — we'll help however we can. Shelter your sick or give you clothes and cattle and some food first thing, I'm sure. Then you'll go on to your faraway Donbas, and maybe some of our boys will join you to fight for the Revolution together."

Chubenko unhurriedly collected his papers and map case from the table, stuck the revolver into its holster and pretended he hadn't noticed that the cartridges were missing.

"Now that you're per regulations, Chubenko," the toothy one said, producing a bottle from under the table, "will you have one for the road

with us or leave on the dry — whichever suits you best. We're off duty for the time being, taking a rest from the raid we finished yesterday. Killed a lot of Poles, too. So in the morning we invite you to our village. We'll meet you out on the commons, give you a proper welcome, and then see what you need to start with — food and wagons or maybe something else."

The man on the stove was coughing his lungs off. Chubenko glanced over his hosts' heads.

"He's a cripple. Served in the army and in the war. Has recently drifted back no one knows where from, the Caucasus or Siberia. Anyway, he'll die at home now — the poor beggar's got a mere laugh to live."

The soldier climbed down from the stove and shuffled to the door, holding his chest. A doomed survivor of the imperialist war, a victim of the past and a living reproach, and Chubenko's heart contracted at the thought of millions of such cripples and thousands of such villages. The struggle would be a long one, the going hard, the strain enormous.

The cripple spat a mouthful of blood out the door and dragged himself back to the stove. He looked into Chubenko's eyes as he passed, and his stare, deep and sad, seemed to come from over a distance of years and years; Chubenko had the feeling that it had been a stare from behind prison bars.

The soldier climbed upon the stove and fell silent, pressing his chest to the bricks.

"So what's your answer, Comrade Chubenko — or do you speak a different kind of Ukrainian out there in the Donbas? Here we are giving you our open hearts and offering com-

radely help, so will you say at least a word in reply?"

Chubenko rose to his feet and paced across the room, happy to find that he could walk. Through the window, he noticed a huddle of horses and men, and a partisan with his head bandaged burst into the hut and shouted, "Help or we won't hold out!" The toothy one rushed up, grasped the man, and the two of them tumbled outdoors. "Something's been wrong with his head since that Pole got him," Baby-face said, "doesn't know what he's saying when he has these fits."

Toothy returned to the room. "Something's wrong with his head," Baby-face said again, and Chubenko was hard put to ask why the sick man looked like a messenger. "What's the name of this village?" he got out at length.

"Why, Stone Ford, Comrade Chubenko, and we're Stone Ford partisans."

Chubenko lapsed into a silence again. A cricket chirped calmly and lullingly in a corner. The third, taciturn man kept smiling, the smile hanging lifelessly from his lips. "All right, brothers," Chubenko said. "In the morning we'll pay you a visit and talk it over and chew the fat all together. I've got enough men thank you, plenty of ammunition, too, and we're making a stealthy march to the enemy's rear and our morale's high as could be. The Donbas Regiment knows what it's fighting for, because our unit is the hope of the Revolution and the mainstay of the working class. It's beautiful scenery you brothers have out here: endless forests and simple trusting folk. Well, wait for us outside the village tomorrow, and welcome

our regiment of miners and steelmakers, the salt of the Donbas earth."

The sick soldier on the stove was choked with coughing, and Chubenko noted his anxiety-filled eyes once again. With that he left the hut, and the partisans followed suit. The yard was quite empty except for two horses, one of them his. Chubenko and the taciturn partisan swung into the saddles and rode out the village and to the clearing without talking. "That soldier on the stove will die soon," Chubenko said. "Good luck," the partisan said and spurred his horse into a gallop at once.

The quiet of the woods made way for Chubenko, and he let it envelop him. The forest creaked like the rigging of a ship. The moon had set; it was just before dawn. Abruptly, Chubenko's worn-out horse neighed at the top of its lungs. The neighing reverberated as though through a dark cave and came back in a barely audible echo. Chubenko rode through the perfectly still forest as if it were a town of steepled temples of silence rising into the lofty sky, and after one or ten years that were all but a few minutes long, the horse neighed again. "Halt!" several course, miner's voices called at once, and Chubenko gave them the password and rode on.

"Chubenko, Chubenko's back!" ran down the regiment. His aide and deputy commissar hurried up to him, both with revolvers thrust simply in their belts. Up came Chubenko's deputy. "You know, we gave up hoping to see you alive. This man was riding after you and saw them seize you but couldn't help, so he came back at a gallop. Well, we knocked a hundred

crack soldiers together and sent them hot on your trail. They were ambushed and have some dead and wounded. We didn't scare easily, though. Used our bayonets most of the time, seeing as we don't have much ammo, then the night and the trees, too; you can't aim a damn in this darkness. We don't even know who the hell they were, because they wore plain army uniforms without insignia or anything."

The regiment thronged around Chubenko, rifles in hand; and then a barely discernible dawn began to rise above the forest. Those were minutes of a ghastly lack of color and of creepy grayness when the day was born after the hush of night. Slowly, the pale shadows were tinged with pink and blue, and birds began to chirp, trill and twitter across the woods, and all through that mysterious hour of the birth of light, Chubenko stood there speaking to his men, and a breeze was wafting through the forest.

Chubenko explained the essence of the operation, for every man had to know his place and fight conscientiously and selflessly. Their regiment had but one road, through Stone Ford and further eastward. They could not possibly skirt the village: the map showed a river and impassable marshes and forests all around. So they had to march to Stone Ford and meet with the partisans, and the meeting would be a fitting one, never mind.

Till sunrise, the regiment prepared for the visit. Finally they got under way, walking silently and watchfully through the woods, treading on fallen leaves as pines gave way to maples and oaks. Chubenko rode in the lead,

feeling weak and torpid, and dozing off, too — a sign that his nerves were still strong.

After what seemed a long time, he saw the familiar clearing. The regiment deployed for attack and thus reached the assigned line without meeting anyone and stopped in the thicket, after which began the even field and the first huts of the village.

Chubenko stepped forth with the regiment's vanguard — its best hundred. He had dismounted and was carrying a rifle. The wind unfurled the red banner and some of the men unbuttoned their shirts: five-pointed stars were tattooed on their chests. That hundred would fight to the death: they would never surrender. The village was quiet, not a soul in sight, and the hundred stood at attention as befit regular troops.

Half an hour passed. No one appeared. Chubenko's deputy came riding from the thicket and reported, "Everything's done, a party's been sent to the river. We are establishing contact," and trotted back.

Standing in a row facing the village, Chubenko's men seemed like more than a hundred from afar. The morning was quiet, the village street empty — and then it suddenly came to life, overflowing with cheery multitudes who gushed out of every yard.

Red flags waved like gonfalons above the crowd. There were very few men, mostly women and girls. An enormous red canvas was carried on two planks up front. The procession left the village and spread out to either side, coming on in a broad thick wave of womenfolk.

Chubenko looked through his field glass and shifted to the right flank. Bringing up the rear

of the procession was a group of about fifty partisans, and they were doing their best to keep pace and cut a swath before the regular unit.

Chubenko took another attentive look through his field glass. The procession was drawing nearer, red flags glowing. The Donbas men's faces remained hard and intent. They did not seem to like that ceremonial welcome and fingered and opened their cartridge cases in a businesslike manner.

The procession was within range now. Chubenko gave a command; his men scattered and dropped to the ground. "Fire!" Chubenko shouted in his usual voice. The machine guns began to rattle, methodically slicing the procession into pieces. Rifle breeches clanged unremittingly, ejecting empty cartridges. The red flags fell. The women whipped out swords and rushed into a frontal attack in scattered chains, stepping over their dead and wounded.

"You didn't invent this trick," Chubenko said under his breath, shooting from his rifle like a rank-and-file soldier.

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Communists, surrender!" The procession abruptly turned into a military unit and hurled itself forward so fiercely and fearlessly they would have demoralized anyone else; but the Donbas regiment did not waver a pace, nor did its machine guns stop even for a second.

The disguised enemy began to lose his unity, and in vain did the woman in the lead, whom Chubenko recognized as the taciturn man of the night before, brandish her saber and shout, "Death to the Reds! Death to the Reds!" This was nothing new for the Donbas men. They had

held out at the critical psychological moment when the defending side often loses its nerve in the face of the inexorable onslaught, and now they were slaughtering the enemy masquerade as calmly as if they were sitting behind a wall of steel. The wave halted; the field was strewn with corpses; the enemy broke up and fled in panic.

Chubenko stopped the shooting to save ammunition and let the machine guns cool, because a new danger had arisen: a cavalry detachment had sprung up from behind the nearby huts and fanned out for a charge. It had been waiting there to hack Chubenko's men to pieces if they had cracked under the pressure and run, so now the cavalry had broken cover out of sheer folly, itching to vent its rage. Chubenko's hundred lay in a sparse chain, bayonets stuck forward, and the charging horses and swishing swords did not scare them a bit. Under the yellow and blue Petlyurite flag, Chubenko recognized Babyface, his yesterday's host.

The cavalry just rushed over the Donbas men, failing to tear them off the ground. Chubenko's men shot after them, unhorsing riders. In the meantime, the Petlyurite infantry regrouped for a new attack, gathering around their commanders. Chubenko was brought more ammunition from the thicket.

Abruptly, the Petlyurites were sprayed with rare but well-aimed shots from behind the village fences. Somebody fell after every shot, and the Petlyurites dashed back to strike out at the ambushers. The shots grew even rarer. Thirteen men ran from behind the fences and toward Chubenko's position in a loose chain.

They ran like old front-liners — crouching, zigzagging, crawling and fighting back. Clearly professional soldiers, they had not lost a single man in the retreat. Chubenko glanced through his field glass and ordered them supported by fire.

When they finally made it to the Donbas men, Chubenko recognized the consumptive soldier among them. The man's eyes blazed with fanatical fire and his hand was clasped over his mouth as he ran up to Chubenko and fell. Blood gushed out of him in a spate; his face turned yellow and translucent like wax. He was breathing with difficulty, the air gurgling in his windpipe.

"You must hold out," he spoke up with effort, "I sent for help last night, but it's about twenty miles away. There might be a regular Red Army unit in addition to our partisans because there's a highway. You must hold out, Comrade Chubenko."

"Have you run to your death or what?" Chubenko asked, choking with anger and pity. "We'll make it on our own somehow — you've done your fighting, man."

The soldier turned his dead-white face to Chubenko. "Don't you dare speak like that to me, Chubenko. I work in the underground here and dream about a death like this every night."

"Shut up and save your breath," Chubenko told him, "I'm just getting my wounded and supplies across the river. In the evening I'll follow suit, and your help's of no use to me."

But the soldier did not hear him. He scrambled up in his agony, straightened to his full height as though reviewing a parade of poste-

rity in that last minute of his life, and repeated, "I dream about a death like this every night," with his lips alone. He fell, cut down by a bullet. Chubenko ordered him covered with the flag and himself felt an overwhelming tiredness. His open-hearth plant came roaring over him again, the sun becoming the several charging doors of the blazing furnace and the earth rocking beneath him like a giant swing hoisted to the sky.

"Fire!" he shouted, rolling down the slope. "Forward, O Donbas Republic!" Help was galloping through the village, sowing panic in the enemy ranks. Chubenko's men threw themselves into attack and linked up with the reinforcements. Chubenko struggled to his feet and fell time and again. A few minutes passed before Ivan Polovets rode up to him.

Chubenko was standing, swaying like a reed in the wind. "Thanks, brother, and now lay me down wherever you want," he said, and that was the end of the day's heroic struggles of Chubenko, the regimental commander.

THE WAY OF ARMIES

It was somewhere near Apostoliv following the famous action against General Babiev's cavalry. Chubenko rode in the sunset-red *tachanka* of his new and best machine gunner, Maxim the blacksmith. The Donbas Regiment had just emerged victorious from several hours' battle against select White troops. It had fought as part of a whole army and was now pursuing the highly mobile enemy unit making a dash for the Dnieper. Chubenko, who was brittle and pinched after his bout of typhus, and mustachioed Maxim were sitting in proud and independent poses. The sun was setting behind their backs, and Chubenko held an iron rose in hand, appraising it with the eye of a medieval guild master.

It was the acme of perfection, a miracle of inspiration and patience, the delicate masterpiece of some extraordinary hammer and a triumph of metal which had learned to grow, bud and bloom from a living cell.

"And I'll tell you, Commander: every one of these petals was forged with a hammer and it's one solid piece — no welding or soldering. It's as though it had grown from an iron seed or graft. Well, I'm a smith and weapon maker by family tradition. Used to make machine guns for the whole army. I've gone through this world like a bullet, too, and that's a fact."

Chubenko looked back at his regiment rattling behind him in a long column. The action had

been at Sholokhov, and the regiment, reinforced after the Polish campaign, had again blossomed with its Donbas fame. A Maxim machine gun stood in the *tachanka* — an improved, perfectly adjusted, well-oiled, easy-to-handle, tried and true Maxim.

"You can't imagine, Commander, what a hard job it is to forge a rose, to make it so delicate and velvety that dew would settle on your dark beauty at night. I love fine filigree work, and I'd love to make beautiful things for all the world and to see life filled with beauty and sunshine. So I painted this wagon red, too, and before this one, there was another with red apples, green mallows and sunflowers splotched all over it.

"A smith has the whole world wide open to him; now if he beat up a constable and wounded a gendarme in a nineteen-oh-five street fight, carried a red flag at the head of demonstrations and sang, 'March, march to battle, working men, forward march,' you can easily tell his fortune includes a lot of wandering. Out I went into the big wide world.

"Not every smith can forge a rose; I went back to that business whenever I had a spare moment. As I was doing my stretch in prison before being sent to Siberia for life, I often wondered if I'd live to get there. Night turned to day. Days without number, and I understood that my whole life was no longer than a day: it took me less than a day to think my whole life over, and yet much of it still remained for prison boredom.

"But then I met a young man from death row — he'd killed a constable and was to be hanged. 'Smith,' he told me, shaking with his

entire being under the burden of his last thoughts, 'Smith, you can't forge a rose... It grows drinking dew on tender mornings, and we fall bloodstained at its feet. If only you'd learn to forge that rose, man... For it will take time to grow, the rose of our revolution...'

"And he was hanged on a dull morning to the terrible cries of the whole prison. We shouted and pounded on the doors with stools and tore our clothes and broke windows. The young dreamer parted with his life amid the clamor and din of our protests, and there are moments when I wonder what music will play when I have to cross that line?

"But I remembered that rose of his and began forging. Every time I took a hammer in my hand I felt as though all smiths in the world were hammering at it too, helping me. It was like a needle that stuck in my brain, I felt it there night and day, and when a man's obsessed by something, he won't be taken by anything — hunger, heat, cold, not even death itself. This must be the only reason I didn't die as I walked on through one world after another, forging the iron rose.

"I finished it in a desert. Woke up in the middle of the night lying on cold sand, woke up all in a dither because I'd finished forging my rose in my dream. I could still see its glowing pinkness and sense its weight in my hand and its warmth on my face. I was still trembling, but reality edged into my mind, and then everything was gone and over and only the starry sky blinked over me — the strange southern sky. Up there right ahead of us, Commander, the red star called Aldebaran barely stands out against

the sky in the east. It will rise higher and higher, and soon all the eight visible stars of that constellation will peep out, just let it get dark enough — eight stars making up a V like a flight of cranes wedged into eternity.

"But that night, the Southern Cross shone above me as I lay there in the Atacama Desert, making my way to the Republic of Peru. I finished my rose in the town of Arica on the Pacific coast. It happened in the local smithy, and ocean waves were lapping and some shrubs blooming with incredibly fragrant pink flowers. It was the year 1917.

"And then I covered a long way before I found myself out there at Sholokhov and in your regiment's sector. Walked it through Peru, Equador and Columbia and got to Europe, tasted of a French concentration camp and Italian jail and Turkish hospitality that wasn't any sweeter than the camp and jail. Finally I got to Sevastopol and then to Hulyai-Pole, my home town. Anyway, I got back in time to help oust General Denikin."

On either side of the road, blazing fires rose high into the sky. A distant cannonade was heard from across the Dnieper. The Donbas Regiment was pushing east to Kakhovka in a forced march. Reflections from the fires fell on the rose in Chubenko's hand, a pink haze enveloped the autumnal steppe, and the night was cold.

"And then, Commander, I met my friend Artem. The year before last, he headed the Republic of Kriviy Rih and Donetsk, the miners' revolutionary council. I knew him back from Brisbane, Australia, where we'd arrived from

Shanghai at about the same time. Later we worked on the construction of a railroad near Brisbane. Saturdays we worked till one in the afternoon and washed linen afterwards, Artem singing his favorite ditty about a hill in the spurs of the Altais and the grave long forgotten by all. Then we sat by the fire in front of our tents, and food was piled on top of a wooden crate with four planks knocked to it for legs, and the legs were shoed in tin cans filled with water because Australia's crawling with ants.

"And my, the talks we had by those fires! Sometimes after a week's work, we went swimming and fishing. The river was a small one; we'd mostly catch turtles and a couple of loaches once in a while. At night, the water glowed for some reason, and the Southern Cross shone above as Artem spoke and I listened.

"I came to love him; he was my teacher, and I followed him like a sunflower turns its head to the sun. Last year we met in the Donbas and recognized each other. 'Remember how we beat the Irish at tug-of-war?' he asked. It was in the middle of a fresh battlefield and the snow was strewn with corpses steaming in the frost. 'The time has come,' Artem told me, 'we'll defend our Revolution till our dying breath.'"

Chubenko glanced at his watch and gave orders for a halt. A cavalry detachment rushed past. The Donbas men began feeding their horses. No bonfires were lit. The cold pierced to the bone; the bare earth had frozen through. The men stomped their feet and jigged beside their wagons to warm up. Blazes of fire went up noiselessly in the distance to their right and left, their wavering light snatching the column

from the frosty murk for a time, then dying away.

Chubenko went to look over the regiment. The wee hours were passing. Far out to the right, something was burning furiously, lighting up the infinite flat expanse of the naked steppe. The smith and his two helpers watered their horses and gave them oats. Blackbearded Serbin and smooth-faced freckled Lyashok broke into an argument. "Get a move on," untiring Chubenko shouted down the line, "Forward, Donbas Republic!"

"So I joined the anarchists in Hulyai-Pole on Artem's orders," the smith continued with his story after the wagon had trundled on. "I was to work at Makhno's side for a time and organize the best men there. One day I was sitting out on the porch and Makhno said hello to me passing by. 'Watch out, Maxim,' he said, playing with his rawhide whip, 'I know what you're up to.' He was keeping his Black Hundred lifeguards in town at that time.

"Then he gathered a general assembly on the square and started on a speech. Unexpectedly for us, we struck up an argument with him, sensing that by and large, the crowd would back us. It was a classic public debate, and everyone saw that Makhno was losing. So he piped down and listened in silence as we spoke about all the plundering, levies at gunpoint, barrels of gold, torturings, mass shootings and downright murder of innocent people.

"When my comrade finished his speech for the prosecution, Makhno broke into a smile that bode us no good. Then he stepped down from the platform that had been built especially for

his speechifying, strode through the crowd, grabbed my comrade's hand, and dragged him to the platform. Small, with his old biddy's face and preacher's long hair, he looked perfectly ludicrous as he dragged the strapping lad after him. The crowd hushed. We waited to hear what he'd answer.

"Makhno got onto his tribune, still dragging his opponent after him. For a moment, they stood face to face in front of the thousand-strong crowd. Then Makhno whipped out his gun without a word and shot my comrade. The crowd fell back from the platform. We opened up with our guns, but Makhno was no longer there. And we were quick to whisk out of the suddenly hostile crowd.

"We ran through the streets, firing back. No one would give us shelter. Finally, we made a stand in Lyashok's house: sent his old mother away to the neighbors, blocked off the windows, locked the doors, reinforced them with what could be found, and kept our guns and ammunition ready. 'Come on over,' someone shouted, 'it's on the house!' There were eleven of us.

"I'm not the bragging type, but the treat we stood them was a generous one. The fight lasted till night, because we were pretty good shots and there was nowhere to run. We hand-grenaded them and they us; we rattled away from the machine gun we were lucky to have and they sprayed us with lead, too. They did their best to set the house on fire, but the neighbor's caught instead, it was a blustery spring day, and sometimes the wind wafted to us the smell of winter wheat, the neighing of horses or a cuckoo's call.

"The neighbor's hut was burning to high heaven, they tried to put it out, but sparks flew to the shed and the barn, and finally, another hut caught. They gave us no rest, fearing we'd use all that welter and escape. Few of us were still alive. Of eleven, only five kept on shooting, but they, too, were exhausted and stained with their own and the next man's blood and blinded and deafened by grenades.

"We knew we were as good as finished, but we also saw the thousands who'd come and take our place, even if after our deaths. They would fight out our battle and honor our memory. We were glad to die for this, and fear of death didn't rend our hearts, while our consciences weren't burdened by the thought of lives lived in vain. We had lived like men, and like men we were dying. In our mind's eye, we saw all those who'd died for our Revolution before us, and we didn't know if we were worthy of standing next to their good names.

"Then the wind turned on our own hut, and it caught, too. The Makhnovites stopped shooting and waited for us to run out. We didn't shoot either. The hut was full of smoke, and fire scorched us, and the crossbeam crashed down. Then we began to sing and didn't stop till the last one of us lost consciousness. We hadn't agreed on it or anything — someone just broke into song and we realized that song was the last grace life was giving us."

Lyashok and Serbin, who had been listening throughout the whole story, looked back from the box.

"We sang *The Internationale*," Serbin said.

Chubenko sat holding the iron rose in hand, Aldebaran and the whole constellation — a flight of cranes wedged into eternity — gleaming high above his head. Then he got a small notebook out of his pocket, opened it to the light of the near and distant fires, thumbed through it some and, word after word, read out loud: "Revolution is war. It is the only lawful, rightful, just and really great war of all the wars known to history."

"Great words, these," Chubenko said. "Comrade Lenin's."

"Old steelmakers say," Chubenko continued to say, "that making steel's like living a life: hard work and fear and a difficult end. Now we make revolution, not steel, and you've got to heat your furnace like it's going to burst and be a real good master to get your steel and run it off into perfect molds. Then you'll have a nation of steel and a proletarian fortress. And we rank-and-file soldiers have to love the future and give our lives for it."

"The three of us were rescued from the fire," the smith said, "Lyashok, Serbin and me. So we repainted our *tachanka* red. For the Makhnovites to recognize."

"We've poured so much salt on those dogs' wounds they'll recognize us in the other world, too," Serbin added grimly.

The red wagon was making its way to the Dnieper, and so was the whole Donbas Regiment. Those were the orders from the army. It began to smell of dampness from afar; their goal was near. Some time after three in the morning, they stopped on a high bank. A cold wind was blowing. Kakhovka lay on the plain across the

river. Down by the water, units of the Sixth Army were pushing along and engineers were throwing across a bridge.

"Thanks for the company and keep well," Chubenko said. He mounted his horse, gave the regiment orders to stop, rode to one side, and began observing the far bank and Kakhovka through his field glass. A glum October dawn was breaking through the fog, and an infinite milky plain sprawled to the horizon which barely brightened in the east.

That was the Red Army's famous Kakhovka Bridgehead, the site of its fierce fighting in August against the corps of General Slashchev and General Barabovich's cavalry. An indestructible Red islet in the steppe, the bridgehead was protected by several belts of barbed wire, trenches and strongpoints as well as the Dnieper to the rear. It was manned by the legendary Siberian division. All Barabovich's mounted charges shattered against the barbed wire and the stamina of its defenders; nor could repeated assaults by the corps of generals Slashchev and Vitkovsky crack the Kakhovka nut.

Suddenly, Chubenko saw the bridgehead come to life. Fighting flared up in the gray morning haze as dark turtles crept out of the fog far away on the plain, spewing fire; tanks, thought Chubenko. In their wake crawled waves of infantry supported by armored cars. The earth shuddered from the bursts of heavy shells, and thousands of machine guns seemed to be riveting enormous sheets of steel.

Single shots and even volleys of rifle fire from the bridgehead were hopelessly lost in that earthquake. Chubenko thought of those sitting

out there in the deadly rain in spite of the Whites' fury, in defiance of all the tanks of world capitalism, Baron Wrangel's supplier.

Sitting in those trenches were Ural miners and factory workers and Siberian partisans who had defeated Admiral Kolchak.

"They haven't seen tanks yet," Chubenko said out loud, "they won't hold out against such an assault. Wish I was there dying beside them."

Meanwhile, it had been getting light. The Whites mounted a new attack. Chubenko saw reinforcements pulling up under cover of tanks and armored cars. The little men who ran out of the trenches toward the tanks to meet them halfway fell and ran on. "No, these won't scare," Chubenko whispered, his heart filling with great love and pride.

When it got light enough, airplanes appeared in the sky. Chubenko counted seventeen. They came from the south, turned for the attack, and started to bomb the bridgehead. It was frightening to look at the explosions splashing upward; Chubenko was quaking with anger, it was beyond his strength to see his comrades dying. He snatched out his revolver and fired without realizing it. "Follow me," he shouted, "follow me!" As though his regiment could take to the air and wing the distance to the enemy.

The Donbas Regiment tarried at the crossing. Chubenko's men brought him a sheepskin jerkin. "You're still weak after that typhus." The Dnieper was rolling heavy gray waves, the pontoon bridge rising and sinking underfoot. Unit after unit crossed over to the bridgehead, and finally Chubenko's turn came. It was late morning when he set foot on the other bank. The

fighting had died down then flared up again with volcanic vehemence, but still it was somewhere far off.

Chubenko was not destined to take part in that battle: the bridgehead had beaten off all attacks, capturing twelve tanks and armored cars and cutting up the White corps in a brilliant victory. The tanks remained standing on the battlefield, dead beside their dead masters' bodies. The corpses were all officers in black uniforms with death's heads sown on the sleeves and some with embroidered mottoes. "Fear No One But God Alone," read Chubenko.

The tanks stood beside each other. The bodies of the Red Army men who had scorned death and won in uneven battle were lying all around.

A White officer sat in the greening winter wheat field far from the trenches. Both his legs had been torn off knee high. There had still been time to bandage him, but then he had been thrown off the wagon in the panicky flight. The bandages on his stumps were soaked with blood; he sat swaying from side to side with his eyes closed, humming a Cossack song: "Sons of Russia and the Don, far and wide we roam; And where'er you tie your horse is your welcome home." He was either drunk or out of his mind from shock.

And further on his way, Chubenko met a small Red cavalry detachment carrying their dead commander to be buried.

It is quite different if you die that way. The sight of the mourning men solemnly accompanying their commander with bared swords moved Chubenko who had stared death in the eye many a time, almost to tears. He joined the cortege.

The dead man lay in the wagon gazing at the sky. His head rocked in time to the springs as though he were shaking it in bewilderment, saying, "Why did I give in to death, brothers, why?" The wind was stirring his wavy forelock.

Autumnal clouds and endless flocks of cranes were flying over the Perekop plain. A steppe October, cold earth. Baron Wrangel's fifty-thousand-strong army threw one select officer brigade after another into battle, pulling up its reserves of Don and Kuban Cossacks, marshaling its tanks and airplanes. Five armies of the Red Southern Front were aimed at that formidable force. The autumn of 1920 was filled with the thumping of heavy cannon, the clatter of hundreds of thousands of horse hooves, the rumble of tank and airplane engines and the rattle of two armies of different historical eras clashing head on... "If we're to speak about Waterloo," a young general said, "I don't see a Napoleon Bonaparte in this setup." And he gave a great laugh, that recent Don Cossack captain, redhaired and pockmarked.

"This is the sort of generals we get these days," thought an old general with a gray crew cut.

"And yet things are moving toward a Waterloo," the young general continued, "in which the Reds will be defeated and destroyed."

The two generals were sitting at headquarters, the young one sipping a brandy and the old one his milk.

"Incidentally," the old general said, putting down his glass, "there was no action at Waterloo."

"What do you mean no action? What about history?"

"The first battle was at Ligny, where Napoleon wiped out Blücher's Prussian army, while Blücher * himself — an old slasher of a general, honest and brave but without any education — fell off his horse in the welter and could not be found for a long time. But he had the famous Gneisenau,** the great Scharnhorst's *** associate, for chief of staff — if all these names ring a bell with you..."

The young one kept silent and angrily slurped down more brandy.

"Yes, and Gneisenau, brilliant theoretician that he was, gave the battered Prussian troops the only correct order for the direction of retreat. In the meantime, Napoleon had engaged Wellington's British army at Mont St. Jean. He broke Wellington's resistance and was just about to give him a sound drubbing. But then the recently defeated Gneisenau and Blücher rushed up and helped the goddess of victory leave Napoleon for the other side. Waterloo is just the name of the village where Wellington's headquarters stood on June 18, 1815."

Silence fell in the headquarters. A distant cannonade, the neighing of horses and howling of the wind came from outside.

"A military operation resulting in annihila-

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* Blücher, Gebhard Leberecht von (1742-1819) — Prussian field marshal

** Gneisenau, August Neithardt von (1760-1831) — Prussian field marshal

*** Scharnhorst, Gebhard Johann David von 1755-1813) — Prussian general and author of several works on military science

tion of the enemy is called a Cannae," the old general said. "Didn't you happen to study that, Your Excellency?"

The swaggering Cossack captain in general's shoulder straps turned beet-red with fury. He glanced at the old man and thought that he could easily cut him in two like a reed. "We're speaking about the Trans-Dnieper operation, aren't we," he muttered.

"So, it won't harm you to know about Cannae," the old general went on, saying, "the battle famous Count Schlieffen * wrote about. In 216 BC, Hannibal, a Carthaginian general of genius, with fifty thousand troops in command, routed Roman Consul Terentius Varro's seventy-thousand-strong army at Cannae. The invincible Carthaginian cavalry led by Hasdrubal defeated Varro's right-wing cavalry, charged rear of the Roman infantry and made short work of their left-wing cavalry, too. As a result of that brilliant maneuver by Hannibal, the Romans were forced to defend themselves on four sides at once, and the Carthaginians left almost every one of them lying on the battlefield. That is a Cannae for you."

"This is what's going to happen at Kakhovka, too," the young one said. "The Romans had their Cannae, and the Reds'll have Kakhovka."

The general with the gray crew cut shook his head. "The Trans-Dnieper operation is a bold one and has its chances of success, but we must beware of all manner of surprises," he strained through his teeth.

* Schlieffen, Alfred von (1833-1913) — German field marshal (1911); drew up his plan for a war against France

The pockmarked general shrugged, his stiff general's shoulder straps perking up. He knew one thing for sure: his brigade of cutthroats was within earshot and waiting to be thrown into pursuit of the defeated Reds at any opportune moment.

"But Your Excellency, do you think that our troops crossed the Dnieper only to come back?"

The old general drank up his milk and went hobbling to the door and back, annoyed by that young churl's arrogance. "It will be good if they do," he muttered.

"Command of the Red front has been given to Frunze *," he said crisply after a pause, "and I'd rather not" — and he cut himself short as he glanced out the window — "and I'd rather not receive any bad news."

But the officer who came running into the room did not look like a harbinger of good tidings. "It's the end," he shouted, "the operation fell through. All our tanks have been destroyed! The bastards!"

He fell onto the table, frothing at the mouth. The pockmarked Cossack captain in general's shoulder straps dashed outside, from whence came his obscene swearing and inane commands to the brigade.

The Perekop plain begins beyond the Dnieper: a boundless expanse, dark and bare, without a stream or tree. Hamlets and homesteads are few. The autumnal sun is never for long; it

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* Frunze, Mikhail (1885-1925) — Red Army commander; defeated White Admiral Kolchak in Siberia and General Wrangel in the Crimea (1920)

seldom peeks out of the wispy clouds strewn all over the sky. The last days in October are cold, the frosted dry grass crackles underfoot, and the springs of childhood are far, far away on some rosy shores wrapped in a briny mist.

Little shepherd Danilko was again riding on horseback across the land of his childhood. True, he had grown to become a full-fledged shepherd, Danilo the greatgrandson of Danilo, son of Rihor, and above him was autumn and the bitterish air of the autumnal steppe. Not a lark in the sky or a stork in the grass; and the lizards had gone to sleep in the ground. All the grasshoppers had frozen to death and the grasses withered. The sun no longer warmed the earth, and the last birds were flying south beneath the clouds. It was autumn.

And his greatgrandfather, whom he had lost somewhere on that plain, rose before Danilo's eyes whispering, "Trampling, trampling on primroses." Greatgrandfather would come to him gentle and old, his ancient voice making itself heard to Danilo as it had always done in the trying moments of his youth. And thence did he find strength and courage, thence was his song born — the echo of his forefathers' freedom!

Danilo was gazing about. It was as though he had noticed the orphanlike nakedness of the steppe for the first time ever, and he thought of how he would put it in writing. He had swarms of ideas to get across to his people. In his person, his rebellious clan would obtain the right to speak on this earth!

He would write a history of his family and himself, of how he walked down an ancient road

and come to the Revolution. Greatgrandfather might lie in peace in the earth: his greatgrandson had not forgotten his words or his own father's misery, he remembered everything well and would put it down on paper. It would be a long book in which no one would cry just as Danilo, his father, grandfather, and greatgrandfather had not cried as they ate their bitter bread, toiled for the landlord and the village rich and fought with bare hands, not knowing how to unite with other poor beggars like themselves.

The books would contain four lives, the fourth being his own, and every one beginning with the same childhood; the same larks would trill over each of the four, the same grasses murmur under their feet.

The young commissar rode across the steppe of his childhood, returning from the headquarters to Comrade Shved's regiment which was standing on the army's extreme flank somewhere on that desolate steppe. At the headquarters, the young commissar had insisted on a quantity of boots and uniforms for the regiment, so they had to be received and fetched. He had described how his men braved cold night and day, stuck in the bleak steppe without fuel or shelter and with mere rags for boots, the wind chilling them to the bone. Shved had staked out a small tumbledown homestead as a resting place for his reserves. He had few horses but saw his unit as a cavalry regiment. "I'll transfer you to the infantry!" he shouted, and that was the strongest threat with him.

Also, Danilo had once again seen that the headquarters regarded their detachment as

almost irregular and kept it away from the more critical sections of the front, but nevertheless loved Shved dearly. His proud reports to the effect that his regiment of one hundred and twenty-two sabers was ready to go anywhere anytime were read by the chief of staff, an old factory worker and party veteran from Petrograd, with a smile. "Bushwhackers," he would say condescendingly and benignly at the same time.

Once headquarters inquired where the Wrangel officers Shved had taken prisoner had disappeared to after the battle, to which he replied that he had never taken nor would ever take any prisoners in his "fight for the Revolutionary ideals." Danilo was the only commissar he put up with. And yet he, too, had to break Shved's obstinacy day after day, running up against his commander's contrary character all the time.

What wild schemes had Shved not come up with! Once it had been nothing less than a landing operation. He was going to put his regiment on board (without letting anyone know, of course), sail to Sevastopol and land in its vicinity at night, stalk up unnoticed, raid Wrangel's headquarters, catch him if they were lucky, cut everyone else's throats and then get lost in the Crimean mountains and fight till the arrival of friendly troops. "Lenin himself will hear about it," Shved would say dreamily.

Another of Shved's projects for the destruction of Wrangel had nearly ended tragically for himself. In the absence of his commissar ("the summons to HQ I gave you was a fake," Shved confessed later, "I just hated to take you along")

Shved dressed his men in the captured uniforms of a Wrangel officers regiment and headed for the front. His choice of place was perfect. He was just about to begin the raid when a Red cavalry unit swooped down on them out of the blue. The Red cavalry men met with a strange phenomenon as the Wrangel officers surrendered to the last man without a single shot, swearing up hill and down dale.

Riding across the steppe, Danilo could not rid himself of the thought of an unknown detachment which, he had heard at headquarters, had appeared in their parts. He flicked his horse into a trot and struck up a song but didn't sing for long or with feeling. Tumbleweed was blown in the wind. A horse lay dying by the road. Now and then, it tore its head off the ground and gazed impotently over the steppe. Half a kilometer afield lay an ammunition cart without wheels, and suddenly Danilo saw that the earth was all battered by horse hooves.

He followed the tracks, noticing signs of a grueling hasty march everywhere. He no longer felt like singing. The tracks led to the homestead that served as Shved's base. Presently, the homestead itself came into view. Over the homestead, vultures were circling.

The first thing Danilo saw when he rode closer was Shved in his red riding breeches but without boots. He was hanging from a smell-split tree. And not a living soul around. The yard was strewn with papers. Two dead sentries at the porch, heads cleft open. Rubbish and papers whirling about the yard in the brisk wind. Then the sun broke through a cloud to light up the dismal picture. And suddenly a rooster,

crowed from a loft amid all that stillness and death.

"Is anyone here?" Danilo shouted without hearing his own voice. He dismounted and let go of the reins. The horse trod after him. "Anyone here?" Danilo called again and again as he walked around the yard, peering into the windows. No one called back. The hacked-up cook lay crouched near the field kitchen. Death had overtaken him peeling potatoes, and now he would be peeling them forever. Several dead Red Army men were piled up by the shed.

Turning a corner, Danilo nearly knocked a living man to the ground. It was a young soldier, no more than a boy. He sat leaning against the bullet-ridden wall of the shed, his head shaking, his lips jibbering inaudibly without end. And the vultures were circling in the sky.

The young commissar bandaged the lad and gave him a drink of water. He learned that the Whites had been riding under a Red flag. Shved believed they were a friendly unit in disguise. There was no fighting whatsoever.

This was how Shved and his partisans had perished.

Danilo hugged a saber-slashed cherry tree and felt an overwhelming bitterness choking him. All the aches and pains of his childhood, all the hurts in the orphanage, all the smacks in the eye he'd gotten working for the rich flashed through his head. Tears streamed from his eyes. He was crying for the first time in his adult life. In the land of his childhood.

The Perekop plain and the steppes of Tauride were the field of a pitched battle on the threshold

of the Crimea. Two eras had clashed head on to settle accounts on that flat, interminable expanse. But the initiative had been seized by the revolutionary armies led by a topflight general, and the select White troops with their tanks, airplanes and armored cars resorted to anything to bear the concentrated Red attack.

A plan to encircle and destroy Wrangel's army in Tauride before it could withdraw into the Crimea was envisaged. The Sixth Army threw the enemy aside and cut through to the Perekop isthmus, sealing off Wrangel's escape route. The invincible First Cavalry Army thrust deep behind the lines of Wrangel's main forces and severed the other way to the Crimea, through Chongar. The Second Cavalry Army and the Fourth and Thirteenth armies continued to attack mightily. So Wrangel fled to the Crimea, saving himself from a Cannae.

"The first stage of the liquidation of Wrangel is completed. The task of encircling and destroying the bulk of the enemy force north and northeast of the Crimean isthmuses has been accomplished brilliantly by joint action of all armies of the front. The enemy has suffered tremendous losses. We took about 20,000 men prisoner and captured upwards of one hundred artillery pieces, countless machine guns, almost one hundred steam engines, two thousand freight cars and nearly all supply trains as well as enormous stocks, among them tens of thousands of artillery rounds and millions of cartridges."

Sitting in the 4th Army Headquarters, the Front Commander was reviewing his order to the troops. He wore a leather jacket and white

felt boots and had a long mustache, high forehead and clear calm eyes.

He was a genuine marshal of the Revolution. With five armies at his command, he had cut up Wrangel in a series of successful maneuvers and bold operations within the course of a month. Now he had arrived posthaste at the forward positions to lead the final assault.

He was a commander made by the Revolution who stood at the top of the military profession. He was pacing the small room of the headquarters with a barely noticeable limp and listening. His simple, pleasant factory worker's face was pensive and composed. He seemed to have withdrawn into his thoughts and the enormity of his responsibility — responsibility for the life of every single Red Army man and the entire front, responsibility to the Party for the front and responsibility to the new socialist man he had dreamed about in czarist penal servitude.

And his troops' situation became clear to him in minutest detail, which is often more relevant than shortage of ammunition and men: they were faced with scarcity of forage, utter lack of fuel, warm clothes and plain ordinary drinking water, subzero temperatures and the cold bare sky for a roof.

The Front Commander oversaw the strengthening of coastal batteries and the organizing of positions. He saw that everyone and everything was immersed in the forthcoming assault. The troops had no engineering support — the engineers just could not keep pace with the forward units in their spirited rush south. Exposed to piercing cold, tattered and barefoot and without any hot food or even a place to

warm up, the men were doing all the necessary work with their own hands. And not a single complaint about the incredibly harsh working conditions. But the Commander was not surprised: his men's heroism and devotion were understandable to him. He demanded that they accomplish the impossible, and they did.

His felt boot had rubbed his foot. He sat down on a zinc ammunition box and changed into another pair. A numbing salt wind was blowing from the west.

The approaches to Perekop and Chongar positions lay on even ground, and those positions had been fortified by all possible means. The French and Wrangel's engineers had designed and erected a whole defensive system of earth and concrete which seemed to leave a frontal assault no chance of success. Besides, at Perekop there also rose the ancient Turkish Wall with a moat below, and if the height of the rampart was added to the depth of the moat, the obstacle was from thirty to forty meters high. All that was enmeshed in barbed wire, protected by concrete-lined trenches, guns, mortars and machine guns, and supported by fire from a friendly fleet.

From the 51st Division's Headquarters, the Front Commander headed to Perekop. It was getting dark. In the twilight, a thick fog had settled, and nothing could be seen for more than a few paces ahead. Guns roared unremittingly. The searchlights on the opposite side did not go out even for a minute.

Volleys of gunfire flashed. The reserve regiments of the 51st Division were preparing for the final assault. The fog had been dense all the

day long, artillery could not be used, and troops had been storming the enemy positions with scarcely any preparatory firing.

The Front Commander was riding along the northern shore of the Sivash. Now and then, enemy shells burst near the road. A stack of straw caught fire. The Front Commander kept perfectly calm under bombardment; his army and division commanders knew of instances when he had joined rank-and-file riflemen in attack.

The 52nd Division's commander was not to be found at his headquarters. He had crossed the Sivash with his regiments the night before, and fighting had since been going on without respite on the Lithuanian peninsula. All that time his men had not had a bite to eat; nor was there any drinking water. The peninsula offered a cut into the rear of the Perekop positions which the 51st Division was storming in vain. It was necessary to hold the peninsula and keep storming the Perekop Wall at whatever cost.

They had some tea on the way. Night was the darkest near the searchlights. Jokes were traded and laughed over.

Near midnight, the Front Commander arrived at the 51st Division's Headquarters. The division's commander and his regiments had also been on the Lithuanian peninsula since the previous night. Furious attacks were raging there. The Whites were stepping up their pressure. They had thrown their best division with its armored vehicles into counterattack.

Half an hour after the Front Commander's arrival at headquarters, the forward units informed him by telephone from across the Sivash that the water was rising, flooding the

fords. Both divisions' regiments might find themselves cut off on the far side of the Sivash inlet.

The Front Commander showed all the force of character and resolution required from a general under the circumstances. Czarist penal servitude and exile had undermined his health but hardened his will. His military talent went together with his Bolshevik perseverance. He knew one thing: victory would not come by itself— it had to be won.

So he gave this order for immediate execution: *Assault the Turkish Wall head on without delay and at any cost. Mobilize residents of nearby villages for preventive work on the fords. To the cavalry division and the insurgents' force: Into the saddle at once. Cross the Sivash.*

The cavalry division arrived at about three in the morning. The Front Commander briefly inspected it and dispatched it to battle. Water was gradually rising in the Sivash; the fords were becoming difficult, but it was still possible to cross.

An hour later, the insurgents arrived, too. Their leader Karetnikov and chief of staff came to the Front Commander. They entered warily, as if expecting a trap.

Who knew what they were thinking when they had offered their services? Maybe they needed ammunition or some respite... Maybe some evil plans were behind Makhno's giving the Red Army his regiments as help? The Front Commander had been sifting through all those possibilities ever since Kharkiv.

Karetnikov heard out the Front Commander's patient explanation as to why an immediate

crossing of the Sivash was necessary. He was pensive as he cast glances at the legendary general. This was not the man Karetnikov had expected to see. There was nothing to be gained by playing dumb or yelling, so Karetnikov kept silent. His chief of staff was scrutinizing the map. "The cavalry won't make it across," he said at length.

"We, Ukraine's revolutionary insurgents," Karetnikov spoke up, "will fight Wrangel with you. But the cavalry won't cross the Sivash."

"Our cavalry division did," the Front Commander rejoined calmly, "only an hour ago. I hear the revolutionary insurgents do not intend to fall behind in accomplishing their duty."

Outwardly, the Front Commander remained unperturbed. He did not show the two Makhnovites his impatience. He was making it a point that only out of his good will could he entrust them with the honor of crossing the Sivash and joining the battle. Knowing the wayward guerilla tempers, he did not press them into anything, although every minute was precious. Karetnikov saluted and left.

The Front Commander was informed that Makhno's troops had tight bundles of straw and reed roped to their saddles. They knew the ways of crossing the Sivash only too well and were simply stalling for time, fearing some kind of trap.

Karetnikov and his chief of staff came back to the Front Commander then left, allegedly to execute the order, several times. The whole business began to be taking too long. The Sivash might fill with water, and the badly needed reinforcements would be unable to cross over

to the Lithuanian peninsula. "I regard your deferring," the Front Commander said at last, "as cowardice. Perhaps you'd do better to go home."

That unmasked blow stunned Karetnikov. He grinned wryly and went out noiselessly, mounted his horse and lashed it with his riding crop. His detachment sped off to the Sivash.

Then came a report from the 51st Division's Headquarters. Supported from the Lithuanian peninsula, the division's regiments had taken the Turkish Wall by assault at night and were now pursuing the enemy. The task was far from accomplished, because the strong Yushun positions still remained ahead anyway; but the fall of Perekop had allowed the division on the Lithuanian peninsula to join the general offensive.

The Front Commander did not permit himself a moment's rest until he had signed the follow-up order. Then, the utterly exhausted man lay down on a cot and started massaging his bad knee. It was 6 a.m., November 1920.

Telegraph operators began to transmit the order. It was signed by Frunze.

There followed two days of fighting at Yushun, dogged and bloody. And Yushun was captured at the same time as the 30th Division took Chongar by daring bayonet assault. The Red armies broke into the Crimea, and nothing could turn the tide now.

Commissar Herdt overtook Ivan Polovets, Commander of the Internationalist Regiment. "What a funny *tachanka,* look," Herdt said. "It reminds me of that ace pilot who painted his plane red. When he appeared in the sky, it look-

ed beautiful even if impractical. But it had a certain psychological effect, too."

"Something like this psychological attack we gave them on the Sivash," Ivan Polovets said as he watched the red wagon passing in the distance. "The place is packed like a fair," young Sashko Polovets said, turning his head right and left.

There were four men in the funny wagon: a bearded man and one with a smooth chin up front and a mustachioed giant with a lean young soldier at the machine gun. "Some picture," Herdt said laughing. "'Victors Entering Baron Wrangel's Last Stronghold.'"

Some shouting came from behind. Horsemen galloped down the road at breakneck speed, wagons trundling, motley rugs streaming. Beribboned horses, rugs hanging down to the wheels, speed, pomp, extravaganza.

"The Makhnovites are in a hurry," Ivan Polovets said. "They were more unassuming on the Sivash."

"In a hurry for spoils," Herdt said. "Wish we could machine-gun them all."

The Makhnovites spotted and seemed to recognize the red wagon. A huddle of horsemen separated from the detachment and dashed toward the red wagon without slackening their gallop. Sabers sparkled in the air. For a split second, the wagon disappeared behind the horsemen, then they scattered like wolves and sped after their column.

Everything had happened so quickly that Polovets and Herdt did not come to their senses until two men had fallen out of the wagon and the horses began to spin without control.

Disorderly shots rang out, but the Makhnovites were too far away already. The red wagon was stopped. Chubenko emerged from somewhere.

In the *tachanka,* Maxim the smith had hung his saber-cleft head on his machine gun. On the other side of the machine gun, an unscathed Danilo sat holding the iron rose dazedly in his hand. The smith was still jerking like a dying bird. Over came Polovets and Herdt. "Yours?" Polovets asked when he saw Chubenko's eyes. Chubenko turned away. "The war is ending," Herdt said. "You'll soon be making your steel, Chubenko," Polovets said with a smile. "The star of Aldebaran," Chubenko said for no apparent reason. "A 'V' or cranes wedged into eternity."

And he took the rose from Danilo.

The scene etched itself on Danilo's brain: the sun, autumn, the smell of death and horse sweat, infinite vistas, the joy of victory, and Chubenko the steelmaker at the gate to the Crimea, rose in hand.

"Now then, I'm no superintendant, just an ordinary steelmaker. Our furnace superintendant is Friedrich Ivanovich, a master worth his weight in gold, a steelmaking genius. I looked for such a man a solid year before I found him, because professionals like him aren't born every day. He's a master of the old German school, and I wouldn't be surprised if he had had Siemens for an apprentice in his day. Siemens designed the first furnace for Pierre Martin, the man that built it.

"My Friedrich Ivanovich is as delicate a master as he is a human being. You've seen him around the furnace: from a distance, he might appear to be a physician, a dapper little man in his white smock and metal-rimmed glasses who looks like he couldn't care less about that ugly furnace. Why, he's just here between two delicate operations, just on his way from one clinic to another. The little old doc stops by the furnace and its fifteen hundred Celsius hits him in the face 'cause he's stopped right by the charging doors where hell's a-cookin'. And he looks kind of amused that some people should want to live in such a hot place, amused and scared of all that clatter and banging. Cars with molds are shunted this way and that, the charging machine turns around and around, the iron bridge booms underfoot, and a worker shoves his goggles over his eyes to take a look into the roaring blaze.

"You might think he's totally indifferent to all those fireworks, but I'll tell you: there's never been another steel wizard like him. Such masters should be prized beyond words, and I've been a steelmaker for a while, too, and seen men that could do the job and can make any steel you like, any type and quality. I've made chrome tungsten, too, and that's a high-speed steel capricious as can be; yet every time I stand beside good old Friedrich Ivanovich I feel terribly envious, even though it doesn't become a Bolshevik to nurture such feelings.

"This is what I want to say, comrades, at our meeting here in the open-hearth plant where you've just witnessed the making of the first Soviet steel in the Donbas — take my word for it — if not in the whole Republic. You saw us pour that steel in molds, and it was just hot enough and easy-flowing and hard as required by the customer, and we've all got just one customer — and that's Revolution.

"This steel is for metalworks and bridges — point ten percent carbon, no more than point fifteen anyway; point three to point six manganese and as little sulphur and phosphorus as possible; in a word, it's good stuff. Our customer will build bridges all over the Republic, seeing as we have a lack of them now. Town and country, factory and field, and all peoples large and small have to be united. The czarist regime feared bridges. The interventionists destroyed whatever there were, but we'll raise them back again, and this is what we've made this steel for.

"Friedrich Ivanovich is getting the furnace ready for a second heating, so they've got to

check and see if the bottom's eroded and glaze it in if so; or maybe the baffle got burnt or some slag got stuck somewhere. The furnace has to be reheated, and molds with limestone, pig iron and scrap steel have to be brought over; in a word, nothing must delay this operation, so that in a couple of hours, we can run another forty tons of magnificent Red steel into the molds.

"And this is how bit by bit, shift by shift, heat after heat and campaign after campaign, we'll put all our furnaces back in operation. Make your steel, oh Republic, make whatever kind you need — for plows and guns, for machines and rails. We'll breathe life into the old furnaces and build many more, for our Lenin is ill, comrades, and we need new steel mills, we need more electric power, we need our industries going full blast.

"And now, on the occasion of the first steel melting since the war, I want to share some memories of how I, a soldier in the front ranks of the working class, obtained the right to pour this steel into my own ladle — that of a working man and not some bloody capitalist — a ladle I made mine by my own sweat and blood. I won't take much of your time — I don't care much for hours of reminiscences either. Let's just say a few kind words to one another in this shop, and may they be sincere and solid even if awkward and plain, and after that we'll clench our teeth and get right down to work and plug along till mother earth groans beneath us, but we won't stop for a year, two or ten till we all rise to light from our darkness and lead others out, too. For we all have only

one life and I'll be damned if it isn't both painful and sweet!

"I've been in this trade ever since my teens, working as an unskilled laborer, a roaster, crane operator and scarfer. Then my capitalist bosses made me a steelmaker and even promised to promote me to master. The scenery here is naked steppe and no forest, just steppe and coalmines without end, and this little pond nearby has more fuel oil than water in it, but you certainly know all about that yourselves.

"I turned thirty then. It was back in peacetime, a year before the world war. Ten years have since rustled over our heads and Colonel Chubenko's come back to his furnace to make steel. But then I was thirty going on thirty-one and cooking steel in this old furnace — you know, it pains me something awful to think what gorgeous steel I used to make for that bloody capitalist! Yes, and the scenery here is sheer steppe, the flat smoke-filled steppe of our Donbas, and the sun blazes like there's no tomorrow, and the furnace scorches you through its charging doors.

"I was a sturdy young lad and no noodle, so I began to think, why is it that one fellow lives from hand to mouth and another lies around on feather beds? I hadn't taken any part in the Revolution yet, but I wasn't totally ignorant either. I'd read radical and anarchistic authors alike, *The Communist Manifesto,* Tolstoy, and books about the People's Will and the Decembrists. I loved Shevchenko and other Ukrainian classics; like I said, I wasn't absolutely dumb. Used to go to May First gatherings, ran from the mounted police and tasted of their raw-

hide. I read illegal leaflets and passed them on to others. I didn't make it to prison, though, and so cannot be considered a real revolutionary because what kind of a revolutionary can you be if you didn't do time in a czarist confine?

"Such was my young life. I don't remember my parents. Father got scorched by molten iron and died two days later. Mother got galloping consumption at the chemical factory where she worked. So I was an orphan and made steel and raced my pigeons on Sundays: there's no breed I didn't have. But one day near the pond I told you about — you'll see why I mention it again — I met and talked with a comrade and felt my revolutionary consciousness come to a boil in me. It boiled red bubbles, like furnace operators say when molten iron is releasing carbon. And I bubbled over with this new emotion so that I thought I could go and expropriate anything from anybody or shoot any minister or even the bloody Czar Nicholas himself.

"You might say that revolutionaries aren't made that way, but let me tell you this time that the comrade I met at the pond was my wife and dear companion — a slender raven-haired girl, the daughter of an accountant at this very mill. She'd been exiled to her father and the Donbas backwaters following a year in prison on suspicion of belonging to some political organization.

"Steelmaking's a delicate job, difficult and intricate. You can't taste your steel or finger it to check if it's acid or brittle. It might turn out so that it shatters to dust from a good whack or bursts under tension.

"So you keep carbon at norm and deoxidize

acid steel with ferromanganese, ferrosilicone and sometimes aluminum. And I'll tell you what: steelmaking is a terribly delicate business but, admittedly, with women you've got to be an even better steelmaker. You must be able to judge on sight her sulphur content, because sulphur causes red-shortness, and her level of iron oxide and whether this one has to be deoxidized or alloyed with special additives so she won't rust in the dishwater of life or scale over when heated to a thousand degrees, and so she'll attract you like a magnet and won't be attracted by other men. And when you pour your churning steel into a mold, may you obtain such beauty, purity, softness and toughness as becomes every steelmaker to have for a wife.

"I love hot-blooded and strong-willed people whose hearts are not made of burlap and who view life from a lofty rig. I've got a weakness for that breed of man, they're what keeps me on earth. I've been searching for them and admiring them all my life. They live as though burning with an unwavering pure flame, heating everyone around them like crazy. A good gas man looks after their burning, and the gas burns and is burned up without a trace of soot.

"I've always envied people like that. They're in short supply, and we need many more. My wife was one of them, and she is no more, and so was our Adamenko, and he is no more either. And my fists clench unconsciously when I think of that, and I feel like singing and shouting for all the earth to hear: 'Come into the world, people brave and beautiful, and join our ranks to fight and win, to fight for and build the beautiful morrow of socialism!'

"Not so long ago when I was in charge of municipal services in this town — my previous job from which the Party sent me straight here to run this mill, because I'm a steelmaker by trade after all, and then I found Friedrich Ivanovich, and gradually we got it rolling... Yes, and not so long ago I ordered a monument carved from a slab of rock. There was an Italian — an expert in filigree stone carving — he carved me such virtu you'll hold your breath when you see it in the cemetery of the heroes of the Revolution.

"This is a monument to Adamenko and it stands over his grave by the water — a stone eagle striking away at stone shackles and his biography carved in gold, with the Donbas steppe all around and the swelter and clattering and banging all day, and the oil-stained pond by which I met the girl who became my wife. We lived a couple of years without a cross word.

"We had a daughter, survived the Kaiser's war, welcomed the Revolution, and when the Germans occupied the Donbas, we workers called a strike and stopped the mill. I began to knock a miners' revolutionary battalion together. In time, it grew into a regiment and then even a brigade, so let's stop off here and look back on the past some, the glorious and not so distant past steelmaker Chubenko will tell you about in his simple words.

"There were political parties aplenty, one on every street and lane. Such was the situation in our Donbas in nineteen-eighteen when we found ourselves the subjects of a new state, the Ukraine of the Most Illustrious Hetman.

"Our Donbas scenery is not too cheerful. The Ukrainian state was tearing out of control, and we began to think of our own Republic of Donbas miners. The Hetman printed money on a typewriter and we were envious to be sure, so one day around that time I met this turner from Lugansk, and we had a drink together and a smoke and I got down to organizing a partisan detachment, All Power To The Soviets. I looked a bit scary at the time — these gold teeth weren't here yet, and I had a tattered black hat like an old regime Circassian cutthroat and a booming voice and a steely glint in my eye.

"I took on both Bolsheviks and non-party members, as long as they had miner's thick blood in their veins or years in steelmaking to their credit and were dogged and tough and could boil without boiling over and had not more than one percent carbon — that is to say, as long as the checks indicated good steel. And I took on men who were like aluminum that binds gases in metal so steel won't boil in the ladle. Took them from every shop of the works, standing them one beside the other like so many ingots — the hot-tempered, unflinching, hard-grained and hard-bitten workers of the great Donbas land. And that was the partisan detachment I knocked together against the Germans — a score of men or so, but later on, every one of them became a Bolshevik of the highest grade who knew Lenin and Marx by heart and wanted socialism and didn't care for any other theories.

"When following a resolution, our party ranks had to be purged some. we set our own quotas and minimums to qualify for further membership. Say, if you've got the guts to attack a ma-

chine-gun nest singlehanded or throw yourself on a dozen rifles in top working condition, or wipe out a headquarters with a hand grenade, then you're a full-blown Bolshevik and honor be to you, and thank you from the working class, and here's your new Party card stamped, signed and delivered.

"We fought tooth and nail when we could and scattered to the four winds when the Germans got reinforcements, and thus we hiked all over the Donbas, straying into Soviet Russia for some weapons, advice and class encouragement and stealing back across the border by goodness knows what partisan paths to our parts.

"Lying low in a hideaway for a new raid, I received orders from the Party underground to attack an army train, stage a little roadside show for them and come away with some weapons. Ataman Adamenko and the poorest peasants will help you, Comrade Chubenko, I was told, the situation's such and such, don't shoot prisoners, but dispose of the officers, and to heck with them. Report when accomplished.

"I waited for the appointed day, wondering what he was like, that Adamenko, what fighting with him would be like and wouldn't his peasants go marauding. All weighed and considered, I decided to follow my orders but reset my watch five miles or so forward. So I did the job with my Donbas company and lay down in the grass, hot from the fighting, to take a rest and wait for Adamenko. You know how it is, you run around all day for a five-minute fight, and I also got so tired my soul was tearing loose. Up in the sky, clouds were chasing one another, and the pure country smells and

horses nibbling grass... In a word, quite some time passed before I realized I had pneumonia.

"Adamenko was not a shade late when he arrived with his boys, combat ready and all, horses well fed, men well trained. His own mare shone like red gold under him. Where had he been able to hide a beauty like that from the public eye? I asked him and he said he painted her khaki now and then; we nearly split our sides laughing. The whole meadow was simply quaking with laughter, and as I rose from the grass, the easier to laugh, I felt stabs of pain all over and my lungs wheezing under my ribs, and no laughter came.

"Adamenko got off his horse. He was tall as a lamppost, and I remember wondering where they'd gotten a uniform for such a beanpole. Well, he came up and listened to my wheezing, then put me on the ground and started giving me a rubdown. Don't know what kind of a rubdown it was but my ribs were cracking like matches under his hands. He almost choked me with his rubdown, and later he confessed that medicine was his speciality, and he'd served as a veterinarian in the army.

"I liked him straightaway. This Adamenko was a real partisan hero, so I put him in charge of my miners and started wrestling with my pneumonia. They gave me all kinds of pills and powders but nothing did any good. The damned sickness had planted itself firmly in my chest, and me hiding out and riding on horseback with lungs like those. Adamenko said it took quite a man to endure all that, so finally we decided to turn to radical treatment, for which

purpose we found an out-of-the-way hamlet where no German ever showed his nose, and put me, the servant of God, on a broiling hot stove covered with hay and stoked that stove seven days without stopping, sprinkling the hay with water.

"It was so hot in there and I'd been so thoroughly boiled by the steam and cougher up so much blood, I really felt better and made up my mind not to die and gave Adamenko my revolver as a present. We began thinking of joining our detachments, only we didn't know how to settle Party affairs because all the men in my detachment were Party members, and his weren't.

"They had no idea how to tell a Party member by sight, and later Adamenko owned up that they were going to tattoo stars on one another's foreheads to make sure that it was no joke but a mortal fight for freedom. Then everyone would recognize them from a long way off. True, they tattooed their chests instead, so every one had a big star there as a party card after his own fashion. But still, we wondered if the Party organs would permit all that play with Party cards, and so decided to consider theirs a temporary substitute, seeing as you can't register your dues on them. So all Adamenko's men were put down as properly purged and full-blown Bolsheviks.

"Just fancy this panorama: Chubenko lying on the stove, tossing this way and that and spitting clots of black blood, the wet hay sizzling against red-hot bricks and the hut filled with steam so thick you can hardly breathe. Adamenko sitting grief-stricken and all at the table and his men passing through the hut, all

with stars on their chests, all fanatics of socialism. There would be no turncoats among them because they couldn't hide their Party cards in their bootlegs; those Party cards would follow them to the grave, too.

"My head is swimming, and I bellow like a bull, fighting blind nature for my own life. There's a tiny window beside me. I can see the street, trees and the distant steppe. An endless road eddies with dust in my eyes. And I'm so longing to see this socialism and live at least till its beginning, I groan still harder and tear at my chest.

"Adamenko turns me face upwards and holds me while I'm shaking like in a nightmare. I see the light and some people through the window, and then it gets dark, and night falls. The planet carries me through night and day, and the hut's shaking for all that.

"Here I am being carried on a stretcher to the graveyard, and I see the wooden village church flaming like a torch and bells falling slowly from the burning belfry. The big bell crashes down with a bang, then a smaller one plunks down after it, and the smaller ones tinkle against the ground one by one.

"I come to and hear Adamenko's roaring laughter. It turned out to be his anti-religious work. There's been a meeting, and he talked the churchgoers into taking what they could of the church property and hiding it in their homes, seeing as, God forbid, the Germans might come and requisition it or some bands raid the church and shake out all the holy gold — then go and pray at the priest's gate! And so they hauled home all they could lay their hands on, gonfa-

lons, too. And the church turned into a regular circus. And then talk started in the village, and everyone was out to have a gold chalice or some other gold sacred utensil. The whole business ended in their burning the church to the ground to cover their communal sin and the sinful community.

"So Adamenko was roaring with laughter, and hardly did I start to show signs of life when we were busy with a piece of work he'd thought up for us: he seemed to have a demon in his head, a wild, sharp-tongued demon of the highest demonic rank.

"And here I am making steel and thinking of Adamenko. You may certainly say that these are but trivial episodes of partisan life, and yet there were Germans and the Hetman's men all around us, all our class enemies. We stood our ground against them and fought to the last bullet. We carried our lives close to our chests. Ours was a mighty hard road to travel, and few of us got back alive.

"We fought the enemy any way we could, and I'll tell you about just one operation à la Adamenko.

"There was a fair in that steppe village and dust rose sky-high, whirling from all those carts and wagons and steppe schooners with German settlers clattering, rattling and trundling down the broad steppe highways. Different tones, different sounds; but any farmer can tell his wagon's voice from a thousand others, like we could our factory's siren, or an engineer his train's hoot. In a word, it was more or less quiet in a steppe sort of way on the endless flat expanse of Tauride that fine morning.

"The steel hubs of the axles called in a thousand voices, cattle lowed across the market, and people added to the hubbub, too. German soldiers with interpreters strutted among the wagons, buying up cattle with the paper money the Hetman typed on his typewriter. A German brass band played military marches and songs, and out on the commons, a German battalion in piked helmets with full combat gear was going through its drills under the command of a beer-bellied major trotting around on horseback. The sky was like a dark sea overhead.

"Then more covered wagons appeared on the horizon. They were a little late and rolling fast down all the four roads, sturdy tanned women and girls sitting up front with their bright red Moldavian kerchiefs glowing in the sun. The wagons stopped and camped in a circle, and the ladies jumped down and wrapped their kerchiefs more tightly around them. Tall as he was, Adamenko's skirts looked wonderful on him, and his embroidered blouse didn't burst at the shoulders either — the girl he'd borrowed it all from was clearly his match.

"So while those dames loitered among the market folk and farmers were laughing their pants off watching the show, we put up our machine guns in the right places and snipers in the gardens and struck so hard from all around the Germans surrendered in the matter of an hour.

"But the fighting was hard, because those weren't Hetmanites who'd have turned tail from one shot. The Germans fought for all they were worth. They just couldn't think of running from all those petticoats, and we mowed them down

with our machine guns. That was partisan tactics, too — to approach the enemy posing as women and overtake him without letting him deploy. Some of us even lost our skirts, but not Adamenko. He'd kept his maidenly garb on throughout the action — coral necklaces, ducats and all. He didn't lose a single thread of beads that tossed about his neck. All that was his fiancee's — she'd given him her holiday best to wear for victory, or may be for death.

"And I'll tell you about another Adamenko-style. operation. It was when we two — Adamenko and me — declared Red terror against the Hetmanites. We were two orphans then, him and me, because we'd lost our dearest ones who died for us — his fiancee and my late wife. A certain cur had given them away to the Hetmanites, and when I learned about it, I raced for our part of the Donbas with my men, forgetting all danger. I flew to their rescue, and it was a nightmare of a night, with a storm raging on the steppe and the moon hopping from cloud to cloud and flashes of dry lightning crashing against one another in the air.

"I felt like jumping from my horse and running faster still. But it was too late when I arrived to find my wife riddled with bullets by that very oil-stained pond and my house a shambles. Our little daughter had run away to the steppe, and the steppe swallowed her. So I sat down on the floor till morning and realized there could be no mercy for anybody now. I cursed the Hetman's Ukraine with my grief and jumped onto my horse and didn't unsaddle it until we blotted that regime out of existence along with its German guards.

"And the Judas who'd given away our women felt his sure death creeping up on him. He was waiting for it as if it were his dearest guest, and we let him have his fill of every kind of pain there is till it was enough for one body. After that, the second of Adamenko's battles took place, and we had a good fight and paid our debts in blood. The interest alone would have been enough to drown the Hetman, that old czarist general, with all of his hounds.

"Maybe some of you fought as partisans or in the Red Army or took power in your hands in the provinces. These comrades remember the sentiment of those days, I'm sure. We imagined we were the hub of the Revolution, and the world was looking to us for something out of a fairy tale yet untold, some world-shaking heroism and revolutionary dash. Yes, and our example was going to be followed by the entire working class, and we spared nothing in the world, for the red planet of socialism was rising before our eyes and its searchlights shone on us as we marched forward, treading on the heels of our goal.

"None of us had more than one pair of pants and a battered greatcoat. Wherever we went, the Republic of Soviets arose, even though there were very few of us, and the ammo misfired at times. The Donbas Republic stood like a child of virgin beauty. Oh, those were hard years; today you feel happy making good steel and remembering the old fighters, but then there was hardly ever any time to wash up. Yes, and one day Adamenko and I made up our minds to wipe out a hundred of the Hetman's best

troops that were billeted in that lowland Donbas village, to square up with Sir Hetman for our unrelenting grief, to repay White terror in kind, and what have you.

"We took them by surprise, that hundred of His Highness Hetman Skoropadsky's Regiment. We'd been following them stealthily for a long time, and grass didn't rustle under our feet, but there were too few of us for an open fight or even an ambush, so we followed their scent by day and gazed up at the stars and choked on our hatred at night, because Adamenko was waiting for the proper moment, and not every moment is fit for battle.

"Take metal, and you'll see that it can't be let out of the furnace just any minute, because the ladle should be in its place and the molds handy, and most important, you've got to have your steel ready. Now committing men to action is an enormous responsibility: the moment you give the signal to attack, you feel as though you're all on fire, and thoughts race through your head by the thousand.

"We found what we were waiting for in one Moldavian village. There was a large school where the Hetmanites had put up for the night, which was just what we needed. Oh, we gave them some amusement all right: none of them got out of there alive. We picked off the sentries, blocked the doors and set about throwing burning wisps of straw inside. We saw them jumping from the floor and shot them with our rifles. You can't lay around when a burning wisp of straw falls on your head. We wouldn't have messed around so long if we'd had some hand grenades.

"Thus was the second Adamenko-style operation, but there were an ungodly lot of routine operations in between. Adamenko's third ruse was his last one, but a solid year was to pass before that. In the meantime Germany'd risen up in revolution and we began to take a clearer view of things, too. Europe was all burning in revolutionary storms; so I left Adamenko in command of the detachment — which joined the Red Army shortly afterwards — and went to the lovely city of Odessa, where our comrades in the underground needed me to light foreign interventionists and other imperialist sharks.

"It was nineteen-nineteen and the port was jam-packed with navy. All of Odessa was cut up into zones. Here you had the foreigners, there the Whites, and further on Petlyura's regiments jostling for room and Polish legions putting on their Warsaw's-a-little-Paris act. Russian White officers fought Ukrainian Whites, and each zone had its own security service, and none of them forgot about us, even in their sleep.

"Life was filled with struggle and glory, and we all walked a tightrope over sure death. I've left out something, too: there was that gangster army of Mishka the Jap terrorizing the city — umpteen thousand armed bandits posing as revolutionaries to their own advantage. They staged mass 'expropriation acts' right on the streets, and sure enough, we Bolsheviks had to pay the bill, because all the blame for what was going on in the city was laid at our door.

"The security services were bursting at the seams hunting for us, and our Party organiza-

tion was in a difficult situation, to be sure. But we didn't give in. We set up a commission for work with foreign soldiers and printed leaflets secretly at a fisherman's cave — he was my friend Ivan Polovets' father. We found our way to the sailors of the French navy — you read about the mutiny on that cruiser in the newspapers. A tidy bit of work was done, to make a long story short, and I'm not one to go bragging about it. Many of my comrades in the underground perished. I was lucky enough to wriggle out, but I didn't hole up or stick my head out for nothing, either. Because when you work in the underground, discipline and self-control are all, and your life belongs to everybody, and you are to take only those chances the committee allows you to.

"So I survived and went back to my detachment, because suddenly, the horizon had darkened again and leaden clouds had crept upon our Soviet shore, or to put it simply, Denikin's armies had started their offensive on Moscow. Red troops were rolling north in retreat. The bourgeoisie was almost smashing church bells for joy. The situation was lousy and we were all well aware that there'd be no mercy for us in a Russia turned into czarist prison by the Whites.

"I found Adamenko at the front. He was commanding a brave-looking regiment in which no two men were dressed alike. Our meeting was without cheer, and we racked our brains about what to do for quite a while before we took our considerations to the people concerned, picked out which Donbas men we needed from the regiment, and made for Denikin's rear and our

dear and dusty Donbas with its ravines and steppes. And my, did we have an outing!

"How many tons of coal we stole from Denikin's engines, how much equipment went unrepaired! We operated throughout the Donbas, every village feeding, every factory hiding, every mine knowing us. The Donbas sun glared down; one battle followed another, all kinds of traps and ambushes were set for us on every corner. Yet finally they had to pull Drozdovsky's crack officers division from the front and send it against us. And that was the third Adamenko-style operation.

"When certain lads have lots of restless blood, they feel the irresistible urge to write all sorts of stories about our war, and scribble away with pencil and pen like men possessed. They see us, tattered and barefoot, driving whole armies of the foe, and crack officer units throwing down their arms and pleading for quarter just because the half-baked scribbler likes it this way. But we, we who know what it was all about, just feel like swearing in disgust, and it really hurts, because there's no glory in defeating such an enemy. Our good fortune wasn't dropped on us from heaven — we struggled hard to win it, and the officer regiments fought properly and bloodily from despair. All the greater glory to our soldiers who beat such a dogged enemy and got the better of the whole lot of them.

"Drozdovsky's officer regiment was manned to full strength, with colonels for platoon leaders and captains and lieutenants for rank-and-file soldiers. They were commanded by a Don Cossack cornet turned general within the space

of a year. Since such troops had been sent against us, we reckoned we must have been quite a thorn in their side, and so even running away from such an enemy, we comforted ourselves with the fact that our qualifications had been rated so highly, we were pinning down their best unit.

"Adamenko and I spent two nights in an old salt mine discussing, arguing and reckoning. Adamenko had a good head on his shoulders, and the operation arose in his mind in its minutest detail. I only made a few corrections and put it on a practical basis. In the meantime, Drozdovsky's regiment was probing the area. All sorts of local rabble went running to them. Intelligence was being gathered from every end there was, and we sent our men to them, too — to "give away our secrets" and confuse them.

"Their headquarters bustled with activity. They even tried to flirt with the working class. They weren't the sort of officers who boozed away in the rear, selling supplies on the side and undermining their own front; no, these were a crack regiment of fanatic monarchists determined to fight for capitalism and an indivisible Russia to the last drop of their blood. If they boozed, they made sure the populace saw none of it. They did away with our comrades in a quiet underhand way, too. They were wolves posing as sheep who served their class well in their own right. We were destined to fight them one on one, and frankly speaking, we had a tough job on our hands.

"You know these Donbas steppes and steppe ravines. Sometimes a river of sorts flows be-

tween the two low banks of a gully overgrown with reeds and sedge, with those steel giants of blast furnaces and coke ovens puffing here and there in the landscape and slag heaps above the coalmines like monuments to man's toil underground. What we had to find in all that hodge-podge was a tidy valley with a stream flowing and reed and other high grass growing — a place we could lead Drozdovsky's men to by trickery and let them bash their heads on what we would have waiting for them there.

"It was partisan warfare at its finest; a regular unit might not have lived up to such a task. We divided our detachment in two, drifted apart to preassigned areas and started making noise. Drozdovsky's men also split in two, and a three-day partisan action began. The science of warfare is right in that plans are easily made but not so easily executed, and crossing an icystream on sharp rocks with water churning neck-high gives some idea of those difficulties which arise before any commander when he starts to act.

"Adamenko and I were leading our halves of the detachment. We'd agreed to meet in a certain place at a certain time, and so each of us had been fighting a running battle for three days, taking good care to retreat to the appointed place and not to where the enemy was driving him. Our plant was extremely cheeky, and it would certainly have fallen through under different circumstances.

"Adamenko and I were slowly drawing closer together, with Drozdovsky's men breathing down our necks and our detachments dwindling as we let more and more men go — you'll soon see where and what for. Easier said than done,

yes, and yet late one fine afternoon, Adamenko and I and the few men remaining in our detachments met at a certain lovely place, and though it wasn't the one we'd agreed on it could be used, too. A valley, a river and reeds were all there, and you understand that Drozdovsky's men were advancing on our right and left with the handful of us in between. So we left a few volunteers for certain death behind and slipped through the reeds and out of the bag just in time, then found our boys and reinforcements from the neighboring mines some two kilometers away and waited.

"The Drozdovsky units were advancing on each other, each thinking they'd bumped into the bulk of our force. My machine gunners were fanning out the fire both ways. It was getting dark. Both sides opened up in earnest. They were good shots and didn't miss one another. It was dusk; the sun had disappeared behind a cloud of dust, and before they realized they were fighting each other, we came up from the flank and helped their grief. Soon night fell, and the third Adamenko-style battle was over. Adamenko had gotten a bullet through the mouth. It had pierced his tongue and gone out the back of his neck. I took him to a doctor I knew and hung about the clinic till dawn, all in a stew, whacking leaves off the trees with my whip.

"In the morning when I stole into the clinic to see him, Adamenko was alone in the medic's room and out of bed. I saw him pace back and forth across the room. He was a giant out of an age yet to come and of no petty breed. His head was all swathed in white, except the eyes and the nose, and his eyes were so red and

weird they gave me the creeps. There were his poor girl's blouse, skirt, corals and necklace laid out on the bed, and when he saw me, he attempted to say something with that shot-out tongue of his, then waved his hand in despair, and something like a tear sprang up and glittered in his eye. 'Take it easy, you'll blabber your fill yet,' I said. 'We'll sow a calf's tongue on you.' But my heart ached as I said that, and the joke did nothing to cheer him up.

"He went up to the wall and began to write terrible things with his finger, all about that ruthless bitch death who'd come to strangle him in bed, but he wouldn't lie down. Let her get him standing, and all sorts of curses. I answered by writing on the wall, too, and repeating it out loud. But what we talked about that way is of no interest to you. Then we shook hands, and I went out to have a word with the doctor. As I went back, I heard the report of that revolver I once gave him, and Adamenko was standing in the middle of the room, blood gushing from his chest like out of a barrel. His eyes were empty, and he collapsed on the floor.

"Now you can go on with the meeting without me; Friedrich Ivanovich has peeped into here at least twice now. I'm on my way, Friedrich Ivanovich, I'm on my way to the furnace, and I swear this is the last time I'll make a speech at work. Our country's been standing for five years now, so let's make steel and love our dear Lenin. Long live our unswerving path to socialism! Three cheers for our Donbas, and everlasting glory to our fallen heroes!"

Kharkiv, 1932-35.

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