An unusual photograph of Maxim Gorky, taken by the Soviet photograper Moisei Nappelbaum (1928).

FROM FURMANOV TO SHOLOKHOV

An Anthology of the Classics of Socialist Realism

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Illumined by the flames, the smoke rose gently into the sky, while each as ragged as the next, soldiers and old men, women and children sat wearily around the fires.

Just as the traces of smoke gradually melted away in the star-strewn sky, so the jubilation felt by this vast sea of people slowly faded and died, giving way to fatigue. In the soft darkness, lit only by the light of the fires, it was as though a gentle smile were slowly fading as sleep quietly descended upon them all.

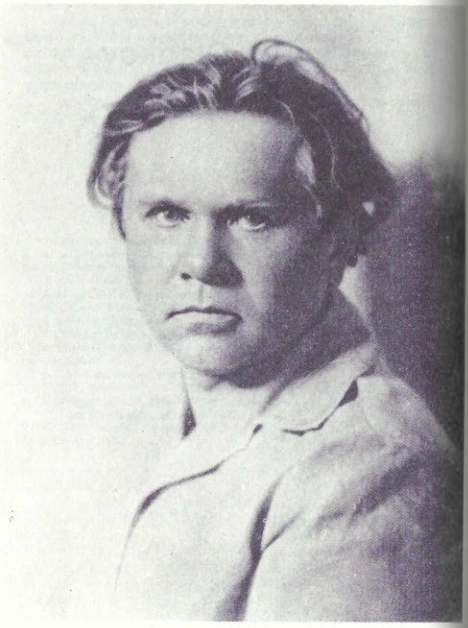
The camp fires gradually went out and silence fell. In the stillness the night was blue—a deep, dark blue.

1924

Notes

1. Chief town in Kuban region of Northern Caucasus. Renamed Krasnodar in 1920.
2. Soldiers drawn from pro-monarchy Cadet Corps, *1924* élite military school for training officers in Tsarist army.
3. Towns on eastern coast of the Sea of Azov.
4. Villages east of Temriuk, near the Sea of Azov.
5. Rostov-on-Don, northeast of the Sea of Azov.
6. Towns northeast of Ekaterinodar (now Krasnodar).
7. Large port on Black Sea, southwest of Ekaterinodar.
8. This detail suggests that the town meant is Novorossiisk, well-known for its cement factories.
9. Town in the eastern Ukraine.
10. V. L. Pokrovsky (1889–1923), White commander of Kuban Cavalry Division in 1918, notorious for his wholesale hanging of people without trial.
11. Town northeast of Tuapse, on the Belaya River.
12. Anton Ivanovich Denikin (1872–1947), Commander of the Russian Volunteer Army from April, 1918.

Fyodor Gladkov
CEMENT



Fyodor Gladkov (1923).

Fyodor Gladkov (1883–1958)

Fyodor Vasilyevich Gladkov was born in 1883 into an Old Believer family of peasant stock in the village of Chernavka in Saratov Province. The boy's parents were desperately poor, and during his early childhood they would travel south during the summer to find work in fisheries on the Caspian Sea and in factories of the North Caucasus. In 1895 the family moved south to Ekaterinodar (now Krasnodar) in the Kuban, where Gladkov worked in a chemist's shop before becoming an apprentice typesetter at a printer's. At the age of fourteen he entered the third class of the local school, and after finishing his studies there took an additional pedagogical course before qualifying as a primary school teacher. In 1902 he moved to the Sretensk district of eastern Siberia, east of Lake Baikal, where he began work as a teacher.

In 1904 Gladkov began to conduct propaganda work for the Socialist Revolutionary (SR) Party in Chita, east of Irkutsk, but in the following year left Siberia for Tiflis, where he entered the teachers' institute. The spring of 1906 found him engaged in propaganda work again, this time for the Bolsheviks, in the town of Eisk on the northeastern coast of the Sea of Azov, where he helped organize strikes by stevedores. It was here that in the same year he joined the Social Democratic (SD) Party. But later that year the danger of arrest forced him to return to eastern Siberia, where he took a teaching job in Sretensk. In November 1906 he was arrested for his part in organizing a Bolshevik group in Sretensk, and was sent to Irkutsk prison. The following year he was sentenced to exile in the village of Manzurka near Verkholensk in Irkutsk Province, where he spent the next four years. It was during this time that tragedy struck, for his parents were savagely murdered by a band of wandering criminals. After serving his term of exile, Gladkov moved south again, to Novorossiisk on the Black Sea coast, where he worked as a clerk before finding a teaching post.

At the outbreak of World War I Gladkov was appointed head of a primary school in Pavlovskaya, a large Cossack village in the northern Kuban, where he remained until the spring of 1918. He was then sent back to Novorossiisk to carry out a reorganization of schools in the

area, but when in August 1918 the town was captured by the Whites, he was forced to take refuge in the workers' settlement of a local cement factory. Living illegally there, he engaged in propaganda activity among both working people and soldiers. After the Whites had been driven from Novorossiisk in the spring of 1920, Gladkov became responsible for adult education in the town. In the autumn of that year he served as a volunteer with the Red Army during the campaign against Wrangel in the Kuban, before joining the Political Section of the 14th Brigade of the Ninth Army. The same year, 1920, saw him become a member of the Communist Party. That winter he was appointed editor of the newspaper *The Red Black Sea* (*Krasnoe Chernomor'ye)*—which he edited from October 1920 until the following May—and became head of the regional department of Popular Education.

In 1921, with the help of Maxim Gorky, he moved to Moscow, where he first worked as a director of a factory school, then as a secretary of the journal *New World* (*Novy mir).* He joined the proletarian literary group "The Smithy," and in 1923 became a professional writer, engaging in varied administrative and cultural work at the same time. From 1932 to 1940, for example, he served on the editorial board of *New World.*

Shortly after the Nazis attacked the Soviet Union in 1941, Gladkov became a special correspondent for *Izvestiya* and left for Sverdlovsk in the Urals, where he wrote articles, sketches and tales about industrial plants in the rear working to supply the front. At the end of the war, in 1945, he was appointed director of the highly prestigious Gorky Literary Institute in Moscow, a post which he held until 1948.

A member of the presidium of the Union of Writers and a Deputy to the Supreme Soviet, Gladkov was a prominent literary administrator and well-known public figure. Among his many distinctions were two Orders of Lenin and the Order of the Red Banner. Unfortunately, his last years were dogged by illness and failing strength. He died in December 1958, and was buried in the Novodevichy Cemetery in Moscow.

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Gladkov's first published work was the tale *Towards the Light,* which appeared in the Kuban newspaper *The Provincial Gazette* (*Oblastnye vedomosti)* in 1900. Clearly imitative in theme of the nineteenth-century poet Nekrasov, it tells of a young girl who becomes a village teacher and dedicates herself to the service of the common people. This first piece was followed by two stories about down-and-outs, *After Work* and *Maksiutka,* which appeared in the same paper in 1900 and 1901 respectively.

After moving to Siberia in 1902, Gladkov published several sketches and tales in newspapers in Chita, among them *Before Hard Labor* (1903), *They Went Off to War* (1904), and *The Inspection* (1905). The year 1905 also saw the appearance of one of his finest early stories, *Three in One Hut,* which reflected his meeting with three women convicts serving sentences in Siberia. It was followed by *The Outcasts,* a series of sketches about the life of political exiles, begun in 1908 while Gladkov was in exile in Manzurka. His next major piece was the tale *The Abyss,* a picture of life in a Russian village during the First World War. Initially entitled *The Only Son,* it was first published in Gorky's prestigious journal *Annals* in 1917. It was followed by the tales *Spring Shoots* (1921) and *The Fiery Steed* (1922), both of which reflect the author's experiences during the Civil War in the Kuban.

In the winter of 1922 Gladkov began work on *Cement,* the novel which was to assure his literary reputation. Completed two years later, it was serialized in the Moscow journal *Red Virgin Soil (Krasnaya nov')* in 1925, and appeared in book form the following year. Hailed as the first Soviet novel of the working class, it was to enjoy tremendous success not only in the USSR but also, in translation, abroad. Officially recommended for public and school libraries, it sold over two million copies by 1937 and is still widely read today.

1926 saw the completion of Gladkov's well-known long story *The Old Secret Prison,* which was serialized the following year in the Moscow journal *Novy mir.* Begun before the Revolution and thematically linked with earlier works such as *The Outcasts,* it is set in the notorious Irkutsk prison where political prisoners were often held before sentence. Also published in 1927 was the satirical tale *The Cephalopodous Man,* which together with the stories *The Immaculate Devil* (1928) and *The Inspired Goose* (1929) was later included by Gladkov in his *Little Trilogy* of 1933.

Soon after the publication of *Cement* Gladkov began work on his second novel, *Power,* a detailed and lengthy treatment of the successes of construction and industrialization during the first Five-Year Plan. The first two parts of the novel appeared in *Novy mir* in 1932 and the last three in 1937 and 1938.

1941 brought the publication of the deeply lyrical and poetic forest story, *The Birch Grove,* one of the author's favorite works, while 1943 saw the appearance of a collection of tales entitled *The Scorched Soul.* The following year Gladkov published a further volume of stories enti-

tled *The Vow*, which took its title from a tale dedicated to the patriotic heroism of Soviet industrial workers during the war.

Gladkov spent the last few years of his life working on a lengthy autobiographical tetralogy, *Story of My Childhood* (1949), *The Outlaws* (1950), *Evil Days* (1954), and *Restless Youth*. The first two sections of the ambitious work brought him Stalin Prizes in 1950 and 1951 respectively, but unfortunately the final part remained unfinished at his death.

CEMENT

CHAPTER I

THE DESERTED FACTORY

1. On the Threshold of Home

Everything was just as it had been on that morning in early March three years ago. Beyond the buildings and roofs of the factory the sea flashed in the brilliant light, while the air between the mountains and the water glowed like rich, fiery wine. The light blue chimneys, the reinforced concrete walls, the little houses in the workers' settlement, and the mountain ridges in the distance were the color of molten copper in the sun.[1]

Nothing had changed during those three years. The hazy mountains with their rocky cliffs and ravines, their outcrops and scree, were just as they had been in Gleb's childhood. Far away in the distance he could see the familiar quarries up on the slopes, the gravity roadways running down among bushes and rocks, and the bridges and hoists in the narrow ravines. The factory below him was just the same too, a whole city of circular roofs, towers and domes, while stretching over the hillside above it, the workers' settlement was the same too, with its stunted acacias and its little square gardens in front of each porch.

If you went through the gap in the concrete wall that divided the settlement from the factory—there used to be a gate in the wall but now there was only a gap—in the second block of dwellings you would find Gleb's house.

Any moment now his wife Dasha and little daughter Nurka would catch sight of him, and filled with gladness, come running out and fall into his arms. Dasha was not expecting him, and moreover, he had no idea of what she might have suffered during the three years he had been away. In the whole of Russia no road, no path had been left

unstained by human blood. Had death only walked down the street here, passing the workers' dwellings by, or had its fiery whirlwind struck Gleb's home too and swept it away?

On a patch of waste ground beyond the wall a few grubby children were playing, while big-bellied, sly-eyed goats wandered here and there, nibbling at the acacias.

Catching sight of Gleb, several cockerels jerked their red combs in surprise and cried angrily:

"Who-o is this?"

Yet all the while in his heart Gleb could hear the deserted quarries, the factory chimneys and the workers' settlement resounding with a deep, subterranean roar . . .

From the mountainside he could see the cableway running down among the factory buildings to the wharves and the sea, its concrete supports resembling triumphal arches shaped like a gigantic letter H. Between them stretched the steel cables with their little trucks hanging motionless in mid-air, while beneath them, looking like rust-colored muslin at this distance, was the iron safety-net. Far below, at the end of the wharf, rose the spread wings of the electric cranes, their tracery of girders outlined against the sea.

Splendid! It meant machines and work once more—free work that had been won in a desperate struggle, at the cost of fire and blood.

The goats seemed to be shouting and laughing with the children. The acrid smell of pigsties hung in the air, and wherever Gleb looked there were rank weeds, while the paths running among them were littered with hen-droppings.

What did it all mean? Goats, pigs and hens here? In the old days this kind of thing had been strictly forbidden by the factory management.

Here was the same old wooden fence round the little yard that was just fifteen feet square, and here too was the same outside lavatory that looked like a tiny hut and opened on to the street. But the fence was rather dilapidated now—time and the northeasterly winds had both taken their toll—and its blue-gray paint was peeling.

Any moment now Dasha would come running out with a cry of joy. . . But how would she greet him, risen again as he was from fire and death? Perhaps she had given him up for dead, or perhaps she had been waiting day in and day out for him ever since the moment he had left her in the night, left her alone with Nurka in their little house.

Gleb threw his kitbag down on the ground and hung his greatcoat on the fence. Then he stood still for a moment, and flinging his arms wide in an attempt to calm himself, wiped the sweat off his face with the sleeve of his army tunic.

He was just about to climb the steps to the porch when the door of the house swung wide open.

A woman with dark eyebrows and a sunburnt face, wearing a man's shirt and a red kerchief, was standing in the shadowy doorway, staring at him in amazement. When she saw the smile on his face, a look of both alarm and joy flashed in her eyes at the same time.

He could see the slightly rounded, girlish cheeks, the familiar, quivering chin, the turned-up nose, the way she cocked her head on one side when gazing intently at something, and the obstinate-looking eyebrows that he remembered so well. It was Dasha all right. But everything else about her—though quite what it was he couldn't say—seemed unfamiliar and strange, and he felt he had never seen it before.

"Dasha!" he cried. "My wife! My darling! Well!"

Breathless with emotion, he rushed towards her.

But she remained standing on the top step of the porch, as though rooted to the spot, and merely brushed him aside in bewilderment as if he were some kind of apparition. Then she blushed deeply and murmured:

"Is it you, Gleb? Oh, my darling!"

But deep in her dark eyes there flickered unaccountable fear.

When he took her in his arms and pressed his lips to hers, she immediately went weak, so weak and still that he thought she was going to faint.

"Well then . . . so you're alive and well, my love!"

But she could not tear herself away from him and went prattling on and on like a little child:

"Oh, Gleb! I didn't even know . . . Where on earth have you come from? And so . . . unexpectedly too!"

She laughed and buried her face in his chest, while he kept pressing her against him, feeling her heart pounding and her body trembling with an irrepressible quivering.

They kept tearing themselves away from one another and gazing rapturously into each other's eyes, then laughing and embracing wildly once more.

Then Gleb lifted her in his arms as if she were a child and started to carry her into the house just as he used to when they were first married. But Dasha broke free and with a knowing smile straightened her clothes.

"My, how impatient you are!" she exclaimed.

Running a comb through her hair and breathing heavily, she backed away from him towards the gate, then suddenly seemed to remember something and cried anxiously:

"Oh, Gleb, I'm late! I must hurry!"

Then more seriously but still with a trace of emotion, she added:

"Call at the Factory Committee office and sign on for your food ration. I haven't got any time at all now ... Oh, Gleb! Oh, comrade! I just can't believe it! You seem quite different—new somehow ... you're familiar and strange at the same time."

"Dasha! What *is* all this? I don't understand ... "

But she was already standing by the gate, smiling at him.

"I have my meals in town now, in the Food Commissariat canteen, and I get my bread ration at the Party Committee office. So you'd better call in at the Factory Committee yourself and register for your bread card. I'll be away for two days—I've got to make an urgent trip out into the country. Have a rest after your journey while I'm gone. I must go now—the cart will be waiting. I really can't ... "

"But just a minute, Dasha. What on earth *is* all this? I've hardly shown my face and suddenly you're off!"

Rushing towards her, he swept her into his arms, but with gentle firmness she freed herself once more.

"But tell me, Dasha, what does it all mean?"

"I'm working in the Women's Section now, Gleb."

"What d'you mean, in the Women's Section? And what about Nurka? Where's she?"

"In the Children's Home ... Now go and rest. I've not got a minute now. We can talk later. You know what it's like—Party discipline and so on ... "

Then away she went with quick steps, her red kerchief teasing him until she reached the wall and seeming to beckon gaily to him as it went.

Then, at the gap in the wall, she glanced back, and with a flash of her white teeth gave him a wave.

Gleb ran to the low fence and shouted:

"Dasha! What about Nurka? She must be big by now! I'll go and see her. Which Children's Home is she in?"

"No, no, don't! We'll go together! Just you have a rest!"

He stood on the porch, watching despondently as she walked away. He simply could not understand what was happening.

He had spent three years amid the tumult of civil war, three fiery years caught up in the whirlwind of awesome events. But how had *she* spent those years, he wondered.

Here he was, back in the house from which he had once fled into the empty night. Here was the factory again, where as a teenager he had always been covered in oil and ash. But the house was empty now and Dasha had not welcomed him as he had imagined she would.

Gleb sat down on the top step of the porch and suddenly felt very tired. It was not because he had walked nearly three miles from the station, but because of what had happened during the past three years and this strange reunion with Dasha.

But why was there such an unusual silence all around him? Why was the air filled with a chirring sound, and why could the scratching of hens be heard all over the workers' settlement?

There were no real factory buildings left any more. Instead they resembled great crumbling blocks of ice, while their dead chimneys looked like cylinders of chill blue glass. There was no longer any soot on their tops either, because the mountain winds had blown it all away, and on one of the chimneys the lightning conductor was gone completely. Had it been wrenched away during a storm, or had it been torn off by human hands? Who could say?

In the old days there never used to be the smell of manure near the factory, but now acrid, mouldy cow dung lay among the wild grass that had crept down from the mountainside.

Over there, in the building at the foot of the slope, was the engineering shop. At this time of day the countless panes in its twenty-foot windows used to blaze with dazzling light, but now only black emptiness yawned beyond the smashed frames.

The town over on the other side of the bay looked different too—it had turned gray and seemed covered with mildew and dust, so that it merged with the hillside. It no longer looked like a town, but more like an abandoned quarry.

Here was the door Dasha had left open, a door leading into an empty house. And down below, in the valley, lay the forgotten, lifeless factory ...

A rooster came up to the fence, and cocking its head on one side, looked at Gleb with a spiteful, cold eye.

"Who-o's this?" it cried.

3. The Machines

There were two ways from the workers' settlement to the Factory Committee offices. One was along the road that led past the factory buildings, and the other was by a meandering path that ran over the

waste tips on the hillside, passing through disused quarries and among clumps of bushes.

From the path up on the hillside the whole factory was visible, complete with its mass of complicated viaducts and towers, its great buildings of concrete and stone that in one place were light and airy like gigantic bubbles, and in another rectangular and austere in the ponderous simplicity of their architecture. Linked one to the next, they climbed above each other or simply rose at various heights from the mountainside, soaring into the sky like giant monoliths. Down in the gorges, perched beside the ruined gravity roadways that were overgrown with bushes and littered with boulders, scattered at the foot of crags or on the waste-tips themselves were lonely little houses built of stone that had been roughly hewn from the light blue rock. The terraced quarries fell away into the ravines to disappear from sight amid the trees of a luxuriant young forest far below, while away in the distance, sweeping from one headland to the next and shimmering in the morning light, lay the sea. Stretching out like taut bow-strings on the far side of the bay were two long breakwaters, each with a lighthouse at its far end, and one could see immense arcs of foam sweeping in towards the factory and wharves then breaking in snow-white surf upon the shore.

Everything still looked just the same as it had three years ago, but then both factory and mountains had quivered incessantly as though filled with a mighty subterranean fire, and the buildings and wharves had been alive too, throbbing with the thunder of unseen machinery and humming with the whine of generators.

Gleb walked along the hillside path, gazing down at the factory and listening to the gloomy silence that was broken only by the murmuring of mountain streams, and he began to feel as if he too were now covered in heavy dust.

Was this really the factory he had known since his childhood, the factory where he had walked the paths every day on his way to and from work? And was this he, Gleb Chumalov from the engineering shop, a true blue-collar worker, now making his way down the overgrown track with a look of sad bewilderment on his face?

In the old days he used to be unshaven—he had sported a turned-up mustache—and because his face had never been free of metal dust and soot it had always looked swarthy. But now he was clean-shaven, and his cheeks and nose were blue-gray and peeling, chapped by the steppe wind. He no longer smelt of oil and ash either, and his back was no longer bent with toil. Now he was simply a Red Army man who wore a green helmet with a scarlet star on his head and the Order of the Red Banner on his chest.

On he went, gazing down at the factory, the chimneys and the quarries, stopping occasionally to think and growing angry as he did so.

"What the hell have they done to us, the bastards? Shooting's too good for the swine! This isn't a factory, it's more like a tomb!"

He made his way down towards the deserted factory yard that was stained black with coal dust and overgrown with rank grass. In the old days great heaps of anthracite had towered into the sky here, their pitch-black crystals flashing like diamonds in the light. The yard was dominated by a steep rock face with yellow and brown strata showing in it. Now the rock itself was crumbling, its fragments obliterating the last vestiges of human toil below. Around the edges of the yard railway lines ran in a semi-circle, while straight ahead, beyond the parapet, the blue factory chimney soared three hundred feet into the sky, rising like an obelisk from the abyss, and beyond it lay the enormous building of the power station.

The factory was like a dead planet now. Icy northeasterlies had shattered its windowpanes, mountain streams had laid the iron ribs of its concrete bare, and rain had turned the heaps of cement dust on the ledges of its buildings into solid rock.

Klepka the watchman came by. He was wearing a long, unbelted smock made of sacking that reached to his knees. His battered shoes looked as if they were made of cement too, and enclosed in them were his bare feet.

"Hey, there, you old devil!" cried Gleb. "What are you doing here, walking around like a bloody ghost? Some guard you are! Why did you let me get past, you old fool?"

Answering in an indifferent tone, Klepka gave his customary warning:

"Unauthorized persons are strictly forbidden here!"

"Oh, you silly old devil! I guess you've gone and lost all your keys too, wandering about over this scrap heap!"

"Keys are no use here any more—all the padlocks have been stolen. So go where you like! There's goats in the factory and rats too, but there's no people any more . . . They've all gone."

"You're nothing but an old rat yourself! Hiding away in your hole and wandering about doing nothing!"

Klepka shot him a hostile glance and moved his toothless gums silently.

"Just because you've got a pointed helmet on . . . " he said. "It's like the horn of the devil himself! But you're wasting your time—there's nobody left here to push around any more!"

Then off he went, shuffling along in his battered shoes.

Running from the yard down into the main factory building was a high viaduct on stone supports. Holes for machine-guns had been smashed in its concrete sides—the factory had been a White Guard stronghold, and the Whites had turned it into quarters for prisoners-of-war and even used part of it for stables. Those same prisoners' quarters had also served as horrible torture chambers during the foreign intervention.

The interior of the factory was festooned with scores of cobwebs that were heavy with dust, and from the twilit canopies high up in the roof drifted the musty odor of old cement. Here was the gigantic bulk of the furnace, its great door now wrenched away. Swirling with dust, the air roared like a waterfall in the shaft as it was sucked swiftly down.

In the old days a cast-iron door had sealed the awesome mouth of the furnace like a great plug, and the chimney would draw the fiery dross up from the rotary kilns with a mighty roar. Lit by brilliant flames, the red-hot kilns would slowly turn their monstrous bulk, while men went scurrying to and fro like ants beneath them. But now torn lengths of thick iron piping lay tangled everywhere in great loops and spirals.

"Oh, the bastards!" thought Gleb. "What have they done? What have they done, the swine?"

Passing down a series of long tunnels, he finally came to the engine-room. It was filled with the clear light of day and resembled an austere temple, its floor laid with different-colored tiles that made it look like a giant chessboard. Here, like great black idols adorned with copper and brass, stood the diesels. Immovable and firm they stood, in long, orderly rows, each in its allotted place and ready for work. Just a touch, it seemed, and they would spring to life once more, their polished metal flashing in the light. As he looked at them, Gleb could almost feel the waves of hot air rolling towards him. The great fly-wheels seemed to be frozen motionless too. Here in the engine-room, just as in the old days, everything was still spick and span, and each part of the machines testified to someone's loving care. Just as before, too, the tiled floor shone with wax polish, and there was not a speck of dust on the windows. The panes—and there were dozens of them—flashed with blue and amber light. It was clear that a human being remained doggedly alive in here, and thanks to him the machines were still alive too, filled with tense expectation.

Then, wearing a dark blue workman's shirt and cap, the human being himself appeared from the gangway between the diesels, wiping his hands on a scrap of waste as he came. The whole of him was immensely powerful-looking, uncompromising and stern, the whites of his eyes and his teeth gleaming in the light. It was Brynza.

"Ha, ha, Gleb, my old friend!" he cried. "Is it really you? My, and what a fine soldier you are too! Well, that's good! You've certainly cheered me up all right!"

Brynza had almost been born here—his father used to be a mechanic too—and he had grown up among the machines, so the engine-room was his whole life. Gleb and he had spent their childhood together and had begun work at the factory at the same time.

"Well then, so this is our soldier, is it? Come on now, let's have a good look at you! You've got that helmet pulled right down, so all I can see is your nose and that star!"

Gleb flung his arms round him.

"Brynza, old fellow! Are you still here? Ah, God damn you! You've got everything so spick and span anybody would think these engines of yours were running quite normally!"

Brynza grasped Gleb by the arm and led him into the narrow gangway between the diesels.

"Just look at these beauties, my friend!" he said. "They're just like a bunch of young girls, all neat and tidy. But you only have to shout: 'Brynza! Start 'em up!' and all these creatures will set to work again, thundering out their iron music. Engines need discipline, you know, just like that army of yours does!"

"Well now, Brynza, haven't you got a few goats as well, eh? And aren't you doing a bit of pilfering on the side?"

The mechanic burst out laughing, his voice ringing with gay malice.

"Ho-ho, those goatherds know me all right! And as for those pilferers, I'll break their bloody necks! The thieving bastards! I keep a rifle here just in case! Can you see it?" He waved a fistful of waste towards a gun standing in the corner. "They're just like thieves, the swine! They come in here hunting for bits of copper and brass . . . "

Gleb patted the shining engines affectionately and kept glancing at Brynza with a look of both surprise and hope in his eyes.

"Well, old friend, you've got things so well organized here I just don't feel like going away! But what a state the factory's in! And what a state the people are in too! So why the hell are you hanging around here, when the place is like an empty shell and all the workers are bone idle and on the fiddle?"

Brynza's face grew dark, and it seemed to Gleb that he had suddenly become hostile and withdrawn. Filled with agitation, the mechanic strode up and down beside the nearest diesel, then said gravely:

"The factory's got to be started again, Gleb, it mustn't die! Otherwise, what the hell did we have a revolution for? Why are we here now? And what's that medal on your chest for?"

Then he added in a quiet, sad voice, as though complaining of something:

"You don't know how machines live, you've no idea ... You'd go crazy if you could see and feel what I do!"

Long ago, when the diesels had fallen silent and the workers had left the factory in droves for revolution and civil war, and for the hunger and suffering they brought, Brynza had stayed behind, alone amid the stillness of the engine-room. He lived just as his shining machines did, and he was just as solitary as they were. He had remained true to them to the very end.

"The factory's got to be started again, Gleb! Machines are machines, my friend, and they can't lie idle! They're at work even when they're standing still. Oh, if only you could understand that! But even if you don't, you've got to do all you can to get things moving again! And you know you can always rely on me!"

Gleb gazed at the lustrous flanks of the diesels and then at Brynza, listening to the profound silence in the vast emptiness around them. He felt powerless, sensing there were no words he could say to his friend, for he himself was filled with profound dismay and appalled by the vast graveyard of machinery that surrounded them. He felt alien here, for everything around him seemed unfamiliar and terrible, as though boundless havoc had been wreaked long, long ago. What could he say to Brynza? After all, he himself did not have a warm place to call his own now, for even his wife had forsaken him at the very moment when all should be forgotten and when nothing should matter but one's beloved ... Surely Dasha could have put off her trip for his sake, couldn't she?

4. Comrades

The narrow, twilit corridor down in the semi-basement of the factory management building was crowded with workmen. Surrounded by clouds of tobacco smoke and begrimed with the dust of roads and quarries, the men all looked alike, as indistinguishable as shadows at nightfall.

Everyone was shouting and swearing about things like the communal canteen, rations and kerosene, clothing-cards and goats.

The door of the Factory Committee office was open, and that room too was packed with jostling, grimy men and filled with smoke. They did not recognize Gleb as he pushed his way through the crowd, and merely glanced in a rather unfriendly way at his helmet with its star and at the Order of the Red Banner on his chest. Then they did not give him another thought.

Gleb made his way into the room and stood at the back of the crowd by the wall. At the table sat the hunchbacked old mechanic Loshak, his face just as dark and rusty-looking as it had been three years ago. Bulky and impassive, he sat there for all the world like a deaf man.

Then he suddenly gave a cough and pressing his fists on the table, got slowly to his feet. For a long time he gazed with heavy eyes at everyone in the room, then coughed again and said:

"Listen, friends, this is how the Soviet government fixes things: it took grain from the peasants to make war on the bourgeois, then it took factories like ours away from the bourgeois—and now there's no work! They took all kinds of trash away from the bourgeois and said to us: 'Share it out among yourselves in your workers' cooperatives so nothing gets wasted. Do just what you like with it!' But what I say is this: let's get the factory started again, then things'll soon be different!"

He sat down again, looking just as massive and gloomy as before.

Gleb eventually made his way through the crowd to the table and greeted the members of the Factory Committee.

"Hello, comrades! It's good to see you again! I've come back to where I used to work!"

The swarthy little consumptive, Gromada—he, too, a mechanic—gave a cry of surprise, then threw up his arms and rushed towards Gleb.

"Loshak, old fellow, can't you see who it is? It's Chumalov! Our Gleb! We all thought he was dead but here he is, as large as life! Just look at him!"

But Loshak looked at Gleb just as indifferently as he looked at all the other workmen who crowded into the Factory Committee office every day from morning till night.

"I can see him," he said. "Well, Gleb, you couldn't have turned up at a better time—the machine shop has gone to the dogs and all they do there now is make things like cigarette lighters on the side! It's a hell of a place!"

Then, with an effort, he stretched a long, heavy hand from behind the table and slowly held it out towards Gleb.

Men from various sections of the factory crowded round them, staring at Gleb in amazement as though he were risen from the dead. Then, exchanging glances and muttering to each other, they too shook him by the hand.

"Right you are, Comrade Chumalov! We've got a job for you, just you wait and see! We've taken matters into our own hands, you might say. Look at the state everything's in! We've got rid of the bosses all right, but just you watch what's going on round here! They're all at it! One strips brass off the machines and another pinches rivets, while somebody else cuts off the driving belts. Oh yes, we're the bosses now all right, make no mistake!"

Gleb was looking at the workmen and nodding happily.

"Ah! Coopers and smiths, electricians and mechanics—you're all here, comrades!" he thought.

Gromada elbowed his way through the crowd with a chair and obligingly put it down beside Gleb.

"Make way, comrades! Make room for Comrade Chumalov! After all, he's our soldier back from the Red Army! And since he's also a worker in our magnificent factory, we must show him off as best we can. If Comrade Chumalov hadn't had such a bad time of it, and landed up in the Red Army after being with the Greens,[2] and so on and so forth, there'd probably be a good many of us who wouldn't have taken the step of joining the Communist Party. So you see, comrades, that's how much Chumalov means to us!"

Vying with each other to be heard, many of the men began shouting:

"So you came through alive after all, old friend, did you? It's good you made it! Well then, just you enjoy yourself for a while! How are you going to spend your time now, comrade? Don't worry about tobacco, though—we'll take care of that for you!"

But Gromada was already waving his big bony hands at the crowd and saying in his chesty voice:

"Comrades, as members of the working class we all fought to gain control of the means of production, but it's disgraceful, comrades, that we're so inclined to defeatism! We've triumphed on every front and eliminated all opposition, so are we really incapable of proper economic labor now?"

Gleb was silent. He gazed at the gaunt faces around him, then at the hunchbacked Loshak and the sickly Gromada—the man was so small, yet his surname was so big[3] and the words he used were so big too—and once again he was painfully aware that here as well he had failed to find the sincere gladness and warmth he had dreamed of all the way home. Everyone seemed pleased enough at his return, but their exclamations and smiles were curiously distant and cold. It was as if all these men had burnt themselves out and were now destined to remain exactly as they were for the rest of their lives. Even in Gromada's noisy outbursts there was something absurdly labored and forced, as though he were trying to show more excitement than was really necessary. Strangely enough, Gleb felt that all these people had something in common with Brynza and Dasha too. Or was it simply that he had been upset by his strange reunion with her?

"Yes, friends," he said, "it isn't a factory you've got here any more, but a scrap heap. What the hell have you been doing all this time? There we were, fighting and getting ourselves killed, but what were you doing? Couldn't you think of any better way of passing the time than keeping goats and making cigarette lighters on the side?"

At the back of the crowd someone gave a hoarse laugh.

"If we'd spent our time loafing round the factory, damn you, we'd all have died like flies! So to hell with the bloody factory!"

The man's laughter and his simple words overwhelmed Gleb, for they rang with the commonplace everyday truth that can crush the most inveterate dreamer. Was this not why the impassioned Gromada's enthusiasm seemed so ridiculously irrelevant amid all these coarse, hungry men? But the speaker's malicious laughter and the contempt he showed not only for his factory and his workman's duty, but also for himself infuriated Gleb. Trying hard to control his anger, he looked at the crowd and his face grew dark with rage.

"Well, and what if you *had* died? You should've given your lives to keep the factory going, instead of turning into a pack of thieves and stealing your own property!"

"Ho, ho! We've heard all that lots of times before from dozens of liars, without you giving it to us all over again!"

With a nonchalant gesture Loshak brushed away a fly that was trying to settle on his forehead, then said in a loud, deep voice:

"So you've come back to the factory, Chumalov, have you? Well, that's good! We'll find work for you all right—we're going to set things straight round here!"

Gromada was looking at Gleb with eyes that burned with emotion and he kept trying to say big words that were beyond him.

Gleb took off his helmet and putting it down on the table, smiled with embarrassment, but his eyes were still full of anger.

"Yes, I've come home, and even my wife's got no time for me now. These days you can hardly recognize the woman you live with, because everything's gone to hell! Loshak, put my name down for a

food card, would you, and for meals in the canteen and a bread ration too!"

At this there was a stir among the men and they began to laugh.

"Ho-ho! He's a great talker all right, but his belly's empty just like ours are! You should've mentioned that to begin with, Chumalov! You've come back to join us, old friend, so just you wait and see what life's like round here. Ha! His belly's empty just like ours are!"

In his usual impassioned way Gromada tried to convince the men otherwise:

"When everything's said and done, comrades, Chumalov belongs to us, he's a workman just like we are! And you all know he's been in action and so on!"

"But what's that to us? His belly's empty just the same!"

Gleb stood up and surveyed the grimy crowd, and in his almost expressionless calm there was both menace and despair.

"Comrades! What are you trying to prove to me? My belly's got nothing to do with it! After all, a belly's a belly, damn it! But you've got to have a head on your shoulders too! You've lost yours, though, and instead of behaving like real workers you've turned into a gang of profiteers. But you won't put one over me without a fight, so carry on—shout your heads off and make fun of my belly if you like—you won't offend me! After all, I haven't eaten you out of house and home yet, have I? But I'm ashamed to see you so demoralized—it's worse than treachery! But d'you think I'm going to loaf around like you do? Oh no! I'll fight tooth and nail! Did you think I'd given up the ghost? Well I hadn't—I fought and what's more I'll go on fighting! The Party and the army ordered me to return to my factory and fight for socialism just like I did at the front!"

The men narrowed their eyes in confusion and shuffled their feet.

"You get things going again, Gleb! That's what I say! Isn't that right? Or I'll be damned! Right?" cried Gromada, running round the table in a fever of excitement.

Outside the window, leaning heavily on his stick as he made his way down the concrete path, went a stooping but dignified old man with a silver beard and the look of a gentleman. Gleb saw that it was Engineer Kleist. Once again, just as in the days when the Whites controlled the town, their paths had crossed. How good it would be to run out of the Factory Committee office right now and confront the old man face to face! He would probably be scared to death . . .

CHAPTER II

THE RED KERCHIEF

1. The Cold Hearth

Gleb was never at home at all during the day. The deserted house with its dusty windows and unwashed floors seemed airless and strange now. The walls seemed to press in on him and it felt too cramped to move. Then in the evenings the walls seemed to draw in closer still and the air became noticeably heavier.

He would wander round and round the factory then climb up to the quarries that were overgrown with bushes and weeds, and grow tired to the point of exhaustion.

He would come home again at night, but Dasha would not be there to welcome him as she once did.

In the old days it used to be comfortable and cozy in the small living room, with muslin curtains hanging at the windows and flowers standing in vases on the windowsill as bright and gay as little colored lights. The painted floor used to shine with a mirror-like luster, the white bed would be soft and deep, and the fragrant tablecloth would beckon invitingly to him. The samovar would be boiling away and the teacups tinkling too. It was here that his wife Dasha used to be, singing and laughing, playing with little Nurka and chattering about the morrow.

But all these things were painful now because they belonged to the past, and it made Gleb wretched to see his home looking so neglected, its walls stained with mold.

One night Dasha came in after midnight as usual.

The sooty flame in the paraffin lamp burned with a dim light, while the dusty lampshade on its blackened cord hung like a frosty flower in the air.

Gleb lay on the bed, watching Dasha through half-closed eyes.

No, it was not the same Dasha, the wife he once knew, for that Dasha was dead. This was a different one, a woman with a sunburnt face and a stubborn-looking chin, whose fiery red kerchief made her head look bigger than it really was.

She was undressing by the table, chewing a crust of bread as she did so and not looking at him. Her face was tired and grave.

Returning from her official trip out into the country, she had hurried home only to find Gleb not there—he was out inspecting the gravity roadways. But that evening when he came in she had bustled about in an eager way, and after boiling the kettle to make some tea, had poured

a few white saccharine tablets into a dish, then with a knowing look had pushed a little pat of butter towards him. All these things were for him, she'd said—she'd got them at the District Committee. As they drank their tea, she had told him at length about her work in the Women's Section, then had asked him how he had spent the last three years and which fronts he had fought on.

After that they had talked about Nurka. She was a fine little girl, Dasha said, and she was perfectly happy living in the Children's Home. In fact, she didn't enjoy life now unless there were other children around her. Dasha had brought her home once on a public holiday, but the child had spent the whole day longing to go back. It was true there were still many shortages: the food in the children's homes was very poor, milk was in short supply, there was never any sugar, and as for meat, the children hadn't the faintest idea what it even looked like. What was more, the staff were unreliable, and you had to keep a constant eye on every single one of them. But all these things would come right in time and everything would settle down in the end. What about Gleb, though? What was he going to do?

But he had not been listening properly to what she was saying, and kept giving irrelevant answers to her questions. He had watched her, trying to understand her and fathom what kind of person she now was, wanting to arouse in her the quiet submissiveness he remembered so well. He had put his arms around her, then held her close and had been filled with desire. She had held him too, but had kissed him in a guarded way with a look of alarm and fear in her big, grave eyes, and when, overwhelmed by furious passion, he had flung himself upon her, she had said in a sober, rather cross voice:

"Hey now, just you wait! Stop it!"

And her cold words had been just as hurtful to him as a slap in the face. Then, sounding rather offended, she had reproached him:

"You can't even see I've become a different person, can you, Gleb? Don't you realize I'm a comrade of yours now? I've learned something fine and new, and I'm not just a woman any more. Try to understand that. After you'd gone I discovered I was a real person and learned to value myself. It was very hard, and it cost me dear, but now no one will destroy the pride I have in myself—no one, not even you, Gleb . . . "

Filled with anger, he had interrupted her rudely:

"Right now it's the woman in you I want, not the person! Are you my wife or aren't you? Yes or no? Have I the right to you or have I become a fool? What the hell do I need all your arguments for anyway?"

But she had pushed him away, saying firmly with a frown:

"How can you love me, Gleb, if you don't understand me? I can't do it like this, I don't want to live in the simple way we did before, and just to give in to you, like any other woman, it isn't in my nature."

Then she had moved away from him, seeming suddenly inaccessible and remote.

With every day that passed she had become increasingly distant from him, withdrawing into herself more and more, and he could tell she was suffering. He was suffering too, though, feeling angry and hurt at the same time. He had come to the conclusion that there was someone standing in his way, that Dasha had found someone else during the past three years, and that she did not wish to share her love between Gleb and the other, his rival. How else was her stubbornness to be explained? It was inconceivable that during the past three years she had never yearned for a man, inconceivable that having found Gleb again, she would not give herself to him with all her heart. After all, he could see she was excited and barely able to control herself, and he had felt her heart pounding under his hand.

Yet here she was, home again but even more distant now than she had been in the early days after his return. How long, damn it, would all this business last, he wondered.

"Tell me, Dasha, what on earth am I to make of it?" he asked. "I've been three years in the army, and I haven't had a moment to think of myself. Now I'm back again I feel terrible. I can't sleep at night because I'm wanting you. I've been back a week now, and you've only spent three nights at home. After all, you know, we've not seen each other for three years!"

Dasha heaved a sigh and said with a tender smile:

"Yes, three years, Gleb."

"I don't understand a damn thing! I just can't make it out to save my life! But d'you remember the night we parted? D'you remember how you looked after me when I was lying up there in the loft? And how you cried when I left? I never forgot those tears of yours, Dasha, not even for a single day. So what's happened, then?"

"Oh, Gleb, so much has changed!"

"Well, that's just what I'm talking about!"

"You see, Gleb, in the old days I was just a little fool. I feel ashamed when I remember what I used to be like . . . "

"I see. So it turns out, Dasha, that I've come back home for nothing, doesn't it? Are you saying to hell with the past?"

She shot him an intent glance, then turned thoughtfully towards the dark window.

"What do you want, Gleb? What have you been thinking all these years? I was left all by myself, completely at the mercy of fate, and I've had to fight to stay alive. I learned how to keep warm even in an unheated room in winter—there's a fuel crisis, you know—and I got used to eating in the canteen." Then she smiled and added jokingly: "I'm a free Soviet citizen now, you see!"

Gleb sat down on the bed, and his eyes—eyes that had seen so much bloodshed and death—flared with alarm.

"But what about Nurka? Have you gone and chucked your daughter out as well, now you're a free woman?"

"That's just downright stupid, Gleb!"

Untying her kerchief, she threw it on the table, and as her hair spilled free, its chestnut curls fell down over her eyes, making her look like a little boy. But she seemed to be gazing down on Gleb with a look of wise condescension, a faint smile playing on her face.

In the darkness outside the window a solitary night bird was calling in the ravine, sobbing like a little child, while inside hungry rats scurried to and fro under the floor.

"Well, all right, then, Dasha. But what if I go to the Children's Home tomorrow and bring Nurka back here? What will you say to that?"

"You can if you like, Gleb—you're her father, after all—but I can't look after her—I haven't time. If you want to take care of her, though, then stay with her—I'll be very glad!"

"But it's you who's her mother! Since when have you turned into some kind of cuckoo, leaving the child God knows where while you go rushing around without giving a damn?"

"I'm a Party member now, Gleb, and don't you forget it!"

He got up from the bed and walked over to the door. Once again he began to feel cramped in the room—the walls seemed to be closing in on him and the floor was swaying beneath his feet.

Dasha took a blanket and pillow off the bed and fetching herself a sheet from the chest of drawers, laid them on the floor. Then she quickly got Gleb's bed ready too.

He had to make up his mind. Did Dasha still love him as before, or had her love died, and together with it had she herself now become a thing of the past?

Whom had she caressed and warmed with her body these past three years, he wondered. Can a vigorous, healthy woman really be like a barren flower?

"So, citizeness," he said, "that's how things stand, is it? We parted with tears, and now we're together again, we haven't got a single word to say to each other!"

"But why do you say that, Gleb? I want to talk to you so much, and I've got so many good things to tell you, but you just reduce everything to . . . "

But he was not listening to her, and muttered:

"For three years I thought to myself: my wife's back there waiting for me, waiting for me and . . . But when I get home I find I might just as well be a widower, because it's as if I weren't really married at all. Of course, there *was* a man, only it wasn't me!"

Amazed, Dasha rounded on him, her eyes flashing with anger.

"And didn't you have other women while you were away? Go on, tell the truth! After all, I still don't know whether you've come back healthy or riddled with disease!"

She said this through clenched teeth in an offhand way, but there was conviction in her tone. She could see through Gleb and he felt embarrassed.

"Well, all sorts of things happen at the front . . . Anyway, you can't compare men and women like that, you know. What's allowed for a man isn't always possible for a woman."

Dasha undressed but did not lie down. Instead, half-naked but quite unashamed, she sat leaning against the wall. With a knowing look in her eyes, she scanned Gleb's face, then clenching her teeth, replied:

"A fine state of affairs that is! So a woman's position's different, is it? Just look what a lousy deal she's got, being a slave who's not allowed to have a will of her own and playing second fiddle all the time! What kind of Communism was it you learned, Comrade Gleb?"

He hardly recognized her now, for from her emanated an unprecedented, new power. Her directness and daring dismayed him. Would she really ever have spoken to him in such a forthright way in the old days? Then she used to think exactly as he did, devoting herself to him unreservedly. Where, then, could she have learned such bold self-assurance?

He went up to her and looked her sternly in the face.

"So it's true, then, is it? Yes?"

Outside the window everything was oppressively quiet, and the starlit stillness was broken only by the chirping of crickets and the ringing of bells far away in the distance.

Out there, beyond the factory, lay the sea, wrapped now in a phosphorescent haze with its surf murmuring and sighing in the darkness.

"I've not asked you anything about the women you had at the front, Gleb, so what have my lovers got to do with you?"

"Just remember this then, Dasha! I'll find out sooner or later, and I'll get to the bottom of all your secret carryings on! So just you wait!"

She moved away from the wall, her eyes flashing.

"Take care, Gleb! I can be just as fierce as you can!"

Where on earth had she got this boldness from, he wondered. Where had she learned to fling up her head so proudly and to parry harsh words with an angry glance?

It was not by fighting in war, not by carrying a food-sack on her back, and not by doing a woman's daily chores that she had learned this. No—her character had been awakened and forged by the collective spirit of the workers, then tempered in the years of fire and blood, amid both the severest hardship and a newfound freedom that was beyond almost any woman's strength.

Gleb felt that he was no longer standing on firm ground and that he was beginning to look foolish in her eyes. Infuriated by his sense of impotence, he seized her by the arms, gripping them so hard that the joints creaked. But Dasha gave no indication that it hurt her.

"Take your hands off me, Gleb! D'you hear? Go away!"

But he lifted her in his arms and flung her down on the bed. They began to struggle, she twisting to and fro as she tried to break free, her half-naked body writhing with the effort. Suddenly, with a dexterous kick, she threw him to the floor and leapt to her feet. Then, pale and breathless, she pulled down her nightdress and said contemptuously:

"I won't let you treat me like this, Gleb! Don't you know me properly yet? Well, start learning now—it's high time you did! So this is the kind of Bolshevik you are! You might be a good soldier, but you haven't got any brains!"

Subdued now, he was sitting on the floor, grinding his teeth.

"Put the light out, Gleb, and lie down. Calm yourself a little—you can't think straight just at the moment. It makes no difference—we won't reach any solutions tonight anyway."

"I just can't understand it, Dasha! There's such a fire in my soul!"

"Lie down and be quiet, Gleb. I'm absolutely worn out, and tomorrow I've got to go out into the country again on another trip. There are thieves all over the district and people are being attacked everywhere..."

She went over to the table and put out the lamp. Gleb could hear her lying down and covering herself with the blanket, then she was quiet. Suddenly he was filled with both suffering and shame. He felt like rushing over to her and beating her, then tearing her to pieces and weeping—weeping and imploring her to caress him. They lay silent for a long time and neither of them moved. Gleb waited, hoping she would get up and come to him, then tenderly, without a word, nestle against him. But she just lay there without moving and he could not even hear her breathing.

"Dasha, darling! Don't torment me like this! Why are you so cold towards me?"

She reached out and taking his hand, pressed it to her breast.

"Dear Gleb, get a grip on yourself, and calm down! Let's try to understand each other a little better. Just wait, darling! It's not easy for me either, you know, but there are things we must think about. I've longed for no one but you these past three years!"

Outside the window the sky was strewn with glittering stars, and from far away in the mountains came the sound of distant thunder. But it was only the northeasterly wind soughing in the trees that filled the dark ravines.

2. The Children's Home

The next morning Gleb sensed through his drowsiness that sunlight was filling the room. The air between the window and the door was fragrant with the smell of spring. Dasha was standing by the table, wrapping the fiery red kerchief round her head.

She glanced at him and smiled.

"Gleb, I've managed to draw up a report for the Women's Section about the day nurseries we want for the children. I've worked out the estimates, but there's no money. We're so dreadfully poor, you know! We ought to squeeze a few things out of the bourgeois ... But you've not seen Nurka yet, have you? Well, we can go to the Children's Home together if you like—it's not far!"

"Now, Dasha, come here!" he said.

She came towards him, a knowing look in her eyes that shone in the morning light.

"Well? What is it?"

"Give me your hand ... That's right," he said. They were both silent for a moment, smiling and waiting to see what the other would say. "God knows if I understand you—you seem just like you used to be, and yet you're different somehow. But then again, perhaps I'm not the person I once was either. All right, let's try and understand each other. After all, everything's different these days—even the sun shines at a different angle!"

"Yes, Gleb, perhaps even the sun's different now too. Everything's changed, it's true, and you've changed too. You seem either younger or older—I'm not sure which ... And inside me everything's turned upside down. You're angry with me, but it's you who's to blame, you know. You weren't a bit interested to hear how I've spent these past three years and what I've been through. If only you knew me a little better and could sense what I feel, then you wouldn't treat me so coarsely. Oh, you are a silly thing!"

And with a laugh she ran out on to the porch.

"Come on then, get ready! I'm waiting for you!"

All the way to the Children's Home Dasha walked in front of him, following the path which wound its way among conifers and dogwood. She kept disappearing from sight then coming into view again, her red kerchief blazing in the light.

The "Krupskaya"[4] Children's Home was a tall building that stood in a ravine, surrounded by clumps of fruit trees. Its walls were of undressed stone laid in a crude but sturdy fashion and firmly cemented. The wide-open windows were as big as the doors, and from the dark interior of the building came a discordant, bird-like hubbub. A massive, curving staircase led up to the first floor, with decorative cement vases set on pedestals along it. Up on the verandah dozens of little children's heads could be seen, shining like melons ripening in the sun, but even from a distance their faces looked deathly pale and gaunt. What were they? Boys or girls? It was impossible to say, for they were all dressed in long, gray smocks. The nurses were outside with them enjoying the sunshine, they too dressed in gray with little white caps on their heads.

Away to the right, stretching beyond the buildings of the home and rising far above them, lay the sea, its deep blue waves flecked with myriads of dazzling sparks. Seeming no bigger than a waterboatman at this distance, a harbor launch was pulling away from the jetty, leaving a triangular wake behind it. Both the town and the mountains beyond it looked very distinct and near.

There they were, mountains and sea, factory and town, lying amid the vast expanse of distance that stretched away to the horizon and embraced the whole of Russia ... And all this boundless immensity resounded like music in the people's hearts, filling them with a song of magnificent toil. Did their hands not tremble in anticipation of the strenuous labor to come? Did their hearts not pound with the blood coursing through them? This was workers' Russia, this was what they were, this was the new world of which mankind had dreamed for centuries!

Dasha was standing by the stairs and smiling at him.

"How good the air is, Gleb! It smells just like the sea! Spring's here at last! Come on—Nurka lives up on the first floor!"

She set off up the stairs, a few steps in front of him as before. On she went, walking as if she were simply on her way home, for she seemed perfectly at ease here.

From up on the verandah Gleb could see more under-nourished little children wandering about like animals among the bare bushes and trees. Huddled in small groups, they scratched in the earth, greedily burrowing for food and looking round furtively like thieves all the time. They went on and on digging, stopping occasionally to tear their booty from each other's grasp, while further away, over by the fence, more children still were swarming over a heap of manure.

Filled with amazement, Gleb nodded towards them and looked hard at Dasha.

"They'll all starve to death, you know, Dasha! You people ought to be shot for this!"

She raised her eyebrows in surprise then looked down, and her chin quivered in a smile.

"Oh, that!" she said. "Scratching in the earth, you mean? That's not so bad—there's far worse things than that! If there'd been nobody to look after them, all the children would have died like flies long ago. We've opened homes for them but there's nothing for them to eat, and what's more, given half the chance, the staff would practically bite their heads off! Some of our people are good, though—the ones we've trained, that is!"

"And Nurka, is she like this too? Does she scratch around in the dirt like these starving little devils?"

"But how's Nurka any different from the rest? She's had a bad time too. If it weren't for our women, all the children would've been eaten alive by lice months ago."

While Dasha and Gleb had been coming down the mountain path, the children had been out on the verandah, but by the time the couple reached the first floor, both children and nurses had disappeared. They had probably gone running off to tell everyone that visitors had come.

The big room upstairs was full of sunlight and the air was hot and heavy. The campbeds stood in two long rows, covered with pink and white blankets that were patched and torn. Nurses kept coming in and out through the doors. The walls were hung with pictures—work the children had done in their collective activity groups.

The nurses paused respectfully as they passed.

"Hello, Comrade Chumalova! The matron's just coming."

Dasha felt she was in charge here.

"Nurka, I'm here! Nurka!" she called.

A little girl in a loose smock—she was very small, the smallest of them all—was already running towards them, laughing and shrieking as she came. The other children began to laugh too and came racing after her.

"Auntie Dasha's come! Auntie Dasha's come!"

Nurka! Here she was, the little rascal! Gleb found it almost impossible to recognize her. She was like a stranger now, and yet there was something familiar about her at the same time.

She came rushing up to Dasha and hid her face in her skirt.

"Mummy! My mummy!"

Dasha was laughing too now. She lifted Nurka in her arms and whirling her round, kissed her tenderly.

"Nurka! My little one!"

This was the old Dasha again, thought Gleb, the one who used to welcome him with Nurka when he came home from work. Here were the familiar gentleness and kindness, the eyes moist with tears, and the melodious voice with a nervous tremor in it that he knew so well.

"Look! Here's your daddy, Nurka! Here he is! D'you remember him?"

Nurka stared at Gleb with a faintly hostile look in her little blue eyes, and frowned.

Gleb laughed, and stretching out his hand, felt a lump rise in his throat.

"Come on, Nurka, give me a kiss! My, how you've grown! You're nearly as big as mummy now!"

But the little girl shrank back and looked intently at her mother once more.

"It's daddy, Nurka!"

"No, it's not daddy! It's a Red Army soldier!"

"But I *am* your daddy, and I'm a soldier too!" said Gleb.

"No, it's not daddy!"

Dasha's eyes were full of tears now, but she was smiling all the same.

"Well, all right then, just this once I'm not your daddy, but you're still my daughter, so let's be friends, shall we? I'll bring some sugar for you next time—even if I have to dig it out of the mountain, I'll bring you some. But why's mummy better than me? You live here all the time and she's somewhere else."

"But mummy *is* here. She's here in the daytime and she's here when it's nighttime too. But daddy's not here, and I don't know where he is. He's away fighting the bourgeois somewhere."

"Aha! You've got that off beautifully!" said Gleb. "Come on then, let me give you a kiss!"

The other children stared inquisitively at him, laughing and eagerly waiting for Dasha to take notice of them too. Vying with each other for attention, the little girls with their close-cropped hair kept holding out bunches of curly violets to her, each of them wanting to give her their flowers first.

"Auntie Dasha! Auntie Dasha!"

Far away somewhere, in one of the rooms, someone was drumming on a piano, and a chorus of children's discordant voices sang with all their might:

> "Arise, ye children of the future,
> Freedom's youth of all the world . . ."

Laughing, Dasha patted the children on their little heads, and it was clear that they were accustomed to her affection, expecting it just as they did their regular ration of food.

"Well, children, what have you had to eat today? Whose tummy's full and whose is still empty? Come on, tell me now!"

They all shouted their replies, scratching their heads and bellies as they did so. One dirty little boy with bulging eyes kept hawking and swallowing, then scratched his chest and coughed. Gleb went up to him and lifted his shirt, but the boy yelled in fright and ran off into a corner behind the beds so that only his face with its prominent eyes was visible.

"Ah-ha!" cried Gleb. "There's a ferocious fellow for you—he's got himself behind the barricades straightaway!"

Everyone burst out laughing. The sunlight came dancing in through the open windows that were as wide as the doors.

Holding Nurka by the hand, Dasha walked on in front. Gleb was hurt, for here too he felt like a stranger, as Dasha's clear voice rang out among the children. Both here and at home he was lonely and childless now.

Yes, life's difficulties had to be overcome here as well . . .

They visited every floor of the home, looking first at the dining room where children were sitting at tables laid with crockery, then at the kitchens with their clouds of steam and smell of food. Next they dropped in at the recreation room, its walls covered with children's paintings among the patches of mildew. Here, clustered round a short-haired

young woman with a brown birthmark that covered the whole of one cheek, the children were singing discordantly:

"Arise, ye children of the future,
Builders of a brighter world . . ."

Domakha and Lizaveta, both of them neighbors of Dasha and Gleb, were working in the home as well. In them, too, Gleb detected something new, something he had never seen before. Domakha was in the kitchen, helping with the cooking. With her sleeves rolled up and her face covered in perspiration, she was bustling about just as if she were at home. She greeted Dasha with a kiss.

They found Lizaveta in the storeroom with the housekeeper. Both of them were tall, handsome-looking women, neatly dressed like nurses. They were weighing out provisions, checking them and making a note of them.

Lizaveta greeted Dasha in her usual rather cool way, but there was a smile shining in her eyes. She only gave Gleb a glance, though, and after that took no more notice of him.

Then once again there were women walking everywhere, some in white caps and some without, but all of them smiling respectfully and even ingratiatingly at Dasha. But they looked suspiciously and askance at Gleb. Who was this man, they wondered. Perhaps he was one of those tiresome inspectors who had to be watched very carefully so as to discover their weaknesses.

Gleb kept taking hold of Nurka's hand and saying:

"Come on, Nurka, give me your hand! You let mummy hold your hand, so why won't you let me?"

But warily the child kept her hands out of the way. Then, when all of a sudden he lifted her in his arms and gave her a kiss, she became submissive and quiet, and for the first time she looked him in the face, her gaze thoughtful and intent.

"Your Nurka's a lovely little girl!"

It was the matron speaking, a small, quick mouse of a woman, devious-looking and sly with a face that was all flashing gold teeth and freckles.

Dasha looked past her, and her expression became stern and cold once more.

"What's so special about Nurka?" she asked. "They're all the same here. They're all lovely children."

"But of course, of course!" replied the matron. "We do all we can for the workers' children! Nowadays they must have all our attention. After all, the Soviet government takes great care of . . . "

Gleb clenched his teeth with anger.

"She's lying," he thought to himself, "we ought to find out what kind of a woman she is!"

And then the matron began to make one complaint after another.

But to these, too, Dasha replied sternly and coolly in a way that Gleb had never heard before:

"Please don't grumble, Comrade Matron! Tell me what's wrong, but don't grumble! Grumbling doesn't get us anywhere!"

"Yes, of course, Comrade Chumalova, of course! It's so pleasant and easy working with you!"

Dasha looked in every nook and cranny in the home, searching high and low and asking many questions. Then, unable to restrain herself any longer, she went into the staff's quarters.

"So this is how things are!" she cried. "Why on earth have you got armchairs and sofas in these back rooms of yours? And ornaments, pictures and flowers too! Didn't I say you mustn't deprive the children of anything? This is disgraceful! Is it really so bad for them to walk on carpets and sit on sofas sometimes? This just isn't good enough!"

"Yes, Comrade Chumalova, you're right, of course. But in my experience of bringing up children . . . Besides, it's harmful and makes them lazy . . . spreads all kinds of dirt and increases the risk of infection."

Sparks flashed in the matron's eyes, but without looking at her, Dasha went on speaking in the same hard voice, angry red blotches showing now on her cheeks:

"I don't give a damn for your experience! Our children used to live like pigs, but what they need now is as much light and air as possible, and good furniture and pictures too! We've got to give them everything we can! We must furnish the clubroom and decorate it. The children should be given the chance to eat and play and enjoy themselves. We adults need nothing, but they must have everything. Come what may—even if it kills us—we've got to give them all we possibly can! And to make sure the staff don't get lazy, they should sleep in dirty back rooms! Don't try to fool me, Comrade Matron! I know a bit more than you do even with all that experience of yours!"

The freckled, quick little woman flashed her gold teeth and laughed with delight, but sharp needles still glinted in her eyes.

"Why, who on earth could doubt it, Comrade Chumalova? You're an exceptional woman, so perceptive and quick. With your guidance everything will go well, everything will be splendid!"

As Gleb and she were leaving, Dasha kissed Nurka once more, and as she did so the other children clung to her with their discordant cries.

Once again Nurka looked long and thoughtfully at Gleb.

"D'you want to come home, Nurka?" he asked. "You can play there like you used to, you know. And mummy and daddy . . . "

"Mummy's here! Here she is! But daddy's not here . . . That's my bed, over there! We've just had a drink of milk and now we're going to do some marching in time to music!"

Then, for the first time, she put her arms timidly round Gleb, and her little eyes—eyes that were so like her mother's—glowed with the light of a silent question. All the way back from the Children's Home to the main road, Dasha said nothing, her face shining with a tenderness that was slow to fade. But when they reached the road, she said regretfully:

"Well, I'm off to the District Committee now. There's a lot of work to do so I'll not be back till late. There just aren't enough hours in the day for us in the Women's Section. It's not the children we've got to educate, oh no! It's those damned women of ours! If you don't watch them like a hawk, they'll steal everything down to the last crumb before you can say Jack Robinson. Ugh! There are enemies everywhere you look. Oh, and what a lot of them there are too! Like that matron with the gold teeth, for example. You might expect it from people like her, though, but when it comes to our own folk, Gleb, our very own! They're no better than slaves! Well now, what d'you think about squeezing the bourgeois a bit?"

But Gleb could not bear it, for she seemed so unfamiliar and alien now . . .

Gloomily, almost with hostility, he muttered:

"We'll think about it—it's not an easy thing to decide. Anyway, what will the provincial committee say about it?"

Dasha smiled distrustfully at him and her chin quivered. Then, with a silent question in her eyes, she shot him a searching glance, but he went on gazing gloomily into the distance.

CHAPTER III

THE DISTRICT COMMITTEE

1. Comrade Zhuk Speaks Out

The Palace of Labor was a large brick building two stories high which stood on the embankment near the long jetty running out on its dark piles into the bay. On each side of the building a damaged concrete wall curved away like a torn ribbon and separated the embankment from the railway line. Through holes and gaps in the wall the rusty rails could be seen branching out as they ran away around the bay. The tracks were lined with grain warehouses as far as the station itself, while far away in the distance, towering like an ancient temple on the mountainside, was the huge grain elevator, its turrets now covered with moss.

The gray wharves with their giant mooring rings lay silent and still, the railway tracks gleamed dully here and there amid the debris of smashed trucks, carts went rumbling along the road by the wall, and the deserted breakwaters enfolded the bay with their curving arms of stone. Far away in the distance, indistinct in the spring haze, the harbor shimmered with myriad iridescent colors, and the white sails of fishing boats bobbed like gulls on the water. Dolphins were leaping and diving out in the bay, their powerful backs gleaming in the light, and shoals of gray mullet flashed silver in the sun.

Desolate wharves and hungry sea . . . In what waters and to what shores were Soviet Russia's captured ships now sailing?

Near the Palace of Labor, in front of the entrance with its high pyramid of steps, there had once been a flower garden surrounded by chestnut trees. But now all the flowers were gone, the fence was broken, and the trees had been cut down for firewood. On the red flag that fluttered high above the roof, the brilliant white letters RSFSR kept flickering then vanishing in the wind like fresh camomile flowers.

Gleb entered the corridor. Straight ahead of him, in the conference hall, he could see banners and flags, while running from left to right was a second corridor that was dark and dusty. On the left was the Trade Union Council office and on the right the District Committee's quarters.

The air in the corridor was thick with stale tobacco smoke and the walls were grimy, covered with patches where the plaster was peeling. Workmen with hungry-looking faces were wandering back and forth, their expressions both angry and resigned, while busy officials bustled to and fro among them.

From various rooms both near and far came the sound of voices and laughter, accompanied by the rattling of typewriters and the clicking of rifle-bolts—the latter probably coming from the offices of the Cheka.

Gleb turned down the corridor to his right.

Two men were standing by the glass doors of the District Committee office, their heads clearly silhouetted against the frosted panes. One was bald, with a hooked Turkish nose and a short upper lip, and his mouth was half-open in a smile. The other man was snub-nosed, with a low forehead and heavy chin.

"It's a shame and a disgrace, Comrade! Absolutely disgraceful!" the snub-nosed man was saying. "It's bureaucracy that's ruined us, bureaucracy and red tape!"

"You're wrong, Comrade Zhuk! That's not the point, not the point at all! We've got many enemies, so what we need is merciless terror, otherwise the republic will continue to hang between life and death. That's what we've got to think about! I know what you mean, Comrade Zhuk, but the Soviet government must have a strong, well-proven administrative machine, and even if it *is* bureaucratic, it's got to work efficiently."

"You too! You're just like the rest! You're all the same! But what about the working class? Oh, my dear Comrade Seryozha! All this gives me a pain!"

"Only one thing matters now, Comrade Zhuk, and that's work among the people. Work, work, and more work! The people must quickly penetrate the republic's entire administrative machine and get right to the top. That pithy saying of Comrade Lenin's about the cook[5] must become an established fact. This is what matters, so you're wrong!"

"Oh, Seryozha! You might be what they call a devoted Communist, but you're terribly blind! You ought to have a bit more sympathy for the working class. And as for our enemies—I say to hell with them! We've dealt with them before and we'll do so again if we have to!"

Gleb recognized in the snub-nosed man his old friend Zhuk, a lathe-operator from the "Shipsteel" factory. He was apparently still shouting and complaining just as he used to three years before.

Gleb went up and clapped him on the shoulder:

"Hello, old friend! Still ranting and raving, are you? Just like in the old days, eh? When on earth will you stop it? You should be giving orders, but instead all you can do is complain, you snub-nosed devil!"

Zhuk opened his eyes wide in astonishment, then gave a gasp.

"Gleb! You old fire-eater! Well I'll be damned!"

And he rushed forward to embrace him.

"But is it really you, eh? You and me'll show 'em now! We'll put 'em all in their places! But where on earth have you sprung from, Gleb? Seryozha, this is Gleb, my best friend—we've sweated blood and tears together!"

Gleb and Sergei shook hands, joining fingers warily like strangers, and in the other's palm Gleb could feel the softness and timidity of a girl.

Sergei Ivagin had ginger hair that rose in curls around his bald patch, and there was a gentle smile shining in his eyes. But you couldn't quite make him out, because his smile seemed both mocking and shy.

"I've seen you before, Comrade Chumalov—I saw you earlier when you came to register. There was a question asked about you in the District Committee, so you've arrived just at the right time. Go through into the Secretary's office, would you? There's a meeting going on at the moment, but the Secretary left instructions to send for you immediately. Go on in—his name's Zhidky."

"No, you take him in yourself, Seryozha," said Zhuk, "it's your job! And I'll come with you and watch them trying to grab him with their bare hands!"

"But I'm busy just now, Comrade Zhuk—the Agitation and Propaganda Committee's meeting at the moment, then there's a session of the Education Department, and after that I've got to speak at . . . "

"Oh, Seryozha! You might be an educated man but you're so humble and timid you're worse than a monk!"

The three men went into the room. Sitting at a table beside the window wearing a dark blue smock was Polya Mekhova, head of the Women's Section. Showing under the edge of her red kerchief, her fair curls shone in the sun. Her top lip was covered with soft down, like a boy's, and her eyebrows glowed with tiny sparks in the light. Her big eyes with their long lashes rested on Gleb for a moment as he came in, and her eyebrows quivered in a smile.

Dasha was there too, standing to one side near the table and speaking in an emphatic, clear way. She only glanced at Gleb as he came in. There was a crowd of women round her and still more lined the walls, all of them listening to her report about the day nurseries proposed for the town.

Suddenly Zhuk burst out laughing and grabbed Gleb by the sleeve.

"This is a very dangerous place, Gleb, my friend—it's the women's front! They'll scratch our eyes out and peck us to death! So watch out!"

Sergei gave a shy smile.

Dasha tossed her head in annoyance, and folding her arms, fell silent, waiting for the men to leave.

Comrade Mekhova brushed them aside and pretending to be cross, said with a smile:

"Move along now, comrades, and don't disturb us! Please go on now, Dasha."

Then, as Dasha began speaking again, Polya interrupted her and said:

"Comrade Chumalov, would you call in to see me on your way back, please? There's something I want to talk to you about."

Gleb put his hand to his helmet in a salute and answered smartly:

"Yes, ma'am!"

Then Dasha went on with her report.

2. A Concrete Proposal

As soon as Gleb opened the door into Zhidky's room, he was enveloped by clouds of greenish tobacco smoke and overwhelmed by a wave of stuffy heat. But the sun was shining amid all the smoke, and specks of dust glittered like sparks in the air.

The clean-shaven Zhidky sat with a leather jacket thrown over his shoulders. Opposite him, leaning back in his chair with a pipe in his mouth was Chibis, President of the Cheka. He was clean-shaven too. Zhidky had an Asiatic-looking nose with flared nostrils and deep, vertical creases in his cheeks.

Sitting on the window-sill with his feet up against the sash was a thin young man with a swarthy face, wearing a black shirt. It was Lukhava, Chairman of the local Trade Union Council. Propping his chin on his knees, he was listening silently to the others.

Gleb raised his hand to his helmet in a salute, but Zhidky paid no attention to him. After all, so many Party members came to see him that there simply wasn't time to welcome them all.

"Well, all right, then," he said, "we've got our logging areas decided, and we've asked the district Forestry Department to help as well. We've got stockpiles of timber too. But what then?"

He punctuated every sentence with a tap of his pencil on the table.

"Well? What then? The main problem, after all, is the actual supply of wood. All the timber's up over the pass and down along the coast. But our wood supply's already failing, so we must find a reliable and quick way of moving fuel before winter sets in. To hell with makeshift temporary methods—we've got to take the bull by the horns and do the job on a grand scale! What we need is a tremendous effort, and all our energies must be directed towards it. The Forestry Department hasn't carried out the tasks that were assigned to it—there's all kinds of riffraff got themselves fixed up there, a bunch of profiteering bastards who ought to be shot! What's more, the men in the logging areas will be rising in revolt soon because they're starving. Apart from that, we've simply got to have firewood, or our children will start dying like flies. We're in a very tight corner, my friends! There's a meeting of the Economic Council in a week's time, so we must be ready by then. Now, Lukhava, what have you got to say?"

Chibis was not looking at anyone, and it was impossible to tell whether he was deep in thought or simply resting, thoroughly bored by the whole business. Lukhava, though, was hugging his knees to his chest and looking at Zhidky with a self-confident grin.

"There aren't any tight corners, Zhidky—there's no such thing! There are only problems to be solved. You've panicked, my friend!"

Zhidky flared his nostrils and it looked as if he were laughing.

"We'll have to use the mechanical power of the factory," said Lukhava.

Then Sergei Ivagin raised his hand, asking for the floor.

"In connection with the proposal made by Comrade Lukhava, I would like to draw your attention to Comrade Chumalov's presence here. Our discussion of this issue might be assisted if Comrade Chumalov were to give us his opinion on it as a skilled workman at the factory. But now I must go to . . . "

With a wave of his hand Zhidky cut him short.

"Stop! Stop! Old Seryozha's declaiming in his usual sentimental fashion and blushing all over his bald patch!"

"I must go to a meeting of the Agitation and Propaganda Committee, after that to the Education Department board, and then . . . " said Sergei falteringly.

Zhidky invited Gleb to come up to the table.

"Well, Comrade Chumalov, do join us please! I'm afraid you'll have to stand, though—there aren't any chairs left."

Gleb went up to the table and stood to attention.

"I've been demobilized as a skilled worker," he said, "and I'm now at the disposal of the District Committee."

Without taking his eyes off Gleb's face, Zhidky held out his hand.

"Comrade Chumalov, you've been appointed secretary of your factory group. It's totally disorganized at the moment and full of speculators and profiteers. They've all gone crazy, keeping goats and making things like cigarette lighters on the side. What's more, they're stripping the factory bare. But then you probably know all about that already. So it's up to you to get the place in working order—military fashion!"

"We'll do our best, Comrade Zhidky! But every kind of discipline requires a firm basis on which to operate."

"That's true. And now it's your job to create that basis."

Still resting his chin on his knees and chewing a cigarette in one corner of his mouth, Lukhava was watching Gleb through narrowed eyes that glowed like embers. In response to Gleb's words he said casually to Zhidky:

"Send this comrade to the Organization and Instruction Department. We can't waste time with trivial details like this!"

Gleb looked him straight in the eye but said nothing.

Chibis shot Gleb a glance through his half-closed eyelids.

"So you're a skilled worker, and a military commissar too. . . But why did you leave the army when the factory's been out of action for years now?"

Gleb smiled and examined Chibis's face carefully.

"Out of action, did you say? It's much worse than that! It's like a bloody farmyard, a filthy scrap heap! Let's talk frankly, shall we, comrades? You're wanting to grab the men by the scruff of the neck and get rid of their goats. And you're asking for strong organization as well, aren't you? But where's your basis for that? If you make a clear announcement that the factory is to be started up again, then everything will go smoothly, but unless you do that, all you'll have will be a bunch of swineherds, not workmen!"

Lukhava gave a contemptuous snort and said:

"Heroes with the Order of the Red Banner should have something else besides bravery: they need a proper understanding of the facts of the situation!"

Chibis was leaning back in his chair with a distant, chill expression on his face, and through the film of dust on it one still could not tell whether he was following the discussion or merely resting, utterly bored by the whole business.

The creases on Zhidky's cheeks quivered as he smiled.

"Right! Let's continue our discussion of the fuel problem, shall we?"

After Lukhava's words—words that were just as provocative as his mocking smile—Gleb could hardly control his anger. Then Zhidky suddenly let fly at Gleb:

"Comrade Chumalov, we haven't got a single stick of firewood left and we're practically starving! The kids in the Children's Homes are famished and the workers are completely disorganized. So how on earth can you talk about restarting the factory at a time like this? It's sheer nonsense! It's not the factory that matters! What about the transport of wood from the logging areas? How can the factory be used for that?"

"Without fuel, electricity or machinery you can't do a thing, and that's for sure," replied Gleb.

"Then tell us how we can solve the problem in a practical way."

Gleb was silent for a moment, gazing thoughtfully out of the window.

"I think there's only one way to do it," he said. "We've got to extend the gravity roadway up as far as the pass. We'll start a program of voluntary Sunday work in all the trade unions—that'll take about two weeks. Then once the trucks are working, you can load them with as much wood as you like."

Zhuk clutched at Gleb and grinned with joy.

"Here you are, sitting around like a bunch of half-wits, messing about and wasting time, and then, just look! In his workman's way, by instinct, he . . . "

But nobody was listening to Zhuk, and the whole of him—so familiar and commonplace now—was lost to view, just as if he were not there at all. He was always present for everyone to see, but no one ever noticed him, and his words barely reached their ears.

Zhidky was pencilling straight and crooked lines on the sheet of paper in front of him, then dividing them up into shorter ones, and because his face seemed so bored and calm, it began to look haggard and old.

"Lukhava, you wanted to say something about this, didn't you?"

Getting up quickly from the window-sill, Lukhava walked past Gleb then went back to the window again.

"I was thinking along the same lines as Comrade Chumalov, but he has put it far better than I can. I propose we accept his suggestion without reservation and ask him to make a report to the Economic Council."

Zhidky suddenly stood up and flung his pencil down on the table. It bounced off and fell at Gleb's feet.

"This is just Utopian, Comrade Chumalov! Stop going on about the factory all the time! The place is nothing but a stone tomb! It's not the factory that matters, it's firewood! There's no factory any more, only an empty quarry! As far as we're concerned, the factory's a thing of the past and the future, so for the time being let's just talk about the present—and the supply of wood!"

"I don't know what you mean by Utopian, Comrade Zhidky, but if you won't say the word 'factory,' the men will say it for you. What do

you mean—the factory's a thing of the past and the future? Have you ever been to it? Do you know how the workers live? Do you know why they're stripping the place bare? Why the wind and rain are eating away at the concrete and iron? And why there's such wholesale destruction going on so that the place is turning into a giant scrap heap? The men don't want to go on living face to face with such failure, and they don't like to see all the trash that's lying around and going to waste either. But here you are, telling them the factory's not a factory any more but an empty quarry! What the hell are they supposed to do after that? They're quite right to strip the machines—as far as they can tell, everything's finished anyway! And now you're pushing them in that direction yourself! So why on earth should they spend their time looking after the factory? And what have you ever said or done to make them into class-conscious proletarians instead of profiteers?"

Zhidky was listening to Gleb with keen interest, flaring his nostrils mockingly.

"You're obsessed with the factory, Comrade Chumalov," he said. "What the hell do we want that place for when we've got robbery and starvation everywhere and all our organizations are swarming with conspirators and traitors? What on earth do we need your workshops and cement for now? For making communal graves? You're campaigning for control of the means of production, while all the time the peasants are advancing on the town like a Tartar horde!"

"Comrade Zhidky," replied Gleb, "I understand all that just as well as you do, but it's impossible to undertake this task without any concrete aim at all and simply expect to accomplish it on the backs of naked, starving men. To hell with all your petty tinkering! What we must fight for now is the restoration of the economy. The guns have fallen silent, and people are returning home and beginning to go about their normal business. The discussion about trade unions and the New Economic Policy[6] is now in full swing, so the question of the factory must be looked at very seriously indeed. We've got to consider which angle we should approach it from, and organize preparatory work accordingly. We've already ended up by having a Kronstadt.[7] And then what about Makhno's campaign?[8] And the Cossack counter-revolution too? The Whites are just waiting for an opportunity to catch us off our guard, fools that we are!"

Chibis got up and went towards the door, but then he stopped and said meaningfully:

"Our Special Department's in a bad state. If we can talk about starting the factory again, why can't we discuss the question of the poor condition the soldiers' barracks are in?"

Then he opened the door and went out in his usual leisurely fashion.

Zhidky watched him go, his eyes lit by a knowing smile.

"Don't let's argue, Comrade Chumalov," he said. "The main problem is the inspiration and organization of the masses. You're quite right there!"

He shook Gleb's hand hard.

"Oh, and by the way, Comrade Chumalov, try and train Zhuk to be a bit quieter while you're at it, will you? He's as fierce as a starving rat!"

Gleb took Zhuk by the arm and led him towards the door.

"Gleb, old friend!" said Zhuk, "you and I are going to move mountains together and work with all our might! That's a fact!"

Then Zhidky called to Gleb in a friendly way:

"Comrade Chumalov! It wouldn't do any harm to have a straight talk with Badin, Chairman of the Executive Committee."

In the doorway Lukhava squeezed Gleb's elbow.

"I've heard about you from Dasha," he said. "We'll discuss your plan and use it as the basis for our work. It's facts we need, not words, then we can get something done. The future may be in our heads all right, but it'll only become a reality if we use our hands."

The two men looked hard at each other for a moment then went their separate ways.

Dasha and Lukhava . . . Could this be the third person in the drama, Gleb wondered. Was it really possible? No—that would be ridiculous. . .

CHAPTER IV

THE "COMINTERN" WORKERS' CLUB

1. The CPR Group

The "Comintern" Workers' Club was housed in the former factory director's mansion, a solidly-built structure of undressed stone in three colors—light blue, yellow and green. The massive, two-storied building rose from the ridges of the mountainside that were now overgrown with clumps of conifers and ivy. It was puritanical and severe-looking in its basic design, rather like a church, but richly and in places extravagantly decorated with ornate verandahs and balconies, accompanied by addi-

tional buildings in its courtyards—these too just as solidly and neatly built—and surrounded by flower beds and lawns. Inside there were countless rooms, complicated, twilit corridors, and staircases decorated with oak pilasters topped by stained glass lamps. The walls were decorated with damask paper, set with tasteful panels and hung with paintings by the best old masters, while heavy furniture and huge mirrors filled the rooms.

On the hillside in front of the house and surrounded by an iron fence set in a stone base was an orchard, its paths now overgrown with weeds and its trees badly damaged by goats. Away to both left and right, beyond the ridge, the giant, light blue chimneys of the factory soared into the sky, while on the mountainside high above were the derelict gravity roadways and empty quarries.

In the old days a mysterious old man used to live here, a man whom the workers only ever saw from a distance and whose voice they never heard. It was amazing how this imposing, venerable director could have lived without fear amid the utter emptiness of his thirty-roomed mansion, suffering no nightmares and feeling no horror at the poverty and filth, the stench and squalor of the workers' hovels not far away.

Then came war, revolution and the great catastrophe ... Abandoning his ruined factory, the director fled, helpless and pitiful in his fear. The engineers, technicians and chemists went with him. Only one man was left behind—the chief designer of the factory, Engineer Kleist—and he had shut himself away in his study in the main administration building that stood on the other side of the road facing the mansion which had been his last creation.

Then, one fine spring day when the mountains and sea glowed with fiery light and the brilliantly clear air seemed to stab the eyes with sunlit needles, the factory workers had assembled in the machine shop. There, amid all the jostling, shouting and clouds of smoke, the mechanic Gromada had made a proposal:

"Let's take the splendid mansion where that blood sucker of a director used to live and turn it into a workers' club, and let's call it the 'Comintern' Club!"

So it was that the ground floor of the building was turned into a club and offices for the Party and Young Communist League, while the upper floor was set aside for a library and for the Cheka.

And there—where once profound silence had reigned and the workmen had been strictly forbidden to walk on the concrete garden paths—in the evenings, when the mansion's great plate-glass windows

blazed like fire in the setting sun, the club musicians would make their brass trumpets howl and their drums thunder.

All the books were brought from the houses of the engineers who had fled and they were placed on the shelves in the club library. The volumes had shining gilt spines but they were incomprehensible and alien to the men, for only Gothic titles glittered on their covers. But the workers went on living in their hovels and communal dwellings, while the engineers' houses stood empty, their great rooms eerie and still. The workers spent their time making things like cigarette lighters in the machine shop during the day, and looking for their goats on the hillside in the evening, while their womenfolk walked inland to the Cossack villages, where they bought and sold food as petty speculators.

One evening Gleb opened a special meeting of the Party group in the "Comintern" Club. The room was spacious, its walls set with long panels of Karelian birch, while its handmade furniture was inlaid with veneer too. Both furniture and walls shone like gold in the evening sun. Rough benches were brought in from the hall, and Gleb sat down at the table where he could see everyone. The faces around him all looked alike. Details of them seemed different, but they all had something in common which made them merge into one. Why had he never noticed it before? And why was it precisely now that these faces so disturbed him? Then all of a sudden he realized what it was: hunger.

Many of the men had never met Gleb before, but they greeted him in a casual fashion as though he had never been away at all. The last time some of them had seen him was at sunset on that evening when officers had dragged him from the ranks of workmen standing outside the factory gates and then beaten him up together with three of his comrades. Some of the men shook Gleb firmly by the hand and wrinkled up their faces in a forced smile, then not knowing what to say, laughed and uttered a few broken phrases:

"Well? How are you, old friend? And how are things, eh?"

Then, without glancing at him again, they went back to their places. But as they sat down, they looked at him once more, and this time their faces shone with an affectionate, irrepressible smile.

Then Gromada came into the room, laughing and shouting in his chesty voice:

"But that's a completely different matter, Comrade Chumalov, really and truly it is! Now we'll get a move on all right! We Communists might have gone astray for a while over things like cigarette lighters and goats, but don't you allow any arguing now! Speak plainly and have done with it!"

Filled with delight, he turned to the men and said:

"Here you are, you damned idlers! Here's a fellow who's been through death and so on! And I'll tell you something else too. I might be speaking out of turn, but I'll state plainly here and now that it was he, Comrade Chumalov, who made me what I am, and it was through him that I joined the Communist Party!"

Everyone listened to Gromada and laughed, for it was unusual for him to speak like this. Gleb smiled at him too from under his brows as one might smile at an impulsive little boy. Surrounded by clouds of tobacco smoke, the workmen kept coughing.

Loshak was sitting in the far corner of the room. Smaller than the others but noticeable all the same, he sat there in silence, a gloomy, silent question in his eyes.

The women, though, were chattering and laughing. Dasha, their leader, was standing by the wall, and every time she went up to them, they all huddled closer together, whispering and choking with laughter.

Everyone was waiting. Any moment now Lukhava would come in and give his report on the struggle against disorganization and the fuel crisis. It was not Lukhava who finally came in, though, but the barefoot and dishevelled figure of Savchuk, once a cooper at the factory. Corpulent and flabby, he sat down on the floor near the door, hugging his scratched, bruised knees to his chest. Filled with yearning, his bloodshot eyes burned in his swollen face.

Suddenly Dasha went over to the window and flung open the massive inner and outer frames that were as heavy as doors. Straggling from their dwellings, no longer mindful of the factory with its heat and noise, its smell of machines and dust, groups of workmen were crawling up the mountainside, carrying sacks on their backs and covered now with a different dust—the dust brought by the mountain winds. Along hill paths and steppe tracks they went, making their way inland towards the Cossack villages as in the days of primitive barter long ago, all of them driven by hunger and age-old greed. Working men from the factory, men who had once been woken in the mornings not by the crowing of cocks but by the harsh screeching of whistles, had grown used during the past few years to the charm of hen-houses and pigsties. These men who had once worked amid the din of machines had learned to squabble over their goats and hens, and to argue over the food ration that had been gobbled up by someone else's pig because nobody had kept an eye on it. The electricity supply to both the factory and the workers' dwellings had been cut, and the factory whistles were choked with dust, so now the silence of idleness reigned amid this pastoral idyll, broken only by the clucking of hens and the grunting of pigs, while grasping husbands and greedy wives had sullenly shut themselves up in their private little domestic cages.

But here in the "Comintern" club and the factory offices, the Communists were beginning to rub their eyes, though their unwashed clothes and dirty hands still smelled of hen droppings and acrid dung. They sat close together, side by side, and the blare of the trumpets and the speakers' unaccustomed words evoked a forgotten life from the distant past. Gleb, too, belonged to that past, but it was as if he had been there only the day before, for he still smelled of red-hot iron, warm oil and the sulphurous smoke of cooling slag. Once again those listening heard the familiar words:

"Factory . . . production . . . Gravity roadways . . . workshops . . . "

Sergei Ivagin came in, and bending close to Chumalov, whispered something to him. Then Gleb stood up and looked sternly at the assembled Party members.

"Comrade Ivagin has come instead of Lukhava, comrades," he said. "Lukhava has gone to see the stevedores—they've gone on strike apparently because of their poor rations. Now let's open the meeting. And please keep quiet! I've got something to tell you. I've heard—and the radio's announced it too—that foreign countries want to trade with us. They've got their eye on the concessions we're offering and they're fitting out their ships accordingly. I don't think we'll take offense at that—no, certainly not! On the contrary, we'll be very glad! We've learned one or two things ourselves now, so they won't fool us any more!"

Gromada got up. He was very agitated.

"Comrades, we are workmen who belong to a famous factory but we have gone and saddled ourselves with pigs and goats and such like. . . It's disgraceful and shameful, my friends! I propose we liquidate all surpluses in favor of our Children's Home, and as we are members of the working class . . . "

There was a burst of general excitement, followed by shouting and the waving of hands.

"Hey, you! You're a sharp one all right! What about those bloody pigs? Weren't you keeping some of them too? They're covered in blood, sweat and tears, those damn pigs of yours!"

"And who's been pinching stuff from the villages and farms?"

"You can't cover up for 'em all! To hell with them! Take a decision, Chumalov, and let the group decide!"

"Hey now, comrades!" cried Gleb. "What are you getting so damned excited for, eh?"

He rang the bell and called the meeting to order.

"Now be quiet, comrades! There's no restrictions been put on pigs or goats yet, so you can play around with them as much as you want. When the time comes, we'll sort them out in real proletarian fashion, just like we sorted out the bourgeois. But for the time being, just carry on, by all means, and do whatever you like with them. Now I propose we elect a chairman."

No sooner had he said these words than all the women began waving their hands and shouting in turn:

"Dasha! Dasha Chumalova!"

The men were shouting too:

"Gromada! Chumalova! Savchuk!"

Then Gromada came running up to the table and raising his arms impatiently, cried:

"Comrades! As far as women are concerned, I've no objections at all. Well, women as creatures enjoying equal rights and so on . . . After all, young people must be leaders too, of course, but let them learn a little first. What we need here is a chairman with a beard to match his experience!"

"So where's Chumalov's beard, then? And where have your whiskers gone, Gromada? Has the cat licked 'em off?"

The women were angry now.

"Dasha Chumalova! Dasha!"

Gleb rang the bell again.

"I'll put it to the vote, comrades! Dasha Chumalova is first on the list, and though she's my wife, I've no objections to a woman chairman. Who is in favor?"

But before he could put Dasha's name to the vote, the women began shouting again:

"We want Dasha! Why don't you give the women a chance, you devils?"

Gleb was the first to raise his hand, and he was quickly followed by the women and Sergei. Then one after another, coughing and wheezing, the men reluctantly put their hands up too.

But without raising his own hand, Savchuk bellowed from the corner where he was sitting:

"Send all the women home! I can't stand them!"

Gleb rang the bell once more and stopped the shouting again:

"I put Gromada's name to the vote. Right! Now it's Loshak's turn. And my name's on the list too. Now please take your places at the table, comrades!"

Dasha, Gromada and Gleb were elected to the praesidium, and from then on Dasha presided over the meeting.

"Comrades," she said, "I ask for silence. Give me the agenda, Comrade Chumalov. I now call upon Comrade Ivagin to make his report. You have just half an hour, comrade."

Sergei laughed in amazement and spread his hands in a gesture of hopelessness.

"But your time limit's much too strict, Comrade Chumalova!"

"Don't speak at great length and keep to the point," she replied.

"She gives herself airs all right!" shouted Savchuk "I told you so—we shouldn't have chosen a woman!"

"Be quiet, Comrade Savchuk! Please keep order! You're not in the street now but at a Party meeting!"

Dasha was right—a few minutes was quite enough. After all, what could you tell a workman in a report? He himself knows best what he needs, and cold, bookish phrases were just as incomprehensible and strange, just as alien and lifeless to them as Sergei himself was to the workmen in both spirit and words.

"Comrades! We find ourselves surrounded by monstrous ruin . . . The working class is undergoing enormous ordeals . . . This is an unprecedented crisis . . . We are witnessing the liquidation of the military front . . . All our energies must now be directed to the economic problems facing us . . . The Tenth Congress of the Party has projected a turning point in economic policy . . . The proletariat is the only force capable of . . . The revival of the republic's industrial production is required . . . Concessions and world markets are what we need . . . We have to be on our guard to defend the land of the proletariat . . . We must increase our strength tenfold and maintain ranks of iron . . . We have broken the enemy blockade . . . The working class and the Communist Party will . . . The supply of fuel must . . . The mechanical power of the factory is . . . "

Sergei spoke for a long time, doing his best to choose simple words, but as though to spite him they did not come easily. He sensed that what he was saying made no impression on these sullen men. They were bored and wearied by it all, and they could hardly wait for him to finish. Dasha had already caught his eye sternly a couple of times now and was frowning with displeasure, and when, covered with perspiration, he finally finished and sat down exhausted on his stool, everyone heaved a sigh of relief.

"Comrades, are there any questions for the speaker? No? Right!"

Everyone looked at Gleb in expectation. He stood up, cleared his

throat, and for a few moments looked intently at the faces of the men before him.

Though many of them wore a vacantly submissive, indifferent expression, some shone with anticipation and hope. But it was as if most of the men were sitting there filled with apathy, sitting there simply in order to devote a statutory hour to their Party obligations. Gleb knew them well—they would not believe a single eloquent promise or a single eloquent word. That was how they had just reacted to Ivagin's bookish report—they had simply turned a deaf ear to it all. But one only had to say a few words like "Friends! Tomorrow we're going back to the factory!" for each of them to leap to his feet and shout breathlessly: "Comrade Chumalov, we've been waiting for this for a long time! You can take us there right now! All this ruin's gone on far too long!"

When Gleb looked at Dasha and saw her face, its expression unaffected and kind as it always used to be and her eyes lit by an encouraging smile, he felt that in some ways he was to blame for what had happened and that he was unworthy of her. Yet at the same time he could not suppress a feeling of hostility towards her for all her self-assured composure and the unfamiliar, harsh ringing tone in her voice. It seemed to him that her behavior was all insincerity and pretence. Then, for some unaccountable reason, he put his hand on her shoulder and patted it. Her gentle response told him that she found his affectionate touch pleasing and that she had forgiven him his earlier outbursts. And all his sense of injury, all his arguing with her now seemed so insignificant and degrading that he closed his eyes for a moment in shame. If these people knew what a jealous fool he had been when Dasha and he had been alone together! But she had faith in him now, expecting him to utter meaningful, decisive words, and not for a moment did she doubt that only he, her Gleb, could set the hearts of these comrades alight, these comrades who longed to return to work once more.

"Comrades," said Gleb, "don't let's do a lot of talking. We've spent much too long chattering in idleness as it is these past few years, and now it's time to stop. We've forgotten our revolutionary obligations. The factory's not a factory any longer—it's more like a farmyard—and we're stealing the state's property for our own private purposes. Is that really fair, comrades? Now there's two sides to every person, my friends. One side can go to the devil and the other can grab hold of the devil and smash him in the teeth! Our hands aren't meant for looking after pigs and goats, but for other things. We Bolsheviks are a special kind of men, and just as our hearts are special, so are our hands, and so is the task for our brains too. As Comrade Ivagin has said, there's now a new economic policy in Russia. But what does that new policy mean? It means going all out for economic reconstruction. Now, we are the producers of cement, and cement is a powerful binding material. In fact, cement is just what we ourselves are, comrades—the working class. So now we've got to realize and feel that properly. We've loafed around long enough, wasting our time looking after goats. It's time to start real work now—the production of cement for the building of socialism!"

The workmen were excited by Gleb's last words, and many of them leapt up to speak. Raising his hand, Gleb asked for attention, while Dasha rang the bell and called for order.

"Right, comrades," Gleb went on, "let's get down to business! We'll start with the most important thing—the question of fuel. There's no fuel either for the factory or for the workers' settlement. Now we can get fuel for the factory from the state, but what about the town? And the workers? And what about all the children in the Homes? It's no use relying on compulsory requisitioning of firewood—the peasants just won't bring us any. So we'll just have to find a solution to the problem ourselves. We are the only ones who can solve this question. What we've got to do is build a new gravity roadway up to the pass. What does that mean? It means we have to get the first diesel going, start the turbine and get the lights back on in the workers' houses. We've got stocks of gas and oil that we can draw on by warrant. So the gravity roadway must be our first step. We'll organize voluntary Sunday work through the trade unions, and we'll mobilize the engineers and use their technical expertise. So let all your pigs and goats go to hell! Then in a year's time we'll be laughing at ourselves, lads!"

Savchuk made his way forward through the crowd and breathing heavily, banged the table with his fist:

"I demand that the coopers' shop be started up again straightaway!"

Dasha got to her feet and checked him severely:

"Comrade Savchuk! Come to order please! When on earth will you learn to control yourself?"

"I demand . . . There are swineherds in here and folk who make cigarette lighters on the side!"

"Comrade Savchuk, for the last time!"

"Gleb, old friend, give your wife a good smack on the backside! She's not mine, or I'd do it for you! Oh, you bloody goatherds! You devils! You've sold your souls for cigarette lighters. Now you've just mentioned the engineers, Gleb, but what kind of a friend is Engineer Kleist to you? After all, he gave you over to be killed!"

"He's right! That damned specialist! He's hidden himself away like a rat in its hole, and he goes sneaking around like a thief! What's the Cheka doing about him?"

Engineer Kleist . . . That man had once held Gleb's life in his hands but had flung him to the executioners. Kleist . . . Surely Gleb's life was worth as much as his!"

Loshak silently raised his hand.

"Comrade Loshak has the floor," said Dasha.

Everyone turned to look at the hunchbacked mechanic.

"It's just like they say, comrades. If you put the right man on the job, then things will go just fine. True enough, Kleist may be a bastard, but what I want to say is this: all right, he did turn Chumalov over to them, but how did he treat Dasha? After all, who was it who saved her from death? It was him, Kleist! We should remember that."

Dasha suddenly became agitated and interrupted him:

"Comrade Loshak, I'm not the subject of this discussion, so please keep to what's in the report. What have Kleist and I got to do with it? What we're concerned about here is the roadway and the supply of fuel . . . " Her white teeth flashed as she spoke. "After all," she went on, "you said yourself we've got to get things right."

Loshak waved his hand in a gesture of hopelessness and sat down again.

Dasha again, thought Gleb. Again this mystery that so troubled his soul . . .

He was thinking hard now, wrestling with his thoughts.

"Comrades," he said, "let me fight my own battle with Kleist, face to face, but let's leave that question aside for the moment. We've got off the point."

The discussion went on quickly and smoothly until a resolution was adopted. It was decided to begin extending the roadway up to the pass immediately, and on the following day to start going through the factory to clear away the rubbish, carry out minor repairs and begin to put everything in order.

Dasha picked up a sheet of paper and glancing at it, looked at the assembled men:

"Comrades, we must consider the question of the Party Committee very carefully. It's essential for us to send several members of the Party group to work out in the country districts."

Her words were greeted by a tense silence. The men seemed stunned. Then they all began to shout at once, breathless and angry:

"This isn't a posting on official business, it's sheer murder! We aren't beasts to be sent to the slaughter!"

"What's all this? You're wanting to throw us like food to the wolves, are you?"

"But comrades, you're Communists, not a bunch of speculators!" cried Dasha. "I'm a woman and I'm telling you that never, not for a single moment, have I trembled before what fate had in store for me. And you know that well enough!"

"Well go yourself if you feel like it!"

Then Gleb stepped out from behind the table, and walking to the middle of the room, silently looked at them all with a hint of menace in his eyes. Then he said in an offhand tone:

"Send me then, comrades, send both my wife and myself! She said it, she called you speculators. And now I'll say it to you too: you're speculators, not workers! But I've been in far worse hornets' nests than those in the country areas round here. You all know I spent three years at the front."

"You may have been in action, Chumalov, but you're not dead yet! Anyway, lots of men have been in action—who hasn't seen bloodshed these past few years?"

"That's true enough. But why didn't I get killed? Because I made friends with death as an equal. And if you've ever seen death, you'll know very well what kind of teeth it's got—they're sharper than a mincer! I'll show you if you like—I'm not shy!"

Tearing off his army tunic and vest, he flung them to the floor, and his body gradually became covered with goose-flesh from his waist to his neck. On his chest the thick hair shone like gold, and as his naked body quivered, its muscles moved under the skin. All of a sudden he seemed very near and dear to them all.

"Anybody who wants to can come up and feel!" he said.

On his chest, on his left arm below the shoulder, and on his flank were long scars, running like pale, purple threads across the skin.

"D'you want me to take my trousers down as well? All right, then, I will! Oh, don't you want me to? I've got decorations like these down there too! You want other people to go off to work instead of you, do you, while you sleep in your goat pens, eh? All right then! I'm off!"

No one came up to Gleb, but he saw how the men's eyes misted with tears and how they all fell silent. They looked at his naked body then quickly turned away in confusion.

"Comrades!" cried Gromada. "This is disgraceful and shameful! Just how far have our souls rotted? Comrades!"

He was writhing at the table, unable to express the storm of feeling that was raging within him.

Then a bearded workman got up from his seat on a bench and struck himself on the chest with all his might. His head was shaking.

"Put my name down!" he cried. "I'll go! I'm not some filthy swine! It's true I've got three goats and a sow with piglets at home, and I've carried a trader's sack down the country roads too—I can't deny it. But we've been cutting our own throats all this time, my friends!"

Behind him a few more heavy hands were raised. Then Dasha, who was gazing at Gleb with eyes full of emotion, waved her hand and said:

"Comrades, is our Party group really any worse than the others? No, comrades! We've got fine workers in it, and fine Communists too!"

Then she was the first to start clapping.

CHAPTER V

THE HIDDEN EMIGRANT

1. The Secret Room

Though the massive, oak-framed windows were never opened, the dust from the quarries filtered through the hinged ventilation panes and settled like velvet on the windowsills between the inner and outer frames. In the mornings, when the mountains glowed with lilac fire and the sun's rays came slanting in through the windows, specks of dust shone iridescent between the panes of glass. Engineer Kleist, once the technical director of the factory, would stand at the window gazing at these tiny, spinning worlds that glowed with the light of geological epochs long ago, and would listen to the profound silence that filled the room.

Since his study was at the end of a corridor where day brought nothing but somnolent stillness and night only ragged shadows and black emptiness, the room seemed comfortingly inaccessible and remote, like the quarry he could see in the distant ravine that was overgrown with sweetbriar and ivy.

Now that the factory lay abandoned, the workings deserted, and the roadways smashed and rusty, life was reduced to its two essential elements—chaos and peace. Why, then, should Kleist not remain the technical director of a dead factory? After all, such a post did not require anything of him whatsoever.

The main thing was not to open the oak-framed windows in his room, but silently to witness the profound significance of the construction work continually being performed by the spiders that lived between the double panes. Suspended now as he was between past and present, Kleist had become aware of the immense architectural beauty of the spiders' webs that festooned the space between the frames. Long-legged and stooping, his silvery hair en brosse, he would stand at the window for a long time, gazing at the pearly-white gossamer of the webs, at the multitude of delicate planes intersecting and inclining at various angles and at the countless radiating stairways that were all interconnected and drawn powerfully taut.

No one ever came to his study now. After all, who could possibly need him when the factory was as silent as the grave and the cement in the warehouses had petrified into rock-hard blocks long ago? Who could need him, when the steel cables were broken and the trucks lay scattered all over the hillside, buried in debris and overgrown with weeds? Who could need him, when dozens of skilled mechanics wandered idly along the highroad and down the factory paths, through the deserted buildings and across the empty yards, spending their time stealing transmission belts and rivets, brass fittings and hoops?

Down below, in the twilit semi-basement where the Factory Committee offices were, shouting and noise went on day after day, and to Kleist the place sounded like a riotous tavern or a den of thieves. Through his dusty windows he could see men going up and down the concrete steps on the mountainside, their gloomy faces gaunt with hunger and privation. They were all totally preoccupied with what they were doing, as if it were an incomprehensible, terrible game, and none of them had any time for him. Everything had turned out splendidly because of his wise caution and the skillfull way in which he had formulated a simple mathematical problem. From his solitary retreat he looked out at the idle men with a combination of mockery, contempt and hatred. Exhausted now by hunger, it was they who had brought both devastation and that greatest tragedy of all to Russia—the Revolution. It was they who had destroyed his future and set the world ablaze as if it were no more than a scrap of factory waste, and now they were much too busy to remember the vestiges of the past that lived on in this secret room.

The concrete yard and the flight of steps outside his window shimmered so brightly in the brilliant light that it seemed as if the ground itself were burning with fiery incandescence and would burst into flame at any moment. The loose cement and pebbles in the yard rattled and crunched under the workmen's boots as they passed constantly in and

out of the Factory Committee offices, going in at one door then coming out of another.

But why was a Factory Committee necessary at all, Kleist wondered, when there had never been one in the past and yet the factory had been famous throughout the world? What work could these men possibly have to do, condemned as they now were to idleness amid the ruins of a once magnificent enterprise? Why was there so much anxious running to and fro if tomorrow were destined to be just the same as yesterday, and if beyond it stretched a succession of identical days that were just as pointless as the infinite series of images in a pair of reflecting mirrors?

At exactly one o'clock each day Yakob, the office messenger, would come silently into Kleist's room carrying a small brass tray. His thin, gray mustache and the close-cropped, gray hair on his pink scalp looked curiously translucent, as though they were made of glass. Stooping a little, he would gravely set a cup of tea down on the table and put a few tiny saccharine tablets wrapped in paper beside it. Then he would step back two paces, and bending down, carefully pick up a few specks from the floor and just as carefully put them in the wastepaper basket under the table. The walls of the room were clean and white, and the oak-framed blueprints hanging on them looked just as severely neat and clear as they had in the old days.

"Is it one o'clock already, Yakob?"

"Yes, Herman Hermanovich, one o'clock exactly."

"Very well. You may go now. And don't let anyone in to see me, mind."

"Very good, sir."

"Just dust the windows, Yakob, but don't open them please."

"Very good, sir."

Kleist stood at the window with his back to Yakob, his short, bristly hair gleaming like silver crystal and his old jacket sticking out from his shoulders and hanging down his back like a little tail.

Somewhere far away, the hitherto empty offices echoed with the sound of isolated voices, while abacuses clicked busily like a flock of clucking hens. There were new people in the building already, people sent by the Economic Council, but just who they were and what they were doing, Kleist neither knew nor cared. He still had his forgotten study that was guarded by Yakob, a study in which only the past existed. As for the present, it was whirling by with its noisy automobiles and trucks, urged on by men who had broken free from their chains and

learned to shout and swear in an incoherent fashion—something that in the old days had been strictly forbidden by the factory management.

Kleist gazed at the steep hillside with its covering of juniper bushes and its bands of different-colored strata. Higher up, on the mountain ridge itself, towered the great mansion of undressed stone, its towers and arches uplifted to the sky.

"What have they got over there now, Yakob?" Kleist asked.

"The Workers' Club and the Communist Group office, Herman Hermanovich."

"They've brought an incomprehensible new language with them, too . . . Please don't let anyone into this room and on no account open the windows. You may go now."

Then, as if for the first time, Kleist looked at the former director's house (just imagine, the Communist Group was in it now!), and admired its striking, lofty grandeur. He, Kleist, had built that house . . .

Away to the left, set amid rocks and greenery beyond the mountain ridge, the factory chimneys rose into the sky. Near them was the cableway and beyond it were the arches and domes of the factory itself. Kleist had built those too. He could not have fled abroad without first destroying the buildings of his own creation. But these things of his own making had stood in his way, almost more indestructible than the mountains around them, almost more inexorable than time itself, and now he was their prisoner.

His study with its polished floor still resembled the businesslike workroom it once used to be. The walls were hung with architectural drawings, the oak desk was covered with blueprints, and the massive carved furniture still retained its look of noble dignity. Time had stood still here and the past hung so heavily in the air that its presence was almost palpable.

2. Enemies

But had an error crept into Kleist's logical constructions, or had life temporarily ceased to obey the laws of human reason? Whichever it was, the closed circle of his isolated world suddenly snapped and began to disintegrate like a ring of rusty wire.

Only an hour before, when Yakob's customary appearance had seemed to affirm the immutability of the passage of time, Kleist's whole conception of life was clearly expressed by a strikingly neat and simple diagram—a circle and a tangent. Safely hidden behind a multitude of walls and surrounded by blessed peace, he would sit at his desk over

the old factory blueprints, and preserving the time-honored propriety of his study, would instinctively pencil in his English notebook one and the same figure, a circle and a tangent, a figure that held good in each and every situation.

Then all of a sudden everything was smashed to smithereens. The axiom suddenly proved to be an absurdity, and the tangent was transformed into a flying stone that had shattered the protective shell of his existence. And because it had all happened so simply and quietly, Kleist was filled with mortal terror.

He had gone to the lavatory and spent more time there than usual—because of the poor food nowadays he often suffered from abdominal pain. As he came back, he noticed from a distance that his study door was open. This was something neither Yakob nor he ever allowed.

Immediately after Yakob had brought his tea, Kleist had seen a group of workmen standing outside in the yard, looking first towards the quarries and then up at his window. At the time he had felt something like a slight electric shock deep inside him, but his feeling of alarm was only momentary, and he had quickly forgotten it. But now his study door stood wide open, and this time the electric shock was accompanied by nauseating anxiety.

Maintaining his usual dignified air, Kleist walked towards the study with even stride. But he suddenly stopped in the doorway, unable to grasp what had happened, for the windows were wide open and clouds of dust were swirling over the windowsills and table. The mountainside looked huge in the clear air, its rocky terraces and spring greenery distinct in the brilliant light. Far, far away, clearly visible now on the upper slopes of the quarries, stood a little house with two windows. Clouds of fresh tobacco smoke and wisps of filmy cobweb mingled in the moving air that filled the room.

By the window with a pipe in his mouth stood a clean-shaven man wearing an army tunic and dark blue puttees. He had a prominent, square jaw and there were dark hollows in his cheeks.

"Ah, what a long time it's been!" he said gaily, greeting Kleist in a familiar way. "How do you do! You've got yourself so well barricaded in here it's hard to find you!"

With his cloth helmet the man kept sweeping the cobwebs off the doorposts and window-frames, killing the spiders as they tried frantically to crawl away.

"Well, Comrade Director, it's certainly a fine den you've got here, tucked away at the end of a corridor! And everything's well camouflaged too! You've thought it all out very nicely!"

Walking unsteadily now, Kleist went up to the table. There had been a time when this man, his body beaten and torn, had been condemned to death, and with a face that was like a bloody mask had stared wildly at him. But now, all of a sudden, he was back again, and this time he was so strangely, so terribly calm.

"No, I never open the windows . . . "

"You're quite right not to, Comrade Director—after all, it's a poisonous wind that blows from our direction! It's enough to make anyone panic, so I quite understand!"

"Why didn't Yakob inform me of your visit?"

"We'll send that Yakob of yours off to the coopers' shop to saw some wood! We've got no time for flunkeys like him! Now don't you remember me, Comrade Director?"

"Yes, I remember you . . . But what about it?"

"Well now, how can I put it? Here I am, wandering round the factory and looking in every nook and cranny—inspecting past glory, you might say. But all I can see is desolation and ruin. The roadways are smashed, the cables are broken, and everywhere you look there's chaos and devastation. And all the skilled technicians have hidden themselves away like rats in their holes. But why are there cobwebs everywhere? Why are you and the factory all covered with cobwebs—that's what I'd like to know!"

"Let us suppose I have already asked myself that question and answered it too. Now what is it you want of me?"

"Well now. . . I came across your barricade and I thought to myself, let's have a look at the place! It's a devilish habit of mine, you know, Comrade Director, to be so inquisitive!"

"I never indulge in idle conversation. I neither understand what you are saying, nor do I wish to. Now please be so kind as to leave me in peace."

Gleb stepped towards the table and grinned. Then he took his pipe out of his mouth and looked hard at Kleist. Were spiders reflected in his eyes at that moment, or did terrible apparitions seem to swirl around him? Whichever it was, Kleist's face turned a dusty ashen color.

"Citizen Kleist, do you remember that splendid evening when you singled me out in such an unforgettable way? It was a hell of a thrashing they gave me, and I shed plenty of blood too. They gave it me good and hot, I can tell you! But a thrashing like that—provided it doesn't finish you off altogether—stands you in pretty good stead, so I've come to visit you and have a chat about old times . . . I like meeting up with old friends again, Comrade Director!"

He stuck his pipe back into the corner of his mouth and burst out laughing.

"Now allow me to amuse you with a riddle, Comrade Director. Don't worry, it's only a trivial one, but it's funny all the same. One fine spring day there were four friends. Then the damned Whites caught the poor devils and dragged them to this very room. By that time, though, their faces didn't really look much like faces any longer but more like ragged old boots. Now the question is this: why were those battered devils dragged in here and how did four dead fools turn into one living one? Well? Funny, isn't it? But what are you looking so gloomy for?"

And again he burst out laughing, sounding for all the world like some extraordinarily amusing, cheerful fellow.

"We've not seen each other for quite a while now, Comrade Director. 'I'll go and call on an old friend,' I thought to myself. But you don't seem very pleased to see me! How people change! You used to walk about like a hero, but now you seem to have lost heart. That's not good, Comrade Director, you ought to pull yourself together!"

Outside the open window the workmen's voices sounded unusually loud and close now. Grinning, Gleb looked intently at Kleist, as though waiting for him to say something, but the engineer was as silent and still as a corpse.

"Forgive me for the joke, Comrade Director, but don't worry, there's worse things than that. I've got such a cheerful nature, you see, so what can you do with me! Good-bye!"

And turning on his heel, Gleb went quickly out of the room.

Exhausted by the encounter, Kleist sat there for a long time, his face wearing the fixed expression of a man who is suffering from severe shock. Then Yakob came in again, deferential and grave, and stood in the middle of the room. He was upset and his head was shaking. Kleist brought his feverish gaze to bear on him and asked quietly and sternly:

"Well, Yakob? Won't you tell me how it happened?"

"It's not my fault, Herman Hermanovich . . . Nothing's forbidden or impossible for them—anywhere or in anything. They have the power, Herman Hermanovich, and their power is law."

Kleist found Yakob's presence agreeable—there was something reassuring about his steadfast devotion.

"So it's the Communist Group then, is it, Yakob?"

"Yes, it's Chumalov, the mechanic. He's suddenly come back from the war and now he's the boss. Can anything really stand in their way now? They'll destroy us, Herman Hermanovich!"

"But didn't you even try to stop him, Yakob?"

"No, I didn't, Herman Hermanovich. It's regrettable that he's disturbed your routine . . . "

Kleist was silent for a moment, almost as if he had not heard Yakob's last words. Then in a calm, businesslike way he lit a cigarette and said:

"Do you remember, Yakob? There were four of them. They were shot that same night, weren't they? I felt sure they all died . . . "

"They were beaten, Herman Hermanovich, then tortured to death. . . "

"Yes, Yakob, it was a terrible business and I'll never forget it. But there's one thing that should be borne in mind. At the time I acted quite deliberately and completely on my own account. Was it fear on my part? Or terror? Or even revenge? There was only one compelling factor, and that was time, for it is time that controls events. And in the same deliberate way I did everything I possibly could to save that man's wife."

The cigarette between Kleist's index and middle fingers was quivering all the time.

"Stay with me for a while, Yakob . . . I don't feel very well."

"You ought to go home, Herman Hermanovich, you need a rest. . ."

"Where's home, Yakob? Abroad? Hasn't it occurred to you, old fellow, that you and I might now be spending our last few hours on this earth?"

"Now how can you possibly say that, Herman Hermanovich? Our workmen may rant and rave, but they're peaceful enough really, and they'd never commit murder. So don't worry, Herman Hermanovich."

But his head was shaking as he spoke.

Hardly had Yakob uttered these words than Kleist flung himself back in the chair and his face turned a dusty ashen color once more.

"Do you remember, Yakob? I delivered this man up to his death, but his death has rebounded on me. See me out, Yakob . . . "

Kleist rose and with fear in his eyes, walked out past the messenger. In his fussy, old man's way Yakob picked up the engineer's hat and stick, and with short little steps hurried off after him into the dark corridor.

3. Retribution

Following the pebble-strewn path that had been cut out of the rock and wound its way upwards through clumps of juniper and dogwood, Kleist climbed towards the mountain ridge. The darkness of night came

floating up out of the ravine beneath him. Hazily transparent in the gloom, thickets of beech and ash showed up faintly on the hillside and in the valley below, while rising above them like huge dark torches, solitary poplars soared into the sky. At the foot of the hillside were the massive buildings of the factory, while beyond them, gleaming like dull crystal in the fading light, lay the sea.

To Kleist everything seemed distant and strange, and only the giant buildings of reinforced concrete that he himself had built seemed comprehensible and familiar. At this terrible hour, when the lifeless factory lay awesomely silent like a vast graveyard full of rusty machinery, he had wandered alone with his stick down the railway tracks and up the flights of steps, then across the upper and lower yards dominated by their high gantries and gloomy towers.

In these deserted buildings he saw only one thing—the grandiose death of the past. His simple formula had proved correct, and now the wheel of events was rolling inexorably down its allotted track. His strange encounter with Gleb Chumalov had shown him that this track had finally come to an end and that his life was now at an end too. He should have blown up the factory long ago while there was still time, and perished with it. That would have been a splendid counter-blow, in complete accordance with the law of equal and opposite reactions. If they were to meet him on the path now, he was perfectly ready for them. Essentially, what remained to be done was the most unimportant thing of all—for them to take him and shoot him in the head.

To what world did the way of life brought by Chumalov belong? Risen from bloodshed and death the man was fearless and invincible, and his eyes gleamed with ruthless power. He was a man with an unyielding, terrifying face beneath an equally unyielding, terrifying helmet. That helmet served to affirm the menacing reality of the present, and it seemed to Kleist that apart from Chumalov's face and helmet, there was nothing else at all.

It would be better if he were to die here, amid all these buildings that he had created, rather than at home. To destroy him here would be to destroy with him all these monuments to his existence.

Over the distant mountains beyond the town, the red sunset was slowly turning pale as molten metal does when it cools, and the great, jagged ridges stood out dark against the sky like the roofs of an immense factory. Somewhere nearby a pulley squeaked as it was hauled up by weary hands, and it was followed by the clatter of falling iron, while at the railway station far below locomotives shrieked as if in fright.

Gleb was standing on the platform at the top of the steel tower. In the old days coal used to be sent down from here into the powerhouse

by a line of small trucks. They would descend by elevator into the dark mouth of the shaft, then travel along rails that ran through a series of tunnels as far as the powerhouse itself. But now the platform was deserted, and in its centre, behind the guard rail, yawned a fathomless, black abyss.

Gripping the iron railing of the parapet so hard that his fingers ached, Gleb gazed out at the trucks hanging motionless on their cables, and at the chimneys soaring to the sky.

There had been a time when this factory had lived a tremendous life of its own. It had been an entire city inhabited by tens of thousands of people, and at night the windows of its workshops had shone with brilliant light, while great lamps had gleamed on every side like countless moons and stars. Away over there, down at the wharves in the bay, ocean-going steamers had devoured millions of tons of fresh cement, while from the factory to the docks and back again, long lines of trucks had swung through the air, passing endlessly to and fro.

But all that was in the past, and now there was only stillness and desolation. The factory entrances and gravity roadways were overgrown with grass, rust covered the machinery like a scab, and the walls of the buildings had been eroded by mountain torrents and scarred by gunfire.

Kleist walked slowly on, stopping frequently to gaze at the many-storied buildings as though they were mausoleums of a bygone age. He looked at them and thought for a while, then on he went once more, only to stop and think again.

Gleb leaned over the railing and peered intently at the shadowy figure of Kleist below. Here was a man he could gladly have strangled at any moment—one that would have been the most joyous moment of his whole life. It was Kleist who in his vindictive spite had turned him over to the group of White officers to be tortured and killed, and Gleb would never forget that day for the rest of his life . . .

The factory workers had all been lined up on the main road in front of the office building. (There were only a few of them left by then, as some had gone into hiding while others had joined the Red Army and left the town, but Gleb and his three friends had failed to get away because they had been caught up in the street fighting.) One of the officers had read out a list of names from a sheet of paper, and as he read, he struck each worker with his riding-crop then handed him over to the other officers. In their turn they beat each man too, using revolver butts as well as whips. Dimly Gleb had heard the anguished cries of the workmen standing in line, and for a single moment through his bloody tears he had glimpsed them running away in all directions with the

officers chasing them. Then, when his three friends and he were dragged into Kleist's room covered with blood, the engineer had looked at them for a long time, his face very pale and his lower jaw trembling. The officers had kept asking Kleist something but he made no reply, pretending to be calm despite his profound agitation. He had looked intently at Gleb but said nothing, and in his eyes Gleb had seen both compassion and scorn. Then Kleist had said softly with a catch in his voice:

"Yes, this is the man ... And these too. Yes, yes, they're the ones..."

"Have you anything more to say, Mr. Kleist?"

"What may happen next is beyond my control, gentlemen. It is a matter for your judgment."

Then the four friends had been flung into an empty warehouse and beaten till late in the night. At moments of consciousness Gleb had felt the blows, some of them so remote and slight that they seemed to cause him no pain, but others so severe that they almost tore him apart. But terrible though they were, even these blows seemed strangely remote too, as though he were nailed up inside a barrel and someone were kicking aimlessly at its sides.

Coming to in the darkness, it was a long time before he could make out where he was. Then he had begun to crawl around the warehouse, trying to find a way out, but after bumping into the flabby, cold bodies of his friends, he had lain down feebly beside them for a while. Then, creeping along by the wall, he had found a hole that was blocked up with stones. Under cover of darkness he had climbed through it, and hiding among the bushes as he went, had crawled as far as his home. After that no one had seen him again. He would never forget what had happened—not for the rest of his life ...

He had remembered all this today while he was in Kleist's room, and he remembered it again now as he watched the engineer wandering over the wide square below him.

"Good evening, Comrade Director!" he called.

Kleist suddenly stopped and went rigid, but he soon recovered from his surprise and began to peer not at Gleb but at the dark, smashed windows of the powerhouse.

This man Chumalov was everywhere, he thought. He was not pursuing him but merely standing in his path, terrifying him like a figure in a nightmare. It was simply impossible to escape from him. In the old days this man had been lost amid the mass of dark blue workmen's smocks, possessing no face or voice of his own. Unnoticed like all the rest, he had performed his allotted task, being no more than a minute

element in the complex, mighty process of the factory's work. Why was it, then, that he, Kleist, once so powerful and strong, could now no longer resist the coarse might of this man? At what point had the enormous change come about? Was it when he had delivered Chumalov up to be destroyed, or was it that moment earlier today, when he had suddenly encountered the man in his study, a figure risen from the past?

"Come up on to the platform, Comrade Director—the grave looks deeper from up here! You're wandering about just like I do, every day... But what's the point?"

The logic of events possesses only one pattern—an ineluctable beginning and an inexorable end. There is no such thing as chance, for chance is an illusion. Obeying the voice of this man who had suddenly come back into his life, Kleist slowly climbed the steps to the platform, trying to maintain his usual dignity and calm.

"Take care, Comrade Director! One false step and you'll go head over heels to your death! It's one hell of a shaft you've built here!"

In an authoritative, chill tone Kleist answered:

"We built it properly, so it would last for centuries."

"Yes, Comrade Director, you certainly put up an invincible fortress here, but it soon came crashing down, didn't it? All your efforts aren't worth a thing! Where are those indestructible centuries of yours now?"

Puffing away at his pipe, Gleb spoke in a good-natured but rather serious way, while Kleist stood there as if paralyzed, leaning on the parapet. His head was shaking, and to his horror he realized he was quite unable to stop it. And just as absurdly an agonizing smile was playing on his lips.

"A grave, a communal grave ... Oh, to hell with it all!" he thought.

Why was this enormous workman standing here, Kleist wondered. Why was he so awesomely withdrawn and quiet? At any moment he could fling him, Kleist, head over heels into the bottomless abyss from which two taut cables came rising up into the steel tower to disappear over the great wheels of the winding gear.

It was strange, but as he looked at Kleist, Gleb did not feel any pain. Either the pain had burnt itself out during his first encounter with the old man, or it had faded and died a few moments ago, when he had seen him looking so lonely and helpless far below. He was even beginning to feel rather sorry for him somehow.

"So, Comrade Director, you're pretty good at building monuments, aren't you? Well, when you die, there's a grave already prepared for you here. D'you see this shaft? We'll send you down it in a truck and bury you under the tallest factory chimney!"

Kleist suddenly straightened up and tore himself away from the rail. Then, reaching out a hand towards Gleb, he muttered in angry confusion:

"Chumalov ... for God's sake, do what you have to do quickly, only please ... please don't torment me!"

Gleb went up to him and burst out laughing.

"Comrade Director! What on earth are you talking about? Get that nonsense out of your head! After all, I'm not a wild animal, you know! All that's in the past now, and we've learned to take stock of everything we do. It's over and done with, so to hell with it. We're living in different times now. What on earth do you think? Couldn't I knock you down and have my revenge if I wanted to? But I need you alive, not dead!"

Kleist looked at him foolishly and trembled as if he had suddenly caught a chill.

"Why do you ... mock me, Chumalov? I don't understand it, and at a moment like this, such a terrible moment ... "

"But it's a splendid moment, Comrade Director! You're worrying about nothing! But I understand, of course. You expected this living corpse Chumalov to take vengeance for the past. After all, you thought, he's got something to remember ... Yes, I've got something to remember all right—three years at the front, for example. The Revolution's the finest school of all, but when you're fighting, you make mistakes and sometimes even commit crimes, so now and then you feel you're still very much a fool. But it's good you can feel that, because it helps you to control yourself. For the time being, though, I'm sure of one thing at least, Comrade Director. There's an enormous struggle about to begin, and it's going to be a good deal harder than fighting and shedding blood in war. It's no joke, you know, the economic front! Now just look! All these great buildings are the product of your talent, the work of your hands. We've got to bring this graveyard back to life, Comrade Director, and then we've got to set it alight! There's a whole new world opening up before us, a world we've already conquered. The years will go by, and that world will shine with magnificent new machinery and splendid palaces. Then man will no longer be a slave but a king, because free and beloved toil will have become the basis of his life!"

Laughing with excitement now, Gleb took Kleist by the arm.

"I feel like day-dreaming a little, Comrade Director. And that's not such a bad thing either, because dreams give life to our thoughts. So set to work, Herman Hermanovich! The first step is to extend the roadway up to the pass so as to ensure the supply of firewood. Then there's the turbines to be repaired. As for the diesels, though, they're ready to start right away, because Brynza's managed to keep them all in good order. Then there's the factory buildings to be repaired. Soon the quarries will begin to work again, the trucks will start moving and the rotary kilns will turn once more ... "

But Kleist muttered in an indistinct, choking voice:

"What's been destroyed, what's died, can never rise again ... No!"

"Herman Hermanovich, do we really want to resurrect what's been destroyed? No, far from it! You're quite right, of course—the capitalist world's been smashed now, and it'll never rise again. That's a fact! But you're already living in the new world. You've come to us with great knowledge and experience, and our new society needs those qualities. You no longer belong to yourself, Comrade Director! Your mind and strength already lie in the strong, steady hands of others, and if you join in the process of reconstruction and labor you'll experience a thousand times more joy than when you were serving the capitalist system. You were a hireling then, but now you're a free creator. So set to work, Herman Hermanovich, and everything will be splendid!"

Then in a simple, friendly way Gleb shook Kleist by the shoulders, and as he did so, the old man's hat fell from his head and plunged like a night bird into the darkness far below.

In this last exhausting struggle between life and death, Kleist realized that Chumalov's terrifying hands—hands that were themselves ingrained with death—had pinned him securely to life. Stunned, he could not comprehend the meaning of this stupendous event, and filled with a strange feeling of emptiness, stood on the platform weeping tears of happiness ...

CHAPTER VIII

BURNING DAYS

1. Workers' Blood

The days burned with intense heat and were filled with feverish activity, while the nights seemed to pass almost unnoticed. Streaming with sweat, Gleb spent his time running first to the Trade Union Council, then to the Party Committee ("Call a general meeting of the Party immediately!"), next to the Railwaymen's Union ("Comrades, speed up the supply of tank-trucks to the oil refinery!"), after that to the Factory Administration, and finally to the power-house where Brynza was always to be found and where the diesels stood all ready for work.

As usual, Lukhava was never at the Trade Union Council, for he could not bear to sit shut up in his office there. Every day from morning

till night he would be rushing from one workshop to another and from one union to the next, and everywhere he went he would enter into all the details of production and share in the workers' lives. He organized special meetings and settled disagreements, cursed those who were idle and inscribed the names of Heroes of Labor on the factory's board of honor. He would go bursting into supply sections, food departments and offices, overturning piles of official papers, issuing orders and making demands, and wherever he went he aroused enthusiasm and caused storms of delight. He was never tired—he did not even seem to know the meaning of the word—and his feverish eyes burned with an undying light. That was how Lukhava won the workers' hearts!

At the factory the electricians had begun repairing the wiring, while in the workers' houses electric light bulbs taken from the stores and put into the empty sockets now shone brightly in the darkness. Filled with gladness, the women and children smiled to see them, and the gray mask of hunger on the workers' faces began to melt away in joyous anticipation.

In the machine shop no one was making cigarette lighters any more. Work of a very different kind was going on there now, and amid incessant hammering and whistling, hissing and clanging, the machines were coming back to life. Across the yard from the powerhouse then back to the workshop again went men in dark blue smocks stained with copper, their paths criss-crossing all the time. Only Loshak and Gromada were not there, for they had tasks enough of their own in the Factory Committee offices. And there, down in the basement in rooms that reeked of cement and cheap tobacco—tobacco strong enough to send the devil himself back to hell, so they said—there were endless crowds of people. Men kept walking in and out of the offices, going in at one door and coming out at another. They were pressing for increased rations, but what few reserves of food were available were already being allocated. The word "roadway" was on everyone's lips, and warrants for the delivery of liquid fuel were expected any day now.

Gleb would run from one workshop to the next, seizing tools and cutting, sawing and drilling as though trying to outdo himself. He often looked in on Brynza, and the mechanic would greet him with a cry:

"Ho-ho, Commander! Things are moving at last! But fuel, Commander, we must have fuel! Just fuel—nothing else! And if we don't get it in the next couple of days, I'll blow myself sky-high together with these diesels of mine!"

Rattling their tools as they worked among the machines were his assistants, all of them looking rather like Brynza himself. He kept winking at them, nodding his head with its peaked cap in their direction and grinning happily.

"D'you see, Chumalov? The lads've started work with a will! All the fooling around and idle talk of the past few years are forgotten now, my friend! This is what the power of machines means, and so long as the machines are alive we can't possibly leave them. When you're longing for a machine, it's worse than longing for your sweetheart!"

Then he shouted again, but so loudly now that his voice filled the workshop:

"It's fuel we need, my friend, fuel! Ten tanks' full! That'll do to start with! Just ten tanks' full!"

Together with Kleist, the technicians and the workmen from the quarries, Gleb strode down the ravine and across the yards that were overgrown with grass. With a grave look in his sunken eyes, Kleist was silently inspecting the roadways. Two technicians, both of them old factory hands, walked two paces behind him out of habit, and with servile alacrity quickly caught up with him each time he nodded his head. The engineer did not look at Chumalov and seemed unaware of his presence, but Gleb knew Kleist had eyes only for him, and whenever the Director talked to the technicians, Gleb knew he was really speaking to him and him alone.

It was decided to repair the main transportation system and extend the roadway from its highest point in the quarries up to the crest of the pass, bringing it to a height of eight hundred metres.

Later, sitting in his office over the plans and estimates with the windows wide open now, Kleist leaned back wearily in his chair and said:

"If you can guarantee, Chumalov, that the estimates will be approved in full and that sufficient labor will be available, we can complete the work within a month."

Gleb burst out laughing.

"Well now, Herman Hermanovich, that's just where you and I can't agree! What d'you mean, a month? The job's got to be done in ten working days at the very most! You'll have five thousand men at your disposal, and materials will be supplied to you by the works management the moment you request them. Not a month, Comrade Director, just ten days!"

Kleist looked hard at Gleb and for the first time he gave a faint smile.

The ruined coopers' shop was still little more than a useless shed. Its glass roof had been smashed by stones and its floor was littered with broken hoops, bits of staves and other debris. The workbenches, transmission belts and circular saws were thick with rust and coated

with what looked like hoarfrost—it was white dust from the mountains and roads. Everything in the shop seemed bathed in a misty, white light. Was this not why all the unfinished barrels, all the workbenches and saws looked transparent and blue-gray, the color of ice?

One morning Gleb called in here as he was passing. In the old days heaps of woodshavings used to glow like fiery gold on the floor, while the coopers, all covered in sparkling sawdust, would be bustling about at their benches. Gleb did not go any further into the shop because he did not like the feeling of emptiness and desolation in it. But the day would come when this place too would be restored to life. The shavings would glow again with fiery light, clouds of sawdust would fill the air, and the saws would remember the songs of their youth once more.

He was just about to turn away when he suddenly noticed Savchuk. With his back to Gleb, the cooper was sitting at his old bench, examining it to see whether it was still sound and hitting it with his fist, while the wood creaked and groaned like a decrepit old man.

"Ha, ha! You old devil! So you've not forgotten me, eh? D'you feel that?"

Then he went over to the saws and patted their ice-colored discs with his big hand. They rang softly in response to his touch, heaving long, distant sighs as though they were fast asleep.

"Well now, my beauties! Let's see what kind of songs you'll be singing next! Just you wait! There'll be men to look after you again soon, and the coopers'll make barrels with you just like they did before. Not barrels for women to pickle cabbage in, though, but barrels full of cement that'll go to all corners of the earth! Come on now, my lonely ones, don't cry!"

Gleb went quietly out of the workshop then burst out laughing, and as he walked away, looked back affectionately at the door.

That afternoon, as the mountains shimmered in the hot sun and the factory lay silent under its pall of dust, a locomotive belching clouds of smoke appeared, pushing a long line of dirty oil trucks in front of it. Shouting and waving with delight, the workmen came running out of the factory gates to meet it.

CHAPTER IX

THE GRAVITY ROADWAY

1. The Masses

Gleb was aware not of each individual but of the whole avalanche of people both in front of him and behind him. Streaming with sweat, he tore the cement shale loose with his miner's pick. The crowds of workmen doing the same covered the entire mountainside like a colossal swarm of ants, stretching from the factory buildings up to the rocky terraces and spreading away as far as the pylons that carried the power cables.

Fluffy white clouds drifted over the sea, and on the green hillsides the first spring flowers fluttered like countless gay butterflies. Among the rocks and in the ravines, shining bushes gleamed in an opal haze. Both to right and left, the towering mountains sloped away, while in the far distance lay the boundless sky-blue sea. And between the mountains and the sea was an immensity of limpid air.

Leaning on his heavy stick, Kleist personally directed the work of all these men, and the sedate technicians and brisk foremen were constantly at his side, always ready to obey. Stooping and grave, he would calmly issue his quiet instructions. Kleist was now a devoted specialist of the Soviet Republic, and the worker Chumalov had become his friend. Was this not a victory?

Preoccupied, Kleist stopped not far from Gleb to survey the work in progress on the mountainside, and Gleb saw a glimmer of excitement and pride in his eyes. Pushing his helmet to the back of his head and wiping the sweat from his face, he smiled gaily and said:

"Well, Herman Hermanovich, what do you think of it, eh? Do you remember, you said this work would take a month, didn't you? But just look what people can do if they're filled with enthusiasm. They've only been at it three days, and the job's nearly finished!"

Kleist smiled, and maintaining his usual air of dignity, said drily:

"Yes, it's true—with a surge of energy like this one can work wonders. But it's not an economic use of effort, Chumalov, because it's unsystematic and there's no organized division of labor in it. Enthusiasm's like a cloudburst—it doesn't last very long and it can do a great deal of damage."

"But when things are in ruins, Herman Hermanovich, that's the only way to start. Then once we've laid a firm foundation and put everything in order, we'll begin learning the process of production in a sys-

tematic way. Anyway, enthusiasm's like a fire, not a cloudburst, Herman Hermanovich—it's a fire in the soul, and in our souls it'll never go out!"

Leaning on his stick, Kleist went on up the hill towards the electricity pylons that were glowing in the sun. Then he stopped and thought for a moment.

"Yes, perhaps this really is a fresh start. Perhaps a new life is beginning after all, a life that will be happier than anyone has ever known before . . . "

The air was filled with an almost unbearable smell of scorched grass and hot rock, and the dust made one's eyes and mouth burning hot.

Echoing in the shimmering heat, bells seemed to be ringing far up in the mountains.

It was good, very good. Everything was immeasurably vast and the sun itself seemed to be alive like a human being. Its brilliant light sent the blood coursing through the body, setting it ablaze with longing and filling it with faith in the future.

The clear lines of the rails went sweeping away over their sleepers and plunged into the abyss, plummeting down to where the quarries were, while in the other direction they came rising up into the webbed jaws of the transmission gear. In an hour's time the iron cables would pull taut, hanging like incandescent threads in the sunlit air, and the trucks would start to sing like brass trumpets as they ran up and down, up and down . . .

Lukhava was standing on a rocky outcrop between the pylons. Wearing an unbelted black smock that left his chest bare, he was giving orders, waving his arms as he did so.

Dasha went by, carrying an iron spade over her shoulder, and behind her came a crowd of women, all carrying spades too. They were on their way up to the power station to repair the tracks there.

"There she goes," thought Gleb, "my little Dasha, the leader! What a fine wife she used to be . . . "

He caught her in his arms as she passed and pressed her close. She gave a laugh, and playfully pulling Gleb's helmet off his head, tossed it to one side. Then she broke away from him and ran on, still laughing as she went. He was about to set off after her but then thought better of it and simply followed her with his eyes. Watching her, he stood still for a moment, then slowly climbed down the rocky terrace and picked up his helmet.

At the head of the construction team, Savchuk was fixing the rails

to the sleepers with spikes, brandishing his hammer with the fury of a man intoxicated by his work.

Shouldering his pick again, Gleb began to climb the mountainside towards where the men working on the roadway were cutting down bushes and extending the line up among the rocks. They were preparing the ground for the second track at the same time.

"Go on, Savchuk, give it all you've got! The harder you go at it, the sooner the saws will start singing again in that coopers' shop of yours!"

"But we're giving it all we've got already, you old devil! We'll lay the track right down to those beauties of ours, those saws, just you wait and see!"

The last rails were being fastened to the sleepers now, and looking like giant snakes, the cables ran over the pulleys and went swooping down into the crowds of people far below.

Leaning on their rifles, a detachment of Red Army men were keeping watch up on the pass. Around and above them were thick clumps of green bushes and dwarf conifers.

Exhausted by the work, Sergei Ivagin stepped out of the ranks, his legs trembling with fatigue. He walked over to Polya Mekhova and sank down on the rocks beside her.

"Well then, my dear intellectual!" she said. "Isn't it true that the roots of Communist labor aren't always sweet?" And she stroked his hair affectionately as he gave a bashful, guilty smile. The sweat was streaming down his face and dripping off his nose and chin.

"Polya," he said, "I feel tremendously excited! Days like this are extremely rare in life! How vast everything seems, and what grand proportions and boundless strength it all has! Seeing this makes you walk tall and feel invincible. Let's sit here for a while, shall we, and dream . . . "

2. A Struggle to the Death

Because of all the noise made by the work, no one heard the Cossacks' shots to begin with. But the Red Army men up on the pass were already running to and fro, taking cover behind the rocks, racing over the crest of the ridge and firing as they ran. Lukhava was waving his arms and shouting at the top of his voice:

"Keep calm, comrades! Everybody stay where they are! Carry on working! And don't panic!"

But thousands of people were already fleeing off the hillside, streaming not only downwards but also to left and right, many of them

falling over before getting up and racing on once more. Here and there someone tried to halt the running crowds, waving his arms and threatening them with his pick or spade.

Then Gleb scrambled up on a rock and cried:

"Comrade Communists, come over here, to me!"

The leading detachment of the Construction Workers' Union came rushing towards him, and after them ran others.

"Stop! Stop!"

But people kept streaming on and on down the mountainside, scattering to left and right among the bushes and rocks.

"The swines! They couldn't stand their ground!"

"They've run off like rats into their holes! Oh, what a miserable lot!"

"It takes all sorts! Some people face up to danger while others turn tail and run!"

Gleb was issuing orders now in a cheerful, lively fashion:

"Savchuk! Dasha! Run down and reassure them! Try to establish order again!"

Holding hands so as to prevent each other from falling, Savchuk, Dasha and a few others set off down the hillside at a run.

Meanwhile, Gleb was still summoning the workers by waving his arms and shouting:

"Comrades! Over here to me! Get your rifles and let's go up to the power station!" Then off he went, climbing quickly up over the sleepers towards the pylons. Behind him surged a whole detachment of men.

The electricians and mechanics went on working in silence, but alarm was already flickering in their eyes.

Lukhava and Sergei were giving out rifles and cartridges now, and as each man took his gun, he could not suppress a smile of joy. They were all equally aware of the importance and seriousness of the moment, and inserting their cartridge-clips with grave faces, walked silently away. But Mitka, a quarry worker and accordion player with a close-cropped, grayish-blue head, came rushing up and yelled:

"Come on now, lads, let me through! Don't push me out of the way! I know where I belong all right! I've been waiting for this a very long time!" Stretching out his hands long before it was his turn, he reached eagerly for the rifle and grew angry when he was pushed to one side.

A few minutes later the whole detachment fanned out and ran off up the hillside towards the pass.

Polya Mekhova was scrambling up over the rocks next to Gleb. He could feel her soft shoulder nudging him and hear her rapid breathing close beside him.

"So you've come as well, Comrade Mekhova," he said, "and you're hard on my heels too! What for?"

"Why shouldn't I come?" she asked. "How is it you can go and not me?"

"It's different for me, and anyway you'll get all tangled up in your skirt!"

Polya was annoyed and gave a scornful snort.

Here and there in front of them both soldiers and workmen were running to and fro, then stopping and kneeling to fire. Far, far away, either beyond the mountains or out at sea, sirens seemed to be wailing.

"But that's the sound of bullets, Gleb!" said Polya. "It's so long since I heard them!"

Gleb climbed on with his rifle at the ready, while beside him went Polya, also carrying a gun. Her long curls glowed in the sunlight.

Gleb's commands were crisp and clear. The detachment was to attack the Cossacks in the rear on the left flank and drive them out of the small wood where they were hiding, then push them on to the bare hillside and bring them under the fire of the soldiers who would destroy them. Gleb himself would direct the attack from the mountain top.

"Can you hear, Gleb?" asked Polya. "They're very close now—they're firing from the summit! They were counting on creating panic, then destroying the roadway!"

But Gleb did not reply. He was scrambling up the steep slope, often stopping to look back at the roadway as he went. Polya kept close beside him.

Far below, the dense crowd of people stirred, and leaving it both in groups and singly, more men still began to climb the hillside, moving up over the sleepers in a long line.

The summit of the mountain shone like an immense green cupola. On it an iron tripod—an old geodesic sign—showed up clearly, its coating of red rust burning in the sun.

Polya and Gleb crawled up on the sharp crest of the mountain. From here they could see out over the wide sweep of the hillside with its trees and copses, its hollows and knolls. Far away in the distance were other ridges that were higher still and hung dark blue in the haze, while above them shimmered isolated peaks capped with pink snow.

Polya and Gleb lay down on a heap of pebbles beside the tripod. The air was full of the odor of scorched grass and the sulphurous smell of hot rock.

"I can't see a thing, Gleb! Where are they!"

Polya got to her knees and leaned forward, moving closer to the tripod. Suddenly there came a sound like the twang of a taut string, and

grabbing Polya by the skirt, Gleb quickly pulled her down again. As he did so, the fastener at her waist gave way with a soft tearing sound and snapped. Polya burst out laughing and sat down beside him once more.

"You've torn the hook, you clumsy thing!" she said. "What am I going to do now?"

But she found a pin somewhere and managed to fasten the skirt again.

Running down the mountainside to the right of the crest was a high rocky wall that looked like the remains of an ancient fortress, overgrown with clumps of wild cherry and sweetbriar. Moving among the rocks and taking cover in the bushes as he went, was a bareheaded, swarthy Cossack, creeping stealthily along with his rifle at the ready. He kept crouching down and leaning against the wall, first disappearing from sight then coming into view once more.

"I'm going to shoot him, Gleb!" whispered Polya, "I can't bear the waiting!" The gun was shaking in her hands and her eyes were burning like fire.

"Lie down, I tell you! Or I'll throw you over the edge!" said Gleb, glaring at her threateningly.

Then he set off at a run down the slope towards the Cossack and disappeared from sight. After a few moments Polya caught a glimpse of him again, bent low and running among the ruins of the wall.

Suddenly the Cossack stopped, and jerking up his head with a start, shouldered his rifle.

Polya's heart was pounding so hard it was cramping her breathing, and she seemed to hear shots echoing in the forest far away at the foot of the mountain. Had Gleb managed to take cover, she wondered, or had the Cossack seen him? She wanted to leap up and run towards them, but no, there wasn't time . . . Quickly taking aim, she pulled the trigger, and though she did not hear the shot, she felt the rifle kick against her shoulder and a wave of air buffeting her ears. Then she leaped to her feet and raced towards the wall where Gleb was. The rocks burst into splinters of flying stone and dust around her as she ran, scorching her forehead and cheeks.

Near the cliff edge, threshing about in the bushes and snarling, Gleb and the Cossack were locked in a desperate struggle. Suddenly Gleb's rifle clattered at Polya's feet.

His eyes crazed with fury and his face smeared with spittle and sweat, the Cossack was gasping for breath, writhing and grunting in Gleb's arms and trying to drag him down the slope towards the cliff edge.

Then, just as Polya was aiming her rifle butt at the Cossack's head, Gleb seized the man's neck with one hand and grasping his arm at the wrist with the other, suddenly broke it. The Cossack ground his teeth and howled with pain, but Gleb only tightened his hold on the man's neck even more. Polya could see that in another moment they would both plunge into the abyss, so with all her might she struck the Cossack in the ribs with her rifle butt. Bellowing with pain, he went limp and his knees gave way.

"That's it! I'm done for!" he gasped.

Then Gleb's hand slipped from around the man's neck and caught his other arm in an iron grip. The Cossack looked at him like a wild beast that is cornered, his breathing heavy and raucous, and his nose and mouth streaming with bloody slime. Then, jerking his head from side to side, he gulped back the spittle and blood that filled his mouth and bellowed:

"Let me go! I'm finished! I give in!"

Polya seized Gleb by the shoulder and pulled him back.

"Get away from here this minute, Gleb!" she said. "Can't you see we're a sitting target?"

Gleb glanced at her with eyes that were full of incomprehension, then let go of the Cossack's arm. He was gasping for breath too, choking and pulling at the shreds of his torn shirt. Then he put his hand to his holster, but his revolver was not there.

Exhausted by the struggle, the Cossack glanced round and shuddered, then baring his teeth in a bloody grin, sprang towards the cliff-edge.

"Oh, you filthy bastards, you swine!" he shouted. "Tried to catch a Cossack, did you? Well try and catch him now!"

Then he gave a cry and taking a running jump, plunged headlong into the abyss.

Gleb ran to the cliff edge and saw the Cossack's body turning somersaults far below, thudding against rocky outcrops and spinning over and over in the air before hitting the rocks again and bouncing to and fro.

Polya pulled him back from the edge.

The enemy were running out of the wood now and scattering in all directions, firing and stumbling, then falling and rolling over as they came. Shots rang out and a cloud of dust rose over the mountain top where the Red Army men were hidden. Polya was lying on her belly and firing too. The rifle kicked painfully against her shoulder, but filled with wild delight she kept snapping the bolt, taking aim, and firing again and again at the little figures running in the distance.

3. The First Truck

The wheels in the powerhouse were humming like strings, their iron spokes beating like huge dark wings at various inclinations and angles, while the steel cables wound and unwound on the great drums like giant threads of gossamer. Headed by Lukhava and Kleist, a crowd of electricians, Young Communists and workers gazed at the electric flight of the wheels and listened to the music of this machinery that had risen from the dead.

An avalanche of people half a mile long came streaming down the valley, seething with excitement. From the very top of the transmission line right down to the bottom where the pyramid-like, rocky terraces rose into the sky, the crowd was divided into two separate torrents, and between them the four taut cables hummed their endless melody.

From the bottom of the ravine, clinging to one of the steel cables, a square, truncated tortoise was crawling slowly upwards.

Carrying their rifles, the detachment of workers was coming down the terraces from the pass in a disorderly crowd, while the Red Army men were taking up their positions on the ridge once more. At the head of the detachment walked Gleb and Polya, and behind them the body of a dead comrade was being carried down on crossed rifles.

The detachment reached the powerhouse and stacked their rifles. The workmen's faces were covered with dirt. They laid the corpse, its head no more than a mass of bloody flesh, on the concrete platform, and jostling each other, the people pushed towards them.

Silently and gravely, their faces filled with suffering and pain, the workmen stood shoulder to shoulder, gazing down at the dead comrade lying at their feet. Though the corpse was almost unrecognizable, they could see it was Mitka the accordion player. Here too, among the crowd, were girls of the Young Communist League, busy now dressing the wounds of their comrades.

Choking with emotion, a young voice said:

"Oh, you made a mistake, Mitka, old friend! But it can't be helped! Such a cheerful fellow you were too!"

Then more people came up and standing motionless beside the corpse, sighed with pain.

Kleist went up to Gleb and silently shook his head. Then Dasha walked by, looking at Gleb with moist eyes that shone with surprise and joy.

This was it, this was the most important thing of all—the masses. The masses, toil and the winged flight of wheels ... That night the factory's lamps would burn again, shining like great electric moons, while the lifeless bulbs in the workers' houses would suddenly glow once more, patterning the darkness with their tangled threads of light.

Very soon, away over there, dark clouds of smoke would swirl from the factory chimneys, and the little trucks would begin to run down to the wharves and back again, climbing up to the high terraces to devour the shale in the quarries before descending once more.

Lukhava was standing near the winding gear, waving his arms and shouting something to those down below.

Suddenly the great wheel shuddered and came to a halt.

Gleb came running down the steps towards the engine, where covered with the silvery dust of decay, a big flat truck stood level with the concrete platform.

Then he ran back up the steps and shouted to the crowd:

"Comrades, lift the body and lay it on the truck! Let's carry him down with honor! Let him pass through the crowd! That way everybody can see him and pay their last respects."

Carefully and silently, the workmen lifted the dead man and laid him on the truck. Then someone said in an affectionate but mournful voice:

"Comrades! Brothers! Take his pick and his rifle ... and lay them beside him!"

Gleb stepped out on to the platform and standing between the light blue pylons, raised his arm in a sweeping gesture:

"Let her go now! All together!"

To the sound of many voices, the truck sailed away, rolling smoothly over the rails and swooping down the hillside like a bird.

Then, cupping his hands, Gleb shouted as if through a loudhailer:

"Comrades, this man is a sacrifice to conflict and toil! But we should not mourn or weep for him. No—instead we should be filled with the joy of new triumphs, for soon the factory will resound with the clamor of machinery and the roaring of furnaces. We are all beginning the great task of building socialism. Yes—much blood has been shed and there has been great suffering. Many obstacles have lain in our path and many more lie ahead. But this arduous path leads to happiness and the final victory over the world of violence. We are building a new life with our own hands. Bearing the name of Lenin on our lips and filled with faith in the boundless happiness to come, we shall increase our efforts tenfold to conquer the future!"

The truck carrying the body of the dead man, that gay accordion player, rolled down the hillside into the crowd, and baring their heads, all greeted the strange hearse in silence. Then, with sorrowful, grave faces they silently watched it pass.

CHAPTER X

STRATA OF THE SOUL

1. Quiet Moments

Dasha and Gleb came out of the factory canteen on to the main road and turned off down a path that ran among bushes entangled with wild vines and ivy.

The sun was already setting, its light fading beyond the distant mountain ridges. The sky was a deep blue, but above the dying sun it was still fiery red. The mountains looked very near, their slopes falling away from their crests like congealed torrents of once molten iron and bronze, while to the right, running along the steep ridge, the gravity roadway was sharply etched on the hillside like a freshly-ploughed, yellow furrow.

Floating up from the bottom of the ravines and drifting through the crater-like gullies came the purple shadows of evening. But the fiery patches and streaks on the mountain slopes still glowed hot and the rocks themselves still seemed to ring in the heat. On the overgrown path among the bushes hung with blue-gray gossamer, the twilit air of evening was full of the heady smell of spring earth and swelling buds.

"Look, Dasha," said Gleb, "let's walk up the hill and sit down for a while, shall we? I don't feel like going home just yet."

"All right then. I'm tired but I'm not keen to go back either. Besides, it's such a beautiful evening . . . "

All of a sudden Gleb felt deeply moved. Then Dasha took his hand and walked silently beside him. He sensed she was troubled and guessed she was wrestling with herself. She wanted to say something to him, something of her very own that was heartfelt and deeply significant, but she could not bring herself to do so. Yet she had agreed very readily to go up the mountain. So what could it mean?

Past the little houses and gardens they went, neither of them saying a word. Then, still just as preoccupied, they climbed the rocky terraces that led up towards the reservoir. With his arm round Dasha's shoulders, Gleb pressed her close, and she took pleasure in his nearness. The reservoir lay high above the workers' settlement, and from up here the water ran down through a conduit and was distributed to the factory laboratories and workshops.

Skirting the piles of rock that littered the terraces, they passed a gallery whose entrance was closed with a padlocked, rusty door. Then they climbed a flight of steps leading to a wide concrete platform. It was level and flat, and echoed sonorously under their feet.

Below them, at the foot of the mountain, the red roofs of the workers' dwellings ran down towards the factory chimneys, and beyond them were the buildings and towers of the factory itself, while lower still was the purple bay with its edging of surf along the shore. Out beyond the breakwaters lay the sea, boundless in its calm immensity as it rose above the factory chimneys and distant mountain ridges.

From the factory to the settlement workmen were walking both singly and in groups, while across the brown hillside in the distance a little girl was running along the narrow white path, waving her arms as she went.

Far below, in the depths under the concrete platform, the water was splashing, and something immense and alive seemed to be sighing in the expanse around them. And it was as though these sighs were echoing both in the forest and above it, floating up from the twilit valley.

Everything was infinitely airy and vast. The mountains no longer looked like ridges and gullies of stone and rock, but like great stormclouds. The rippling, immeasurable expanse of sea was no longer the sea but an azure abyss, while Dasha and Gleb, up here on the outcrop overlooking the factory, felt as if they were on a fragment of some planet that was hurtling into infinity.

Gleb laid his head on Dasha's knee, and looking up at her face with the down shining on its cheeks, gazed into her large, intent eyes that were filled with both disquiet and love.

"Sitting here under the open sky, I feel like a different person, Dasha," he said. "Here I am, lying with my head on your knee . . . When was the last time I did this? And I don't feel I've ever experienced anything like it either. All I know is that your love was greater and deeper than mine, and that I'm unworthy of you. I've not suffered a hundredth part of what you've been through. So tell me about your suffering, then perhaps I'll come to know myself better too . . . "

All of a sudden a flash of lightning lit the sky and lights began to twinkle everywhere like stars both big and small. Then Gleb was overwhelmed by a wave of delight, and in his excitement raised himself on one elbow.

"Dasha, darling, look! How fine it is to struggle and build one's destiny! It all belongs to us, you know, it's ours! Our strength and our toil! It's like drawing a deep breath, a great, deep breath before striking the first blow and then hitting out with all your might!"

Dasha laid her hands on his chest. She too felt deeply moved, and Gleb could feel her heart pounding.

"Yes, darling, it's good to struggle for one's destiny, though it may mean pain or even death . . . That's a terrible risk, and not everyone can face it. But I managed to because my love for you was stronger than my fear. Then I realized something else too, and I became fond of it—perhaps even fonder than I am of you . . ."

"Tell me, Dasha . . . Whatever it is, tell me. I've learned how to listen now and how to control myself too."

2. *The Birth of Strength*

On that purple evening Dasha told Gleb about how she had found the strength to endure suffering and how she had discovered the road to happiness . . .

For a few days, recovering from his beating, Gleb had lain amid spiders and mice in their attic, then one night he had gone off into the mountains where the Greens were encamped in the forests and ravines.

Dasha knew he might be leaving her forever, and in despair she kept clutching at him as if he were already dead. She lay sobbing softly on his breast and for a long time would not let him go. Then, when he had finally disappeared into the darkness, she did not light the lamp but lay tossing and turning with Nurka in her arms till dawn glowed at the window. From then on her days and nights were as terrifying as a nightmare.

She awoke from this semi-conscious state just as suddenly as she had plunged into it.

With a noisy stamping of feet and coarse shouting, a group of officers and soldiers armed with revolvers and rifles forced their way into the house and surrounded her. Then several of them asked together:

"Where's your husband?"

Now for the first time Dasha began to shake, because for the first time she was rooted to the spot with terror. Nurka was wriggling and howling in her arms, but she was deaf to the child's cries.

"Tell us where your husband is! We know he was here, so don't try to look all innocent!"

"How should I know where he is? You should know better than me—after all, it was you who took him away!"

But she did not cry. All that happened was that her face turned a bluish color and her eyes took on a transparent look, shining like little pieces of clear glass.

One of the officers—he was so young that he looked scarcely more than a boy, though his face was malicious and cruel enough—kept sitting down then getting up again, smoking incessantly and not taking his eyes off her for a moment. Then suddenly he shouted:

"Come on now, don't lie! You know where he is all right! You know perfectly well! You'll not get away from me!" And he struck the table with his fist.

"You'll be arrested immediately and we'll shoot you in your husband's place! So talk, instead of trying to fool us!"

But she went on standing there, vacant-looking and motionless, then barely moving her lips, said: "But how on earth do I know where he is? Please yourself—kill me if you like! But you can see I'm alone. So what are you tormenting me for?"

The officer was silent for a moment and looked hard at her again. Whether he saw the torment in her eyes or sensed a reproach in Nurka's cries, no one could say, but he suddenly got up from his chair and barked:

"Search the house thoroughly! Look everywhere!"

He made Dasha sit between two bearded soldiers, and until dawn the others rummaged through the whole house, searching every nook and cranny.

"He got away just in time, the swine!"

The next morning, dishevelled and sweating after their fruitless search, the soldiers took Dasha and Nurka to a villa behind the factory. And there, sitting silently in a cellar amid a crowd of unkempt strangers agonized by the knowledge that they were spending their last few hours on earth, she remained until midday. Many of these people spoke to her, but later she could not remember a word of what they had said.

At noon she was brought out of the cellar. The same officer as before looked at her in his malevolent way, then narrowing his eyes, said:

"Well now, young woman, where's your husband, then? Don't lie, because we shan't let you out of here till you tell us! If he's safe, what the hell are you worrying about? Don't be so pig-headed! There's just no point, damn it!"

But Dasha, weak now with exhaustion and anguish, mumbled:

"How do I know where he is? It's you who ought to tell me what you've done with him!"

Behind her someone muttered in disgust:

"Oh, to hell with it, Colonel, let her go! Can't you see she's practically out of her mind with fear?"

But the colonel, tapping his cigarette-case with a cigarette, suddenly said with a smile:

"I'll have you shot for being so stubborn! We do these things very quickly, you know! You'll not be able to play the fool right to the end!"

"All right then, shoot me! Go on! Go on!"

For the first time she burst into tears and began to sob hysterically.

"It was you who beat him up! You! So now beat me up too! Me and Nurka! Me and Nurka! Both of us at the same time!"

She came to outside in the brilliant sunshine and found herself walking down the dazzlingly bright main road. In front of her was the factory, and further away, over on the hillside, lay the workers' settlement, while in the distance she could see the red roof of her now empty house.

And so she began to live alone. She made friends with Motya Savchuk and would spend whole days with her.

Often she would sit on her little porch listening to the streams murmuring down in the ravine, and think of Gleb. Where was he now, she wondered. Was he still alive? And would he come back to her one day?

Then, one afternoon when the mountains were shimmering in the heat, she was sitting on the porch mending some old clothes while Nurka played with a kitten in the little cement yard. The cicadas were singing, and far away beyond the factory, gulls flashed white as they soared high over the sea.

Then a soldier with a big mustache came walking past the low fence. How many men like him walked by in those days! But this one came up to the fence and leaned on a post.

"Dasha!" he whispered, "sit still and don't be afraid! I've brought you news of Gleb. Pick this bit of paper up as quick as you can ... there! Wait for me this evening!"

Then off he went. All she had noticed was that his eyebrows and mustache hung down like scraps of dark tow.

She was about to rush down the steps to the fence, but the soldier glanced back at her and frowned, the scraps of tow hanging down low over his eyes. She realized she must wait till he had gone, walking off down the hill with his swinging gait. But all the same she said affectionately to Nurka:

"Come here, Nurka, come to mummy! Be quick, be quick! Go and pick up that bit of paper over there and bring it to me! That's right! Now come to mummy with it! Quickly now!"

Nurka went tottering over to the fence, grasped the piece of paper in her little hand, and feeling very pleased with herself, ran back to her mother.

"Here, mummy! Here!"

Glancing round, Dasha unfolded the piece of paper and read (could anyone but Gleb have written like this?):

"Darling, I'm alive and well! Take care of yourself and of little Nurka too. Burn this as soon as you've read it. Efim will tell you all you need to know."

It was from Gleb, her dearest, darling Gleb! If he was alive and well and safe, there was no need for him to worry about her, for she was filled with gladness at the news.

That night Efim came to visit her. He smelled of the mountains and forests, but it seemed to Dasha that it was not really the forests he smelled of but Gleb. She sat beside him at the window in the dark room with stars shooting in the sky, and trembled with love for Gleb. Holding his revolver all the time, Efim came straight to the point, his voice hoarse with cheap tobacco:

"You've got to help us, Dasha! I'll tell you rightaway: Gleb's making his way through the White lines to the Red Army. Don't worry about him—he'll make it all right. It's not him we're worried about ... "

Dasha was shaking, and mumbling thickly, said:

"But tell me, Comrade Efim, mightn't he ... ? What if he falls into a trap and gets killed? He's all by himself, and surrounded by men who are as savage as wild beasts!"

"It's not him we're worried about, I'm telling you. Gleb says you must take care of yourself and help us. Everything's so uncertain these days, but I'll always be around. Now you're going to be our Green lady, so listen carefully. You'll be helping all our Green comrades, so that means you'll be helping Gleb too. For the time being our people will take the place of a husband for you. So remember now: you must organize all the Green wives into a strong band and get yourself a job in the food section of the factory co-operative. We'll arrange that for you right away."

"But what about ... what about my daughter? What about Nurka?"

"Give her to some good woman to be looked after. When all's said and done, the child won't fly away like a bird! Now if there's anything else you want to say, then say it!"

Dasha was shaking and it was only with the greatest difficulty that she managed to force out the words:

"But Comrade Efim, perhaps Gleb's all by himself right now ... all by himself among savage men, with death lying in wait for him at every moment. If he's chosen this path, though, I must follow him down it ..."

Efim smiled in the darkness and patted her knee affectionately.

"You're a fine girl—I knew it! I'll tell you before you start it'll be pretty dangerous, but you'll not be by yourself, because you've got us with you. And we're strong too!"

Then he disappeared into the night just as mysteriously as he had come.

Dasha asked Motya to look after Nurka in return for part of her food ration, and Motya gladly took the little girl in. She was a kind woman and a good friend, and she looked after the child like a mother.

Then Dasha started work in the co-operative bakehouse. From time to time workmen from the quarries would come in, and showing her slips of paper, would take supplies of bread for "the men on the building sites up in the mountains," as they put it.

Every day she would drop in to see the "Green wives," as they were called. Half of them were engaged in petty speculation. Some cursed their husbands who had fled, spent their time carrying on with other men, and soon forgot their own menfolk altogether, while the rest made a living by washing linen for the White officers. Dasha formed them into a group and gave them work to do, such as going up into the mountains to take clothes, boots and information to the Greens.

She became particularly friendly with three of the women. The youngest was Fimka, a girl with the delicate features of a young lady of noble birth. Her brother Petro was with the Greens. The eldest of the three was Domakha, a big-boned, red-haired woman with three small children who seemed to be perpetually crying. The third, Lizaveta, was a childless young woman with a big bosom and a florid complexion. Fimka was affectionate and submissive, never refusing either any man who wanted her or any woman who needed some of her rations. Domakha, on the other hand, was peevish and resentful towards everyone because of the hardships she had endured, while Lizaveta was unapproachable, taciturn and aloof. These were the women whom Dasha had formed into a group, and they were the only people with whom she spent her free time.

Occasionally Efim would come to see them at dead of night, and tapping them on the knee with his revolver, would say:

"You know, comrades, one thing's for certain: you've got to keep quiet and forget everything you've ever heard. You've even got to bite your tongue off if needs be. Your tongue's your own worst enemy—it's like a silly tail that wags when it shouldn't. So if you ever get found out and they nab you, then bite your tongue off and spit it out! So just remember this: your tongue won't move any mountains but it can wipe out a whole fortress!"

So it was that Efim became their first teacher and friend.

Dasha lived in this way for about a year, and during that time it was as if she were born anew. Her old domestic life already seemed offensively humiliating and trivial, and she knew she would never return to it. But her work with the other women and her link with the Greens filled her with new thoughts and armed her with experience.

Then, one fresh, sunny morning when she was standing behind the counter in the bakehouse, a group of officers armed with rifles pushed the crowd aside and burst in. Terrified, the people scattered in all directions. Dasha was put in a truck in which she was surrounded by officers, then driven quickly away to a villa—the one where she had once been locked up with Nurka. There she was flung into the same cellar as before. Once again there were dozens of people sitting and lying around her, and once again they were all strangers, exhausted and half-crazed in expectation of death.

Dasha had thought a great deal about how she should behave in such circumstances, and about how she must not show any weakness. She could endure anything—torture and perhaps even death—but if they used Nurka as a threat, then she could never bring herself to sacrifice her, never tear the child out of her heart.

In the gloom of the mildewed cellar she caught sight of a pair of eyebrows and a mustache that looked like scraps of dark tow. But Efim made no sign that he recognized her, and she realized she must not give the slightest hint that she knew him either. Not far away, sitting in a huddle of people, Fimka was sobbing, and beside her sat her little brother Petro, his boyish cheeks still covered with down. He was stroking Fimka's shoulder and hair, and whispering something. His face looked dark, like that of someone who has been fatally poisoned.

And now, for the first time in her life, Dasha came to know the full horror of human suffering.

They dragged Efim away first then came back for her. The same young colonel as before glanced at her and recognized her straightaway.

"Aha, so you've come back to visit us again, have you? Well, this time you won't get away! Now then, tell me how you fed the Greens! Why did you lie before when you said you didn't know where your husband was?"

Dasha pretended she knew nothing at all.

"How do I know where my husband is? It was you who beat him up, and now you're trying to involve me with the Greens!"

"We'll see if you're telling the truth right now," he said. "Take her to the kitchen and feed her well!"

She was dragged away to another, smaller cellar. Here the air was heavy with the stench of rotting corpses and the floor was covered with filthy slime. There was a naked man lying on the floor, covered with blood. Panting and snarling, two burly Cossacks were thrashing him with ramrods.

Suddenly a whip lashed Dasha's back, searing her flesh like fire.

"One! Two! Take that, you swine!" cried the Cossacks. "Let this bitch have a look at you, you handsome fellow!"

Dasha felt faint and almost collapsed, but somehow she managed to get a grip on herself and moaned:

"What are you tormenting me for? What for?"

"Let's make it a bit hotter for the bastard!"

Again they thrashed Efim as he lay there flat on his back, tossing his head from side to side but making no sound. All of a sudden, Dasha sensed the boundless strength and torment hidden by his silence. Only now did she realize what endurance meant, and saw she must regard her own silence as a sacred duty. Here lay Efim all mutilated by his tormentors, but his suffering was as nothing beside the great secret which safeguarded the vital business of the revolution and ennobled him as one of its mighty warriors.

"Now then, talk, you bloody bitch! Tell us what tricks you got up to with this bastard! If you tell us, we'll leave him alone and you can go free."

"I don't know a thing! As far as I'm concerned . . . What are you insulting me for, you beasts?"

Once again her back was seared with intolerable, fiery pain. Her heart felt as if it were filled with boiling blood, and she cried out in a piercing voice:

"But what have I done to you? What are you beating me for?"

"Talk! Or else you'll get the same as him! So choose!"

Then she realized these people knew nothing about her—they had no definite information. They had simply arrested her, either on suspicion or because of rumor. Neither Lizaveta nor Domakha were here. But what about Fimka? Well she was here for a different reason—because of her brother. They'd probably caught him in her room—after all, he often used to go and visit her at night.

"I've nothing to tell you! What can I say? I keep to myself and don't interfere with anybody!"

"Give that bastard another ration! That's it! Right! Hit him! Harder! Let the swine have a good taste and make him grunt!"

Efim was already racked with convulsions as he lay in the filth on the floor, but the Cossacks went on wearily thrashing him, their ramrods sending fragments of bloody flesh flying through the air.

All of a sudden, Fimka's little brother, Petro, was flung to the floor beside Dasha. Filled with terror, he leapt to his feet, slipped and fell down again, then sprang up and ran away once more, his bare feet pattering in the bloody mire that covered the floor. Brandishing their ramrods, the Cossacks chased after him. Petro gave a terrible scream and began to batter himself against the wall with all his might.

With crazed eyes Dasha watched her comrades being tortured, and mute with horror, could not look away. She gazed and gazed at them, and saw nothing but blood.

She eventually came to in the bright room where she had been questioned earlier and where the colonel was now sitting with two officers, screwing up his eyes because of the smoke from his cigarette.

"Well, young woman, how did you like our kitchen, eh? Now let's have a chat, shall we?"

"I don't know a thing! There's no point tormenting me any more!"

"So don't you know that young fellow in there and that girl, then?"

"Yes, I know Fimka, and I know Petro too—I've known them ever since they were small . . . "

The two officers whispered something in the colonel's ear. He frowned at first then his cheek began to twitch.

"Give her to us, Colonel," they said, and leering at Dasha, came towards her.

She flung herself into a corner of the room and put out her hands to shield herself.

"No! No! I'd rather die! Kill me right now instead!"

The colonel raised his hand and smiled.

"All right then. Nothing will happen if you tell the truth, so come over here and talk."

"I don't know a thing, I don't know anything at all! Aren't you ashamed?"

The colonel leaned back in his chair and narrowed his eyes maliciously.

Then the two officers seized her under the arms and dragged her off to another room . . .

Till midnight she lay in the cellar, barely alive, her breasts and legs bare. She remained lying on the floor just as they had flung her down. Fimka crawled over to her, rested her head on Dasha's breast for a moment and gave a moan, then crawled away again. Twice Dasha seemed to see Nurka before her. The little girl was stamping her feet

and squealing with happiness, but Dasha reached towards her, crying out with fear and revulsion:

"No, Nurka, don't! Oh, don't, don't!"

Then she forgot her, as though the child had been no more than an image in a lifeless dream.

After midnight—she remembered that, too, as if it were only a dream—she came to once more, this time because of the rattling of a truck. She found herself sitting on its wooden floor with several people lying silently beside her. She recognized Fimka, Petro and Efim. All around them stood Cossacks with rifles.

Later only one thing would remain clear in her memory: the sight of the glittering, multi-colored stars which seemed so near—no more than a stone's throw away.

She knew she was going to her death. She knew that in a moment the truck would stop and they would all be flung out on the ground. Then they would be led on to the sand and down towards the sea, and there her chest would be riddled with bullets. She knew all this, and at the thought of it her heart seemed to melt away like a block of ice, but she felt no fear. It was as if none of it were really happening, as if it were only a tedious dream of the kind one does not believe, knowing all its images will soon fade and die. Then once again she seemed to see Nurka. This time the child was running towards her, stretching out her little arms and giving a single, short cry: "Oh!"

The comrades lying on the floor of the truck—Efim, Fimka and Petro—were jolting about like corpses, but Dasha felt no pity for them now, because in her breast instead of a heart there was only a block of ice.

When the truck finally came to a halt, she was pushed out on to the ground. Fimka stood close beside her, shivering with cold, clutching at Dasha's dress and pressing up against her like a child. Efim lay like a corpse at their feet. But Petro, badly disfigured by the flogging, kept tossing his head from side to side and stamping his feet. His face was dark with congealed blood and he kept groaning and spitting all the time.

Urgently and sternly, as if it were not she but someone else speaking, Dasha whispered in Fimka's ear:

"Keep quiet, keep quiet! You must keep quiet! Be blind and dumb! Keep quiet!"

Then it seemed to Dasha as though dozens of people had suddenly fallen on her and pushed her to one side.

It was four Cossacks who were urging Fimka and Petro forward with their rifles.

When they were only a short distance away, Fimka suddenly cried out and began to flutter like a frightened bird. She waved her arms and tried to run back to Dasha.

"Dasha, dear Dasha! What are they doing to me?" she cried.

The Cossacks swore at her and pushed her on. She began to struggle and with a scream fell down on the sand, but they seized her by the arms and lifted her up once more. Silently she took a few more steps, then stopped again and cried anxiously:

"Oh! What have I done? I've gone and left my shawl in the truck!"

But they seized her by the arms again and dragged her off into the darkness.

Out there, out on the curving sweep of sand where the sea stretched away like dark ploughland into the gloom, Dasha could only make out dim shadows that seemed to be dancing drunkenly on the spot.

Again Fimka's shrill cry rent the air:

"I don't want to! No, don't blindfold me! I'm so young! I want to see my death with my own eyes!"

And right up to the volley she kept shouting:

"I want to see it with my own eyes! I want . . . "

When the shots rang out, it seemed to Dasha that Fimka's cries went on drifting over the sea for a long time.

Then a menacing shadow came up to her.

"For the last time, tell us who's working with the Greens! I give you my word you'll be allowed home immediately if you do. Or else . . . out there—can you see? Well the same thing will happen to you!"

But just as before Dasha answered vacantly:

"I don't know a thing, not a thing! I don't know anything at all!"

"All right! Take this fellow next!"

They dragged Efim away, and this time instead of a volley Dasha only heard a single shot.

Once again the officer's menacing shadow came up to her.

"I'll give you thirty seconds!"

"Go on then, shoot! Shoot! Just don't torment me, that's all!"

She felt that any moment now she would fall down on the ground and start struggling in the way Fimka had.

Then they seized her and flung her into the air, and as she fell, she struck her head against a piece of iron.

Once again the truck was rattling along, and once again, very near, no more than a stone's throw away, it seemed—the stars shimmered like droplets of gold, while above the mountains the misty sky glowed like fire.

Then they took her back into the room where she had been questioned, and without looking at her, the same colonel said in a distinct but offhand tone:

"Engineer Kleist has made himself responsible for you. We don't trust you, but we do trust him, so you can go now. But just remember this: if we ever catch you again, you'll never leave here alive. And bear this in mind too: nothing happened to you here, and you didn't see anything either. If you ever breathe a word about this place, the same will happen to you as happened to those swine just now. Now get out—quick march!"

After this, Dasha did not say anything to a soul, but learned to choose her words carefully and speak little. From now on she only spent the night at home. Her little house became stained with mold, and cobwebs and dust gathered in its corners. The flowers on the window-sill withered and faded, Dasha's face grew pale, and her eyes turned very clear and cold. She spent many hours with Motya, that kindly housewife and good friend. She grew close to Savchuk and Gromada too, and would sit with the hunchbacked Loshak for hours on end. All three men were quietly preparing for the arrival of the Red Army, and so she told them about her secret work. Formerly they had slept at night and watched the mountains during the day, but now they suffered from insomnia when it was dark and pretended not to see anything when it was light.

With a silent question burning in their eyes, soldiers would call on Dasha. Just to look at them, anyone would have thought they had come to play the fool a little and have a bit of fun with a young widow. They would call a couple of times then disappear, and new ones would come in their place. But as to where the others had gone, Dasha's clear eyes said not a word.

Now British ships were lying at anchor out in the bay, taking aboard countless numbers of aristocratic and wealthy people who had fled from the north.

From somewhere far beyond the mountains the earth shook with a muffled, subterranean rumbling, and at night the immense thunder seemed to bring stars falling from the sky, cascading like fire in the darkness.

Then, one hot spring morning when it was impossible to distinguish either the blue sea from the equally blue sky, or the fragrant air from the scent of blossoming trees, Dasha made her way into the town. Through piles of stinking refuse she walked, passing among the corpses of horses and men and witnessing the horror of panic and death on every side. With her red kerchief blazing on her head, she was looking for

Communists. On she went, all alone, while the people of the town, still dazed by what had happened, dared not venture out of their houses. On she went, both her kerchief and her eyes shining with happiness and pride.

Then, catching sight of a group of mounted Red Army men with scarlet armbands that glowed like magnificent poppies in the light, she walked towards them. She looked at the soldiers and laughed, and they laughed too, waving and calling to her:

"Hurrah for the red kerchief! Hurrah for our woman comrade!"

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Overwhelmed by all that Dasha had said, Gleb lay motionless with his head on her knee, and for a long time could not speak. Here she was, his own dear wife, sitting beside him, her voice and face just the same as always and her heart beating just as in the old days. But it wasn't the Dasha of three years ago, for she had gone forever.

Then a wave of inexpressible love for her swept painfully over him, and he embraced her with trembling arms. Choking as he fought back the tears, he groaned with both impotent fury and deep fondness.

"Dasha, darling! If only I'd been here! And if only I'd known! My heart's breaking, Dasha! Why have you told me all this? And what can I do with myself? Right now I feel as if I've been wounded! How can I possibly bear it all? I and you and those officers . . . Oh, Dasha! Death came between us, but you're still alive! You followed your own road and found your own way of fighting. As for me, though, I'm going out of my mind! Oh, help me to understand, Dasha!"

"Gleb, what a good man you are! And how dear you are to me!"

Till night fell they sat together as they had not sat since the early days of their marriage.

CHAPTER XV

SCUM

2. A Difficult Transition

Before the Economic Council met, Gleb arranged for a report on the need for partial resumption of work at the factory to be included in

the agenda. The warehouses were empty, the report said, but there were enough staves in stock to make a hundred thousand barrels. Moreover, the cement mill could be started straightaway, and cement shale could be calcined in one of the furnaces immediately—the rock lay ready in stockpiles of thousands of cubic feet up in the quarries. All that was needed was to set the second line of the gravity roadway in motion. The first line would be used to transport wood.

Gleb presented the report, with Kleist acting in his capacity as technical expert. Lukhava and Zhidky spoke briefly but emphatically in favor of accepting the report, and made the following proposal:

"To begin preparatory work immediately for the resumption of production."

Then Lukhava introduced the following motion: "To send Comrade Chumalov to the Bureau of Industry in Moscow in order to secure the prompt implementation of decisions taken by the Economic Council and to obtain increased supplies for the factory immediately."

When the meeting ended, Gleb went up to Kleist, and taking him by the arm, said with a laugh:

"I'll go all right, as sure as twice two makes four! Oh, I'll stir things up at that Bureau, make no mistake! Come on, Herman Hermanovich, let's be off! This is no ordinary technical director, comrades—he's worth his weight in gold! He's an amazing specialist of the Soviet Socialist Republic! We'll show you, so watch out!"

The following day Gleb left for the Bureau of Industry, promising to be back in a week.

At the factory work was now in hand to repair the railway tracks, buildings and machinery at various parts of the site. From early in the morning till late in the afternoon, the sultry air—already filled with the chirring of cicadas and heavy with dust—resounded with the clanging of metal, the whining of lathes and the rattling of trucks, while all day long the windowpanes of the powerhouse hummed like a vibrating string.

The roadway being used to transport wood was in continuous operation now, and day in, day out the trucks went rattling up and down the mountainside and the cables sang like flutes as they wound and unwound on their drums. Down on the wharves railway wagons rumbled to and fro, steam locomotives whistled discordantly, and heavy sleepers fell into the empty trucks with a bang that echoed like a volley of pistol shots across the harbor.

Out on the sparkling waters of the bay a few ships rode sadly at anchor as though in bewildered anticipation of something.

Dasha was often away from home, either working at the Women's Section, attending various meetings or travelling out of town on official business. Each week Lizaveta would assemble the local women in the club hall where they would argue noisily till midnight, and drifting out through the open windows, the wild uproar would disturb the pensive stillness of evening that filled the woods and ravines. As they dispersed in the darkness and made their various ways home, the women went on shouting just as they once had when quarrelling over chickens, eggs and other domestic trifles.

Each morning and evening, when she called at the Children's Home to visit Nurka, Dasha could see that the little girl was melting away like a candle. The skin on her face had become as wrinkled and yellow as an old woman's, and she would gaze at her mother with eyes so full of sadness that it seemed to Dasha they had witnessed something inexpressibly tragic.

Nurka talked much less these days, too, and her expression was pensive and sad, while whenever Dasha said good-bye to her, she seemed almost indifferent.

For the first time that year, Dasha felt intolerable anguish, but she kept it hidden deep in her heart and so no one knew of it . . .

Nurka, her one and only dearest Nurka, was melting away like a candle, and no one could say why. What was the good of doctors if they couldn't explain what was happening and if they were powerless to cure the illness that was destroying the child? But it wasn't really a question of doctors—Dasha knew better than all the doctors on earth why Nurka was fading away like a star at dawn.

A little one does not only need its mother's milk, for it is nourished too by her affection and tenderness. It withers and fades if she does not breathe upon its head, if she does not warm it with her closeness and surround its slumber with her presence and spirit.

Only she, Dasha, was to blame, and she would never forget it. And yet, the source of that blame did not really lie within her. It lay instead in the force of circumstance, that force in whose power she now found herself, that force which had denied death its due and had awoken her to life through struggle and suffering.

But one thing and one thing alone remained and was always there: little Nurka was fading away like a dying ember. For the moment she was still there, but soon she would not be there any more. Once she used to kick her little legs as she lay at Dasha's breast, then she had begun to crawl and walk and prattle, growing steadily bigger all the time. Later, when for the first time in her life Dasha had known the horror of imminent death, her suffering was unbearable, for she could not bring

herself to forget Nurka and sacrifice her. The mother in her had been about to betray the revolutionary, and it was only the torment suffered by her comrades and the terrible yet beautiful death of Fimka that had finally devastated her soul and extinguished the persistent image of her daughter. Then, not simply with her mind but with her entire being she had realized that there was another, more powerful kind of love than a mother's love for her child, and she had learned that one only becomes aware of that love in the last few moments before death.

Now, as she looked at Nurka again, looked at her old woman's face with its sunken eyes that were filled with sadness at the approach of death, once again, as before, she could not bring herself to surrender her. Yes, Nurka was her life's sacrifice, and the knowledge served as a deadly reproach. One morning she had the following conversation with her:

"Nurka, do you feel any pain, little one?"

Nurka shook her head—no, she didn't.

"What do you want? Tell me."

"I don't want anything."

"Would you like to see daddy, perhaps?"

"I want some grapes, mummy."

"It's still too early, darling, the grapes aren't ripe yet."

"I want to stay with you, so you'll never go away and always be near. And I want some grapes, you and some grapes . . . "

She was sitting on Dasha's knee, all warm and close, an inseparable part of her.

Later, as Dasha was putting her to bed, Nurka gazed at her for a long time, deep in thought, then murmured longingly:

"Mummy! Mummy!"

"What is it, darling?"

"Stay here, mummy! Don't go away!"

When Dasha left the Children's Home, she did not turn on to the main road as she usually did. Instead, she walked off into the bushes and flung herself down on the grass in a lonely place where the sunlight dappled the greenery around her and there was a rich smell of earth. Weeping bitterly, she lay there for a long time, her fingers tearing at the leaf-mold beneath her.

4. Obstruction

After Gleb's departure the work of repairing the factory went on with feverish haste. The windows and glass roofs still had many broken panes in them, and dark holes fringed with rusty shreds of steel still gaped in the reinforced concrete walls. But the twilit depths of the factory, where electric lamps shone like stars, echoed with the incessant ringing of hammers, the whining of drills and the clanging of metal.

Two hundred men were working there—the total labor force available. The repair of the rotary furnace required special care as its steel plating had to be reriveted and its fireproof lining relaid. They also had to make new metal castings for the crushing machine, the hoists, the mill and the intricate driving gear. The reservoir tanks for liquid cement were badly damaged and new rotary mixers had to be made, while the entire piping system with its complicated cylindrical sieves and interconnected wooden and metal components had to be replaced. But there was least work of all to be done in the powerhouse, where Brynza was. He was still very much alive, so the diesels were alive too.

Covered in light blue dust, workmen went bustling to and fro all day long, climbing round the kilns, running along the overhead gantries and the network of scaffolding, parapets and stairways, incessantly riveting, cutting and sawing, constantly entangled in lengths of cable, shouting with excitement and choking with the heat and dust—all of them to a man filled with the ecstatic frenzy of toil.

Work on the second roadway, though, was continuing more quietly and calmly. The track was being relaid in various places, while the viaducts were being repaired and the rails cleared of rubble.

As before, the factory was still desolate and covered with dust, but already one could sense its living breath and feel the new vibration of its machinery. Down in the engine-room the diesels were already throbbing day and night without pause.

Every day, looking stern and grave, Kleist would make an inspection of the factory. He was dressed all in white, and for the first time a restrained but joyous smile flickered on his face. Just as in the old days technicians and foremen were in constant attendance on him, and just as briefly as before, he would issue orders to them, nodding his head as he spoke. But with the workmen he was as taciturn and curt as always, and would pass them by, indifferent and aloof.

Gleb had only meant to go for a week but he was away a whole month. As early as the second week of his absence the repair work began to be interrupted, and towards the end it came to a complete standstill. The factory management was no longer either carrying out the plan that had been approved or fulfilling requests for materials, and it soon became impossible to get any sense at all out of the Economic Council. They always gave the same old answer—the problem lay with

the Bureau of Industry or the Cement Trust or the State Planning Commission . . .

In the factory management offices the spruce, neat specialists were frank with Kleist:

"Why don't you forget all this nonsense, Herman Hermanovich? The factory can't possibly be started up again. Don't you understand? Anyway, what on earth do we need the place for? It's simply ridiculous! But let's suppose we do get it going again and the warehouses are stocked with cement. What then? Where's the market for it? There isn't one! In the old days our cement went chiefly to foreign buyers, but what about now? Construction projects? But nothing's being built and nothing can be either, because there's no productive capacity and no capital. They've kicked up a hell of a fuss trying to get the factory started again—you've got to give them credit for that!—but they just haven't the experience, the competence or the capacity for constructive work. How can they have, when private enterprise and capital are completely lacking? They'll not get very far with that nationalization program of theirs either, so whether we like it or not, we'll just have to turn to the foreigners."

Smoking quietly, Kleist listened gravely to what the specialists had to say, then said briefly but weightily:

"I have not come here to discuss questions of political economy and the general financial condition of Russia. My task is rather more modest. It is to request from the factory management that the plan of production be fulfilled in the immediate future. At the moment the repair work has come to a halt and for that the management is responsible."

The specialists looked down at their hands and concealed their mocking smiles beneath a veneer of amiable courtesy.

"But the management has got nothing to do with it, Herman Hermanovich—it receives all its instructions from the Economic Council. So please apply directly to them."

These men were newcomers, sent from the Council, but beneath the pretence of loyalty to the new regime they still cherished the past. Kleist cherished it too, but for him it was remote and dead now, reduced to ashes by the conflagration of the present, and only its smoldering embers were left. Kleist realized there was no longer any common ground between these people and himself. He saw how their faces fell at his unexpected reply and how their mockery and distrust were masked by smiles. This queer old man was either too clever by half, they thought, or he'd been terrified out of his mind by the Bolsheviks. . . .

Kleist went next to the Economic Council, where he was received just as deferentially as if he belonged there. All the officials smiled at him exactly as they had in the management offices—enigmatically but meaningfully, their gold teeth flashing and their eyes full of scorn.

Just as coolly and gravely as before, Kleist explained the reason for his visit, and just as before he received the same politely official replies, made through a haze of veiled mockery:

"Yes, Herman Hermanovich, the delivery of materials in accordance with your estimates has been halted and the figures will probably have to be revised. You see, we cannot go against our instructions from the Bureau of Industry and the Cement Trust. For the time being the appropriate conditions simply do not exist . . . The chairman of the Economic Council is an experienced and careful man (as they said this, a mocking smile danced in their eyes), and he takes a very firm line. He's not at all fond of jokes . . . Everything's been done much too quickly. Anyway, what will the Cement Trust say? There are reasons to suppose that in the Bureau of Industry and particularly in the Cement Trust itself, all this venture with the factory will not meet with general approval. So we're waiting for authoritative instructions."

Now Kleist walked alone without his technicians and foremen, wandering through the factory buildings and down the railway tracks. For hours on end he inspected the deserted construction sites and yards, the dismantled machinery and the debris left by interrupted work, and as he went he tapped gloomily with his stick at the piles of discarded materials and wreckage. During these silent walks he only ever met one man—the watchman Klepka, his eyebrows and beard still flecked with cement.

Gleb returned from his journey all dishevelled and dirty, but his eyes were shining as if they had been rinsed clean. He did not go home first but hurried straight to the factory. He spent only a very short time there, though, and then, pale with fury, strode quickly up to the roadway. Everywhere he looked he saw nothing but desolation and ruin, just as in the first few days after his return from the army. Then, choking with rage, he went racing off to the factory management offices.

Deafened by his oaths, the spruce, neat specialists were rooted to the spot in astonishment and dismay. Those who were on their way somewhere stopped dead in their tracks and those who were sitting at their desks got hurriedly to their feet, while others who were busy writing did not even dare look up. Even before he had crossed the threshold, Gleb began to deafen them all with his cries, giving it to them straight from the shoulder:

"Tell me what bastards have played this dirty trick? I'll smash their faces in for this treachery! Where's the director? I'll send all you swine off to the Cheka right now for counter-revolution and sabotage! You

reckoned that because I wasn't here you could get up to your old tricks again, didn't you? You thought that with me out of the way your nasty little schemes would go unnoticed! You sons of bitches, I'll string you all up!"

He ran from one room to the next, apparently looking for somebody yet finding no one, knocking over chairs, sweeping papers off desks and colliding with people who stood in his way. Like pretty little dolls the typists cowered in fright at their desks, hiding their hair-dos behind the keyboards of their typewriters.

Speechless with fright, the men remained standing or sitting where they were, and when Gleb left them and ran on, they exchanged fearful glances and raised their hands to their mouths in alarm.

When his fit of rage had subsided a little, Gleb flung his greatcoat and kitbag down in one of the rooms and went storming into the director's office. Müller had short, silvery-gray hair that covered his skull like stubble, a close-cropped gray mustache and gold pince-nez. He received Gleb with the same combination of astonishment and dismay as his colleagues had done, but did his best to keep calm at the same time. He stood up and held out his hand across the desk.

"What were you making such a racket for out there, Comrade Chumalov? You curse loud enough to break the windows!"

Gleb did not sit down and did not even seem to notice Müller's outstretched hand either. Standing beside the desk, he asked menacingly:

"Who gave the order to stop work at the factory?"

Müller spread his hands in a gesture of submissive helplessness.

"Come on, don't play the fool with me, Müller! Just tell me straight: what bastard was it who ruined all the work when it was in full swing?"

Müller flinched, his pince-nez flashing, and his face suddenly looked very tired and gray.

"First of all, Comrade Chumalov, I must ask you to be rather more careful about what you say. The factory management has got nothing to do with it. The reason we stopped work was that the Economic Council found it impossible to continue repairs because the necessary resources were lacking and the sanction of higher economic bodies was not forthcoming."

"Show me the Council's order! And all the correspondence too—right now! You bastards have come to an agreement with that bunch of crooks in the Council, haven't you? You thought you'd cheat me behind my back, didn't you? You thought they'd give me a good dressing-down at the Bureau of Industry, and then you reckoned on striking while the iron was hot and pulling a fast one! Well just carry on with your little game, you swine, and I'll get a noose put round your necks as quick as greased lightning, make no mistake!"

"Comrade Chumalov, what grounds have you got for making such serious accusations against us? I protest categorically! You say the most offensive things without even thinking about them. We're not little children, you know! We can't exceed our instructions! Anyway, we've no longer got anything to do with this project—all the stores have been put under seal by the Economic Council and all the documents removed from the files by the Council's representative. So if you're going to make a fuss, be so kind as to do it at the Council, not here!"

Gleb rounded on Müller and banged the table with his fist.

"Don't talk such nonsense! I know all about your dirty little schemes, and you'll soon find out how bastards like you get put up against a wall! You all thought I was a fool and tried to take me for a ride, but I'm going to smash your heads in for this! And just remember something else too: the men are going to start work again first thing in the morning! The repairs have got to be finished in two months' time and by the autumn the factory will be working at full capacity again. Is that clear?"

Müller shrugged his shoulders and with an embarrassed smile tried to say something in reply, but only choked on his dry tongue.

Out on the square in front of the Factory Committee offices bored workmen were huddled in small groups, some sitting in the shade of the wall and others waiting by the office doors. They were all smoking, chatting and laughing noisily. The consumptive Gromada was standing in the doorway on the top step of the porch, swinging his bony fists to and fro and shouting hoarsely in excitement.

"So you see, comrades, that's how things stand at the moment, but as members of the working class we're obliged to act in a politically conscious way, and so on. Both as a group and at our meeting we passed a resolution, and since the Trade Union Council and the Building Workers' Union are our own organizations, we shall defend our interests in every way and hand the matter over to the Revolutionary Tribunal. And then we'll pin a charge on all these sons of bitches!"

The men were growing agitated now and began shouting and clapping.

Then Savchuk in a ragged shirt pushed his way through the crowd, and waving his arms, shouted like one possessed:

"They must be smashed, the bastards! What are you all waiting for? I can't stand it!"

All of a sudden Gleb came running down the wide concrete steps

and was quickly surrounded by a dense mass of sweating, dusty faces. Almost immediately confusion and uproar broke out in the crowd.

"Here's Chumalov! Here he is! Oh, you old rogue, you son of a bitch! Ho-ho! He'll sort them out all right, the old fire-eater! My goodness! You certainly went off and left us at a bad time, Gleb!"

But amid these joyful cries very different, gloomy voices could be heard too:

"What's gone wrong then, Chumalov? And what the hell does it all mean? If this is how we're going to work, we might as well give up now!"

"Is it some kind of joke or what? We know whose dirty tricks these are!"

"Ha! Those profiteering bastards are still fast asleep and dreaming of the good old days under the Tsar!"

"They're waiting for their old bosses to come back, the filthy swine!"

"But why the hell should we worry about them? Just put 'em up against a wall, and that'll be that!"

A strong odor of cheap tobacco and sweat came drifting from the crowd, and because of the men's hot breath it was stifling in the tremendous crush. Gleb pushed his way through the crowd and went up the steps towards Gromada.

"Comrades," he shouted, "tomorrow morning work at the factory will start again at full speed, and when the whistle blows, everyone will go back to his old job. We'll soon get to the bottom of all these intrigues, then we'll be able to call somebody to account. I'm going to the Economic Council, comrades, and I shall demand merciless punishment for these counter-revolutionaries. At the Bureau of Industry I obtained approval for all the orders requesting materials. Fuel supplies have been sent back here with me and men are being sent for more rivets too. First of all, though, we've got to get the crusher going, and after that the mill."

Immediately the men rushed to Gleb and slapping him joyfully on the back and deafening him with their cries, seized him by the arms. Then somebody caught him by the legs, someone else grasped him round the waist, and suddenly a multitude of strong hands flung him into the air.

"Hold on tight, lads! Let old Chumalov have it now! Hup! Higher! Hup!"

"Stop it, you devils! Stop!" cried Gleb, laughing as his arms and legs flailed in the air above the workers' heads. But he was clearly enjoying every minute of it and considered the men's noisy delight not only perfectly natural but also quite unavoidable.

When they finally put him down, he stood surrounded by his tired comrades, then suddenly found himself face to face with Savchuk.

"Gleb! You old devil! Get the coopers' shop going again and at full speed too! I can't stand it! I'll smash them all!"

Gleb was winking at one of the workmen and jokingly showing his fist to another.

"Gromada!" he shouted. "Where's Gromada? Send him over here, lads! Come on, Gromada, let's go!"

Gleb did not go straight to the Economic Council, though, but got out of the cart at the door of the Executive Committee offices.

Seizing Gromada under the arms, he dragged him up the stairs to the first floor. Gromada was wheezing and gasping for breath, and his eyes bulged with the effort.

As soon as the dishevelled old man sitting outside the chairman's office saw Gleb coming, he moved aside and opened the door.

Badin, Chairman of the Executive Committee, was not alone—Shramm, Chibis and Dasha were with him.

Dasha glanced at Gleb, and as her eyes opened wide in astonishment they were filled with both anxiety and joy. It was not joy that Gleb saw in her eyes, though, but something quite different, something that he had never seen before and that was as profound as a heavy sigh. Why did her eyes look so dark? They were very round and dry, burning hot as though she had a fever. Once again her soul was like a deep well, and like the water at the bottom of a well she seemed inaccessible and remote.

He made no attempt to go up to her and she remained sitting to one side without looking at him any more. She was just like a stranger.

"Comrade Badin!" said Gleb.

"Aha, Chumalov! At last! Where on earth have you been all this time, damn you? Well come along then, give us your report, please! My goodness, look how sunburnt your face is! They must have given you a good roasting up there!"

And he gave Gleb a friendly smile.

But Gleb remained standing beside Gromada, and in a gloomy tone, without pausing for breath, began to speak:

"Comrade Badin! Gromada, a member of the Factory Committee, and I have hurried here to find out on whose orders and for what reasons work at the factory has been halted. Everything there is in a state of total disintegration and chaos, and a disgrace like this simply cannot be overlooked. I want to know what bastards have been spreading counter-revolution and sabotage here. The workmen are very rest-

less now, and it's clear that deliberate bad management like this does more harm than a raid by our enemies."

Standing by the table facing Badin, Gleb was beside himself with rage, and his cheek twitched involuntarily.

"Comrade Chairman of the Executive," he went on, "I'm telling you straight out that it's impossible to carry on like this! The question is extremely serious and poses a direct threat to our whole economic program here. You were quite right when you called it economic counter-revolution, and we've got to put a stop to it! Whoever's responsible should be stood up against a wall, and we've got to kick up a fuss in every institution concerned. We've messed about long enough with all this White Guard crowd and now the time has come to give them a good thrashing! I must inform you, Comrade Badin, that both the resolutions adopted by the Economic Committee and our requests for supplies have been approved in full. Tomorrow work will begin again at the factory, and the Factory Committee will take the seals off the stores and make an inventory of all the stock. And I'll tell you something else, too, Comrade Badin: we demand categorically that a new management team for the factory be set up. If this isn't done, we'll take it all the way to Moscow!"

Then, pulling a bundle of papers from his tunic, Gleb flung them down on the table.

"There's all the documents for you! We've had the Bureau of Industry rammed down our throats for long enough, so now it's your turn to see what it's like!"

As he left the office, Gleb bumped into Dasha in the corridor—she must have been waiting for him. Though she stood calmly in front of him, there was a look of agony in her eyes. Then she said quietly but with a catch in her voice:

"You're back, Gleb, but you're too late ... Little Nurka's dead. She's buried now, and you weren't back in time ... She's gone, but you weren't here ... She's not here any more, my love!"

At first Gleb felt as though someone had dealt him a terrible blow in the chest, then everything went quiet and still, as if he had suddenly gone deaf. Then he turned very cold inside and his legs went weak as though he had just fallen from a great height. For a long time, unable to take his eyes off Dasha's face, he could not say a word.

"What? But that's impossible! Nurka? But it just isn't true! How on earth can it be?"

Dasha stood leaning against the wall and Gleb could see she was quietly weeping, choking back the tears that were streaming down her cheeks on to her trembling chin then falling on her breast. But she made no attempt to wipe them away and seemed to be smiling in helplessness and resignation. Close by, also leaning against the wall, stood Gromada, seized with a sudden fit of hoarse coughing.

CHAPTER XVII

A THRUST INTO THE FUTURE

1. "We Shall Go On!"

The reopening of the factory was scheduled for the fourth anniversary of the October Revolution. It was decided to hold a ceremonial session of the town Soviet in the "Comintern" Club so as to combine the anniversary with the celebration of this first great victory on the labor front.

Gleb divided his time between the factory and the management offices. He went rushing from one building to the other, and from one workshop to the next, surrounded by piles of equipment and clouds of dust, and simply could not resist snatching up tools and hurling himself into any task that presented itself. The repair of the furnaces and the crusher was almost finished now. The gravity roadway was already in operation, and several times a day the great wheels in the powerhouse would gaily swing their spokes at various inclinations and angles, while the heavy rollers rumbled along the tracks with a thunderous booming that sounded like the pounding of distant sledgehammers. Only the overhead cableway running down to the wharves was still silent as before, its trucks hanging motionless in the air and the safety net beneath them glowing dull red with rust. But the clock on the factory tower with its white face that was six feet across—the clock that had not worked for three years now—had begun to move its great hands once more, and at night, illumined by arc-lights, showed the time so clearly that it could be seen more than half a mile away.

In the coopers' shop, too, preparations for work were under way. The benches were being repaired, the rubbish and dirt cleared away, and truckloads of staves brought in from the stores. Covered in sweat and dust, Savchuk was shouting and swearing for all he was worth (coopers are always good at cursing anyway), and together with his comrades was continually knee-deep in bundles of hoops and staves and piles of rotten shavings.

Every day Gleb called in at the engine-room where he would immediately become almost a different person. The light in here was a deep blue, the color of the sky, and the windowpanes and tiles shone bright and clean. The nickel and brass fittings on the black diesels gleamed in the light, and the whole room was filled with the soft, melodious murmuring of cylinders, levers and pistons. This austere yet gentle music soothed Gleb's soul with a quietly masterful resonance that seemed to echo deep in his heart. For a long time he would gaze from behind the brass safety-barrier at the giant fly-wheels that seemed so light in their spinning flight, gaze at the broad, red-brown driving belts that streamed and quivered like live things as they sped over the drums, and as he gazed he would lose all sense of identity. Here, close to the wheels that were so elusive in their whirling movement, the silence was disturbing, and as the waves of hot, moist air flowed over his arms and face, his soul was filled with profound emotion. Fascinated, he was lost in contemplation of this winged, iron flight, and stood there devoid of all thought, oblivious of time and space.

Usually it was Brynza who roused him from his reverie. Taking Gleb by the arm, he would silently lead him over to the great glass window, where amid the haze of distant peaks the boundless expanse of sea and sky shone a light, fathomless blue.

But this was no longer the Brynza whom Gleb had met last spring. True, he wore the same greasy old cap that looked like a flat pancake pulled down over his nose, true, he had the same jutting, grimy cheekbones and chin, and the same brown mustache. But his eyes were unblinking and cold now, gleaming like the nickel and brass fittings on his diesels. He did not shout or lose his temper any more either, but listened carefully to the whispering and murmuring of his engines.

The conversation between them would often go like this:

"Well, Commander?"

"Well, my friend?"

"What's next, then?"

"We shall go on, Brynza!"

"And we shan't break our necks in the process?"

"What d'you mean? Have you gone crazy or something? We'll have to get you into the Party, old fellow, and make you see a bit further than these diesels of yours!"

"Now be off with you, Commander! Get out of here! What do I want with the Party if all that exists for me is my engines? The Party's one thing but these engines of mine are another. I don't know much about the Party but I do know plenty about engines, and if these engines are alive, they've just got to work. Anyway, I've no time for people who talk too much!"

Brynza suddenly stopped short, then stooping a little, plunged into the twilit gangway between the diesels and without looking back, disappeared from sight.

One day, while Gleb was inspecting the repair work going on inside the various buildings that echoed with the continual crashing of metal and the shouts of workmen, he ran into Kleist. The strange look in the engineer's eyes had surprised him more than once already, for they burned with immense fatigue and troubled enquiry. Kleist took Gleb gently by the arm and they went silently out on to the viaduct, then shoulder to shoulder they walked up to the platform high on the tower where they had stood on that memorable evening not long ago. To their right, far below, the diesels were murmuring, and the dynamos hidden in the factory's depths sang like bass strings. Up on the roofs workmen crawled to and fro, looking so small at this distance that they seemed no bigger than dolls. Sheet-iron clanged discordantly, reminding one of the harsh calling of jackdaws, and from time to time hammers resounded, echoing like the roll of distant drums. The windows of the factory buildings were no longer gaping black holes fringed with splintered woodwork and broken glass. Now they were richly iridescent, and, reflecting the azure sky, flashed like fiery mirrors in the brilliant light.

The autumn air was limpid and vibrant, still glowing with the sunlight of summer, while above the sparkling waters of the bay sea-gulls soared like wisps of white cloud. And everywhere—in the air, underfoot and in the rocks themselves—there was a muffled, subterranean rumbling that sounded like the boom of distant breakers. Somewhere nearby, a drill was shrieking as it bored its way through a rusty pulley.

"Well, Herman Hermanovich?" said Gleb. "It turns out that if a fool has the guts to say 'I'm strong,' then he can't be such a fool after all! We Communists don't dream so badly when all's said and done! On the anniversary of the October Revolution you and I are going to start all this enormous place moving again. You deserve to be congratulated as director of the factory! This evening your nomination for Party membership has been approved and a telegram has been sent to the district center."

Kleist smiled through the spasms flickering over his face, and maintaining his usual dignity, shook Gleb's hand hard.

"Gleb Ivanovich," he said, " I beg you to forget the grave crime I committed against both you and your friends. The awareness that I am

responsible for the torture and death of others gives me no peace . . . and I feel as though I cannot bear this horror any more."

He looked at Gleb with eyes full of hope and could not stop his hands trembling.

Gleb's face suddenly went thin and drawn, and as it did so it took on a harsh, terrible look. But it only lasted a moment.

"Herman Hermanovich," he said, "what's past is over and done with. In those days people were at each other's throats all the time. But you must remember something else too: if you hadn't saved my wife, there'd be nothing left of her today. And now you're one of our workers, a man with a splendid mind and hands of gold. If it hadn't been for you, we couldn't have done a damn thing. Just look what we've managed to achieve with your guidance!"

"My dear Gleb Ivanovich, I'll devote all my knowledge and experience, all the rest of my days to our country! There's no other life for me now and no other task than to struggle for our future!"

Then, for the first time, Gleb saw Kleist's eyes fill with tears. He shook the old man's hand and laughed.

"Well then, Herman Hermanovich, let's be friends, shall we?"

"Yes, let's be friends, Gleb Ivanovich!"

Then, leaning on his stick, Kleist walked away with firm step.

2. Hearth and Home

Dasha did not sleep at home any more now. She had moved to Polya Mekhova's room in the House of Soviets after receiving a note from Polya saying she was ill and asking Dasha to come and stay with her for a while.

That evening Dasha had set off to town with a bundle under her arm, walking with the same quick step as when she went about the business of the Women's Section. She had only come home again for her bedding.

"Well, Gleb," she had said, "you'll have to look after yourself for a while now . . . "

Filled with astonishment, Gleb had quickly got up from his stool.

"Yet another surprise! You might at least tell me where you're off to now! Are you going on official business or what?"

"When you're in town, drop in to see Polya. She's asked me to go and stay with her for a while—she's feeling very bad."

"And how long will you be looking after her for?"

"I don't know, Gleb. Well, I must be off now! Anyway, don't expect me back soon, because I'm not sure how things'll work out. Perhaps it's better for both of us like this . . . "

Embarrassed, they fell silent, and unspoken words lay hidden beneath their trembling smiles.

"Well, I'm off," she said. "Good-bye for now . . . "

"All right, then. Go, if you must . . . "

He saw her as far as the gate, and when they reached it he took her by the hand. She looked up at him, offering him her lips, and he put his arms round her and kissed her. He sensed she was not simply leaving the house in the way she usually went off to work or left on official business. This time she was carrying away with her all their past life together. Perhaps she would never return, and perhaps here, in her last glance, there was both regret for the past and joy at the prospect of the new road ahead. He could no longer say to her in his old masterful way:

"I'll not allow you to leave the house! I'm sick and tired of it all! Are you my wife or just a stray woman I happen to be living with? I don't want to give up my rights. And why do you prefer Polya to me? Really, you know, you take too much on! Your freedom isn't boundless, you know, you've got responsibilities towards your husband as well! It's bad enough that you've sacrificed Nurka! Your past lies like a curse between us! Don't lead me into disgrace! You can find work at the factory too!"

But he had no authority to say such things any more, because Dasha had taken that authority away from him long ago. It was not simply his wife standing before him now, but a human being who was equal to him in strength and who had shouldered all the burden of the past few years. Dasha was not a wife now, but simply a woman who no longer felt any affection for her man. In a moment she would leave and perhaps never return, and in time she would become just as remote from him as all other women were. Well, all right, so be it! Until now they had lived together in the same room, slept separately at first and then in one bed—together. But not for a single moment had Gleb been able to forget the essential thing: the old Dasha was gone, and in her place there was a different, new woman who tomorrow might go away and never, ever return.

The last thread of their conjugal life—little Nurka—had snapped. Their daughter had died, and there had been times when their common sorrow had brought them very close to each other. But then days of great responsibility had followed—at the factory for him and in the Women's Section for her—and whenever they had met in the evening

at home they had sensed that their dream of personal happiness was nothing but an illusion.

Then, as they parted that evening, Gleb had wanted to say something meaningful and serious to her, but he had not been able to do it. He had not known what to say, and yet it had to be said—without fail. If he did not say it now, he had realized, he would never say it at all. For her part, Dasha was able to listen to what he had to say, and she was sensitive and quick on the uptake too, but she no longer accepted him for what he was. There was too much of the old husband left in him—an inordinate need for affection, enormous jealousy, and a persistent desire to restrict her to house and home.

"Well, all right then, Dasha ... I really can't understand our life together now—there seems to be some kind of snag in it and I'm completely worn out by it all!"

She looked down at her feet and tried to crush with her heel a smooth little pebble that kept slipping away each time her shoe pressed on it.

"I don't know which of us is worn out the most, Gleb ... But I can never be the person I used to be. And I'm no good just as a woman for someone's bed. There's nothing worthwhile in our life now, so what on earth's the point of going on tormenting ourselves for nothing? Let's have a rest from each other and give ourselves time to think."

"Why don't you just say it straight out, Dasha! You don't love me any more and you've got no time for me now ... Life's much better for you without a husband!"

She shot him a glance from under her lowered brows and blushed deeply.

"Well, and what if it's true, Gleb?"

He realized his words had touched her on the raw.

"Then I'd say it's time to finish it! Nothing will make any difference now!"

"Yes, everything's got so confused and so much has been destroyed ... " she said. "Somehow our love will have to be arranged differently, but just how that can be done, I really don't know. We'll have to think about it, give it a little thought and reach an understanding. But one thing is important: we must respect one another and not impose any ties on each other. At the moment we're still bound to one another by fetters, Gleb. I still love you, darling, but you've got to burn yourself out, then everything'll be all right."

She heaved a sigh and smiling in embarrassment once more, said:

"Well, I'm off now ... "

Gleb turned pale and with a groan pressed his fist to his forehead. His heart was burning with anguish.

Dasha was walking away towards the gap in the wall with her bedding under her arm. Gleb waited. In a moment she would look back and wave to him. But she did not. He just caught a fleeting glimpse of her red kerchief and then it disappeared behind the wall.

For a long time now Dasha had been out every day and had not come home till late in the evening. She had often been away on official business too, and then she had been gone for days at a time. But now all of a sudden everything seemed desolate, everything was oppressive and strange—this house, the street with its little front gardens, and that wall which separated him from Dasha forever. What did he need his empty house for now? Or his front garden and the little yard six feet square? Dasha had spoken to him in an unfamiliar, almost alien tongue. Now she had gone, perhaps never to return. And Nurka was dead. Now there was no Dasha and no Nurka any more. Only he was left. What a hellish life! Like a rock-crusher it smashed everything to smithereens—day to day existence, destiny and even love itself ...

Gleb walked away from the gate, but instead of going back into the house, turned off down the narrow street towards the factory.

4. Waves

On the high platform next to Gleb stood Zhidky, Secretary of the District Party Committee, Badin, Chairman of the Executive Committee, several members of the Factory Committee, and Kleist. But Gleb felt as if he were completely alone, because the countless heads of the crowd tossed like a choppy sea below him, a mass of people radiant with color like fields of sunflowers stretching away on every side as far as the eye could see.

At the foot of the tower, in a long line running to right and left, red flags burned like a chain of beacon fires. The tower was ablaze with scarlet too, for the banner of the Party Group hung down from the railing with its luxuriant tassels cascading towards the crowd, while on the other side of the platform, where Zhidky and Badin were standing, hung another banner belonging to the Building Workers' Union. Beneath the parapet, falling in a rich torrent of color, hung yet another banner, enormous and crimson, with huge white letters on it that shone like fresh spring flowers and read:

WE HAVE CONQUERED ON THE CIVIL WAR FRONT,
AND WE SHALL CONQUER ON THE ECONOMIC FRONT TOO

The vast crowd was stirring and swaying, gay with its flashing red kerchiefs, pale and dark faces, and multicolored hats and caps, with banners flapping on every side like great red wings. They hid part of the crowd from view, but beyond them new columns rippled and eddied in the distance, while on the cliff top itself more people still could be seen. They swayed over the slopes and crest of the mountain, climbing higher and higher, while far away in the distance more banners and flags gleamed scarlet like a vast, bright field of poppies. Down below, an endless stream of people was still pouring out of the ravine. Far away a band was playing a march, while nearby all was immense movement and booming sound.

The autumn day was cool and clear, shining with amber-colored light. Distant things looked near, and the faintly hazy air was bracing. Gleb gazed at the mountains and the sky. High above him droned an invisible aeroplane, and silken threads of gossamer drifted in the azure expanse, shimmering like dusty mother-of-pearl.

He gripped the iron railing, unable to control the shaking in his legs. Where was this countless multitude of people coming from? There were already about twenty thousand gathered here, but still new columns kept marching on and on, without end. There were more of them over there, too, about a quarter of a mile away, streaming through the bushes and rocks on the brown hillside, merging with the general mass and climbing higher and higher up the slopes.

Not far away to the right, beyond the tower, a detachment of Red Army men was standing at ease. Once he had stood just like that too—was it really so very long ago? And now he was back here, a factory worker once more. The factory! What enormous energy had gone into it! And what a struggle it had been! But here it was—a great, handsome giant! Not long ago it had been nothing but a corpse, no better than a colossal scrapheap, a huge rats' nest, an enormous ruin. But now the diesels thundered and the cables hummed, the pulleys sang and the trucks went rattling by once more. Tomorrow the first rotary furnace would begin to roar as it turned on its giant spindle, and out of that awesome, huge chimney over there gray-white clouds of steam and dust would billow into the sky.

Surely it was all worthwhile, that this countless multitude should come here and rejoice in their common victory? What was he, Gleb, amid this boundless sea of people? No, it was not a sea but a living mountain, dead rocks miraculously resurrected into human beings. Ah,

what immense power there was here! These were the people who with picks and spades had cut through the mountains to build the roadway. That had been back in the spring, on a sunny, clear day just like this. It was then, too, that the first blood had been shed. But now the town had wood for fuel and everything was ready for the factory to be reopened. How much blood there was flowing in this great army of toil! There was enough of it to last for many years to come! The new roadway was working now, the shipyards would reopen shortly, and the steam mills would soon begin to roar once more. As for later on, surely there were enough mountain streams to make the installation of turbines worthwhile?

Once there had been terrible days and nights of fighting during which Gleb had feared for his life and thought anxiously of Dasha. How long ago it all seemed now, how insignificant and remote! Dasha ... but she was no longer there. She was lost in the crowd and nowhere to be seen. All that was unimportant and almost non-existent now. And it seemed to Gleb that he no longer existed either, for there was only the rapturous crowd around him, and within his heart he could feel thousands of other hearts beating too. The working class, the new republic, the great new life they were all building ... By God, he thought, we may know what suffering means, but we certainly know how to rejoice too!

"Chumalov!"

Kleist was standing beside him, his face grave and pale, and his eyes very dry.

"Herman Hermanovich! My friend!"

Kleist turned and walked away to the other side of the platform, his shoulders shaking with emotion.

The banners and flags were waving and fluttering, the air was filled with singing and shouting, and the planks under Gleb's feet were shaking with the tumult. People were dancing, clapping and singing in chorus. You could see pebbles and shale crumbling away with the vibration and slipping down the rock faces.

Gleb could hardly keep still any longer. He wanted to leap from the high platform into the sea of heads below him, wanted to shout at the top of his voice till he went hoarse with the strain. What would it matter? How could anyone really bear this incomparable spectacle? This was what he had lived for all these months, and now it was right here, all gathered into a single mighty force.

Going up to Badin and Zhidky, he asked in an apparently casual tone:

"Well then, shall we begin?"

"Yes, Chumalov," answered Badin, "it's time to start. I'll speak for fifteen minutes, then you can take over. And give it all you've got! Then as soon as you've finished, give the signal!"

Down below on the main road, the dense columns with their banners were still marching towards them, while from behind them, amid the gray concrete walls of the factory, came the thunderous music of brass bands and the sound of stamping feet and singing.

It was a long time before the crowd settled down, a long time before the clamor of voices faded and died away like ripples spreading on water, but eventually the singing stopped and the bands fell silent.

Then Badin began to speak. He spoke in a cool, clear, formal way.

How can one possibly convey what he said? He said everything that was necessary for a festive occasion such as this. He spoke of the Soviet regime, the New Economic Policy, socialist reconstruction, Comrade Lenin, the Communist Party and the working class. Then he came to the main point which was this:

"And here is one of our victories on the economic front—a colossal, superhuman victory—the reopening of our factory, this giant of the Republic! You all know, comrades, how our struggle began. Last spring we struck the first blows with hammers and picks at these mountain strata. Those first blows brought us the gravity roadway and a supply of fuel. From then on, the men of the Builders' Union never laid their hammers down, and by striking blow after blow they forged the whole complex transport system of this enormous factory. Today, the fourth anniversary of the October Revolution, we celebrate a new victory on the proletarian labor front. During the struggle the working class has brought forth its own organizers and heroes. Can our toiling masses ever forget the name of that fighter, that Red Army soldier who has selflessly devoted his life to the great cause of the Revolution? Can they ever forget the name of Comrade Chumalov? Here, too, on the labor front, he is just the same selfless hero that he was on the battlefield . . . "

Suddenly nothing more could be heard, for it was as if the mountains themselves had moved and come crashing down on Gleb. There was an immense roaring and howling, a vast rumbling and booming, as though a great earthquake were beginning. The tower swayed and shook as if it were made not of steel girders but of flimsy wire. Far below and somewhere further away still, the bands blared with thunderous, brassy sound.

Pale and stunned, Gleb was muttering strange words, gasping for breath, waving his arms and laughing uncontrollably.

"Speak, Chumalov! It's your turn now!"

But why speak, when everything was perfectly clear without words? There was no need to say a thing. What did his life matter when it was no more than a tiny drop in this vast ocean of lives? Why speak, when his own voice and tongue were superfluous here? He had no words to say, no life to live apart from this great mass of people.

Afterwards he could not really remember what he had said. His voice sounded indistinct and feeble, he thought, whereas in actual fact his words were amplified by the echo and resounded all over the mountainside.

"It is not greatly to our credit, comrades, when we struggle to build our proletarian economy, for we do it of our own free will, and moreover, it is a struggle that belongs only to us. In this we are all of one mind and spirit. So if I'm a hero, then you're all heroes, and if we don't work with all our might to achieve that heroism, then we deserve to go to hell! But I'll say one thing, comrades: we shall accomplish everything and create everything we need, because the Party and Comrade Lenin have called upon us to do so! And if only we had a few more technical directors like Engineer Kleist here, together with a few other things besides, then we'd work miracles that would astound the world! We staked everything on our own blood, and with that blood we set the whole world ablaze! Now, tempered by fire, we're staking everything on our labor, and our hands and brains are quivering not with exertion but with longing for fresh tasks. We're building socialism, comrades, building our own proletarian culture. So on to victory!"

Then Gleb seized a red flag and flourished it high above the crowd. Immediately the mountains echoed with thunderous noise and the air was caught up in a furious whirlwind as a metallic howl resounded far and wide. The sirens began to wail—one, two, three—all together yet discordantly, loud enough to burst one's eardrums with waves of deafening sound, and it was as though not the sirens but the mountains themselves were resounding, and together with them the crags and the people, the buildings and the chimneys of the factory itself.

1922–1924

Notes

1. *Cement* is set in and around the Black Sea port of Novorossiisk, in the Krasnodar Region of southern Russia. Founded in 1838, the town eventually became famous for its important cement industry, large works being established there in 1882, 1898 and 1912.

2. Colloquial name given during the Russian Civil War to men who hid in the forests so as to avoid service with the White armies.

3. The Russian noun *gromada* means mass or bulk.

4. Named after Lenin's wife, Nadezhda Konstantinovna Krupskaya (1869–1939).

5. A reference to the remark made by Lenin in 1917 that "every cook must be able to run the state."

6. Inaugurated in 1921, the New Economic Policy (or NEP as it came to be known) remained in force until 1928 and involved a partial restoration of a capitalist-type economy in the Soviet Union.

7. Anti-Bolshevik revolt by sailors and Red Army soldiers at the Kronstadt naval base on the Gulf of Finland in March, 1921. It was crushed with great severity by troops loyal to the regime.

8. Nestor Ivanovich Makhno (1889–1934), the leader of an anarchist and peasant anti-Bolshevik movement in the southern Ukraine during the Russian Civil War, from 1918 to 1921.

Alexander Fadeev
THE ROUT