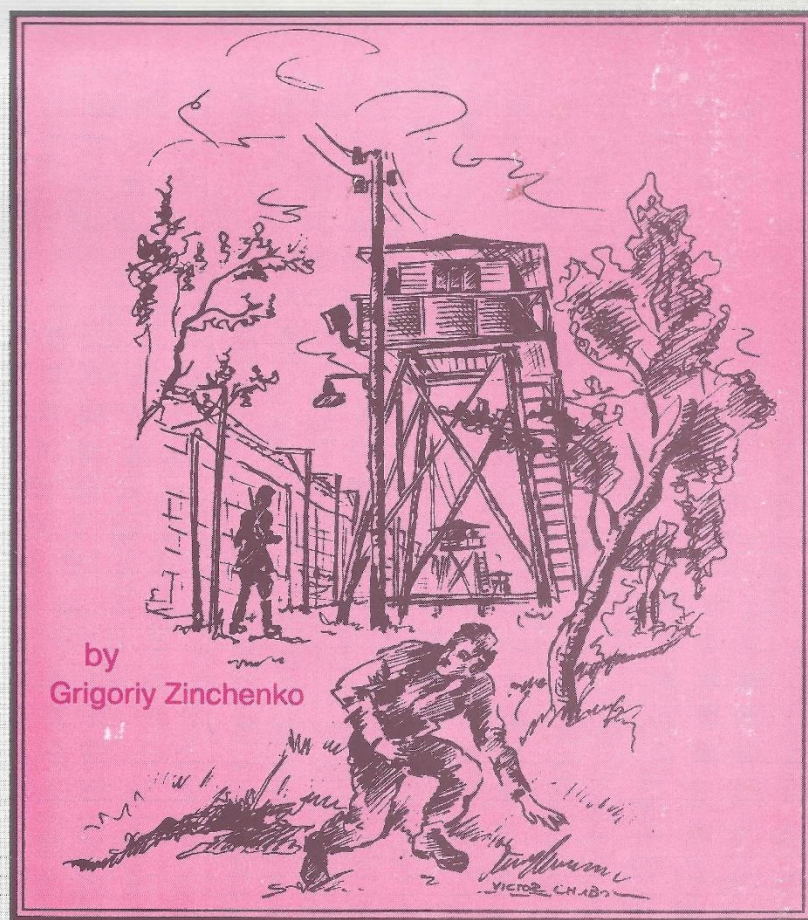


Escape From Buchenwald



by
Grigoriy Zinchenko

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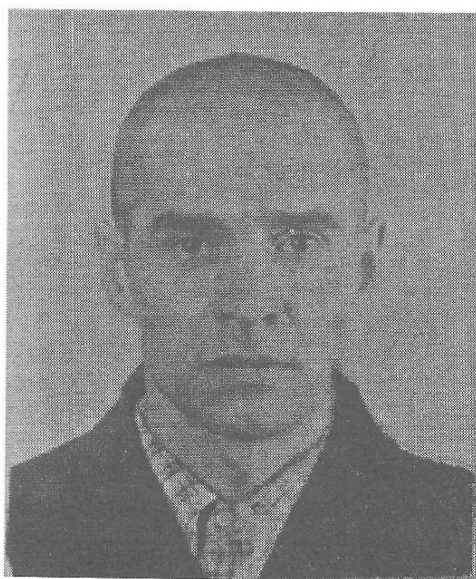
For memory to

from Grigoriy Zinchenko

Personal signature of the author



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DEDICATED TO MY GRANDCHILDREN
Grigoriy Zinchenko

*Life-it is a struggle with death.
If you come to despair,
Without a fight you give yourself up into the hands of death.
Do you want to live? – Don't despair.*

Contents

From the Author	6
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Part I

Beginning to Wonder	7
The New Labor Law	45
The Great Secret; The Famine of 1933	54

Part II

World War Two	74
Germany	80
Escape From the Camp	89
The Dresden Jail	93
Buchenwald	99
The First Stage	102
The Second Stage	111
Escape from Buchenwald	117
Life in the Forest	122
Freedom	126
May Ninth	134
The First Part	139
The First Questioning	143
I Am a Christian	146
The Second Questioning	151
I Am Free	156
The Horrible Criminals	162

From the Author

This book, *Escape From Buchenwald*, is not a novel or an adventure story; it is a very real segment from my life. I was a prisoner in Buchenwald¹ between the ages of nineteen and twenty. I was not a political prisoner, but during my six months in the camp, I had many opportunities to meet political prisoners from France, Czechoslovakia, Italy, and Russia. These people were intellectuals who had a passion for discussing world events.

I remember particularly well their discussion about Ukraine, discussions about the forced collectivization and the artificial famine of 1933. This was not news to the people of Europe, but it was definitely news to me. News I did not forget. During my military service, quite innocently and without any pursuit of political goals, I shared my views on the building of socialism with my fellow soldiers. Later this was to cost me dearly. The fact that I am still alive is simply a miracle to me. During a special political investigation on the matter, I was forced to sign a document which stated that: "In my entire life, nowhere and at no time, will I ever share my feelings concerning the famine of 1933." My signature glared up at me from that document in silent testimony of the new rule of thumb: "If you want to live, then stay quiet."

After the fall of the Soviet Union, the press began to publish freely about the famine of 1933. When Canadian and American cities celebrated the sixtieth year after the famine in Ukraine, I did not read a single article in the paper which explored the reasons or purpose of the famine.

On May 9, 1994, now living in America, I recall that in Ukraine "Victory Day" is a major holiday. On that day, in the school where I was studying English, I wrote my story about Buchenwald. With the help of my teacher, I wrote about my escape from the camp. The story was read in all the classrooms. My fellow peers suggested that I write about my experience in more detail and leave it as a memoir for my grandchildren. That is how this book came about.

I do not wish this book to remain the biography of a grandfather; rather, my hope is that many readers will be able to learn from it. Not wanting to tire anyone with a long, drawn out monologue, I have decided to describe simply and in brief some of the historical events of my life.

The village of Panskaya depicted in this book is one of the many that disappeared from the map after the famine of 1933.

Grigoriy Zinchenko

¹ A German-forced concentration camp set up and operated during World War II.

Beginning to Wonder

Usually, books begin with a description of nature, and that is not surprising. I am 70 years old now, but the images of my childhood past as vividly before my eyes as a movie in a cinema. In these visions I am a boy with bare feet, running after cows on freshly cut meadows. My black curls have faded during the summer and my heels have turned black, but that does not bother me. Summer is coming to an end. In September I will go back to school. In my boyhood I had a great desire to study. I was not worried about the fact that I did not have any shoes or more than a few pairs of good pants. Even my mother made me a pair of new pants, they would already rip on the second day I wore them.

My school years passed quickly. At the age of fifteen, I had already completed middle school (seven years). Now I had the freedom to choose a direction in life, but there were so few to choose from! It was very difficult to leave a collective farm; nobody would let me go. The school principal, who was a kind soul, encouraged me to stay in school. When I was in primary school, he would come up to me sometimes, tousle my hair, and say, "Hey little bright headed one, you're going to be a great person one day."

Being great one day I could understand, but I did not understand why he called me "bright-headed" because my hair was black!

When I got older, he called me his mathematician. And now this principle was insisting that I continue my studies, saying that in his seventeen years of work he had never seen a more talented student. He gave me plenty of good advice, but he could not give me the most vital advice at that time in Ukraine: where to get the finances for an education.

My parents were poor. Our village had only a middle school which I had already completed. To go to a high school, I would have had to walk more than eight kilometres to school and back every day. Everyone walked to school. It was alright in the country from early spring until the first fall frost began because we went to school barefoot. Was it embarrassing to go without shoes? No. I was not the only one. Half the students in school did not have shoes either. Of course, those who are better off wore shoes, but there were six children in our family. My father could only buy shoes for my older sister (who is 2 years older than I), even though she only went to school for three years. At the age of fourteen, she went to work on a collective farm and worked for almost nothing. Our collective farm was better developed than most; they said ours paid better than the other collective farms and that it gave bonuses, too. For every day of work, we received one kilogram of grain. Those who worked in the beet fields who received one and-one half kilograms of grain per day. But tell me, is it not ridiculous to receive just one-and-one-half kilograms of grain for an entire day of weeding and for digging them up by hand in the fall?!

I did not go to school that fall. Instead I helped my sister harvest beets. She finished her assigned plot of land first and received a bonus: winter boots, fabric for a dress, and a scarf. And when she was seventeen, she received an even more special bonus: a winter coat.

Many people wanted to leave the farm and go to the city to work in a factory, but not a single factory would hire someone who did not have official permission² from his farm's management to do so. However, the manager of the collective farm would not issue any of the necessary "official permission

² In Russian, *spravka*, a general word for "Paper of Official Permission."

papers.” It seemed for the entire world as if we were free; But in reality, we were tightly bound to the collective farms. I had no desire to stay at the farm. I wished I could finish school at the top of my class and be given authorization to get an education in the city. What a dream!

Sometimes in the evening when our entire family would sit down for dinner, a discussion would start about my future. My father wanted me to study in the city and become a well-known and successful man.

On one late August evening, in anticipation of yet another “house meeting,” everyone was getting ready for dinner. There were hot potatoes on the table, cooked in their skins (No one had peeled them; everyone had been working late, and there was no time for that.), when suddenly, the manager of our collective farm appeared at our doorway and asked my father, “Vasiliy, why didn't you pick up your son today?”

“Why? Where is he?” asked my father. Then, seeing the lack of concern in the manager's eyes, my father got worried and asked, “Is there something wrong with him?”

“Yes... yes, I think so,” answered the manager. He must have gotten sick from the heat. He is at the threshing area. I ordered a co-worker to take him home, but your son refused.”

As they reached this point in the conversation, the sound of horses approaching could be heard. Then to my family's surprise, Lionya Pokul, our neighbor, came to the door and walked in. He was very tall and strong for his mere fifteen years. I appeared right behind him. Seeing that they had gone ready to eat without me, I immediately got angry.

“So,” I said, “you divided the potatoes among yourselves and forgot all about me? Each of you had better give me two now.”

“We only have five each,” my sister Olya answered.

I sat down on a stool and looked at my father. He seemed worried. He was looking at my face as though I were a stranger.

“Hey, don't you recognize a person from your own household?” I said. “It's me, Father, your son!”

My father had an amazing wit and could give a quick answer to any joke. But this time he just got up without a word and left the table.

“What happened, Grisha³?” someone asked. You're as white as chalk! Lionya, tell us; what has happened?”

“Well,” Lionya began, “they made us unload a car with 100-kilogram boxes of grain and take them to a scale. We had unloaded almost two carts when Grisha began to moan, and sat down.”

My father and the manager took turns examining my stomach.

³ In Russian, *Grisha* is the diminutive of *Grigoriy*.

"Yes," said the manager with a knowing look, "you over-strained your groin. But it's alright, after you've arrested up, will get you an easier job."

As soon as the manager left our house, my family began talking about my future. My father suggested that we rent an apartment in another village so I could finish high school.

"But he's only 15!" My mother protested. "He'll have the chance to study all he wants later! Sure, it's easy to say, 'Let him study,' but where are we going to get the money for it? First, There will be three years of high school and then perhaps four years of technical school in the city. What about the cost of renting an apartment? Plus, he couldn't walk barefoot in the city. Did you think about that? Let him work instead. Look at all the mouths at this table; who's going to educate them?"

That is how my working life began on a collective farm. In the late fall, an order was issued from the regional authorities which read:

All strong young men not currently attending school must be sent to the city for an education. Report immediately.

At that time, they started a program called FZO (factory-plant education). I, together with a large group of boys from fifteen to seventeen years of age, was immediately "admitted" to this program, as were boys from Kharkov and other Ukrainian cities. Even at that early stage it was clear that no one was truly interested in our education or opinions.

First, they divided us according to "city of origin" and "appearance". The older and stronger among us were sent to the coal mines in Donbass. Then the younger boys were again divided according to who was stronger and who weaker. Here, I was put into the "strong" category. Among the "stronger" there were three of us. I was told, "You are lucky; you get to go to a plant in Kharkov!" We were all given some sort of identifying number, and the next day we were taken to Kharkov by train. What excitement! We were overjoyed that we were going to the city to get an education! And oh, how happy our parents were, thinking, "My, how the state cares for our children!"

We sang songs and joked all the way to Kharkov. What else could a boy want? We had gotten out of the collective farms and were headed straight for the city. For myself and for many others, this was our first time to be going to a city that was located more than sixty kilometres from our village.

At last we arrived. We had barely disembarked from the train when the guide started giving us orders. "Step onto the platforms and line up in groups of three," a loudspeaker barked.

They took other such "lucky" boys from the neighboring wagons as well. We were led into a large hall where there stood about two hundred boys our age. On one side of the massive hall, we saw there were representatives from different factors. My friend whispered into my ear, "Look those are our prospective buyers!"

After all our merriment and joking, I started to get upset. "What am I," I thought to myself, "a slave from the book *Uncle Tom's Cabin*? They paid a lot for Tom but what about us? They won't pay even a single penny for us."

"Now," my friend went on, "they're gonna come up to us, grab us by the ear, and dump us into bags! Then we will no longer belong to ourselves. Once we belonged to our parents, and now will belong to "Uncle Party."⁴

Our talk was interrupted by a sharp announcement. "Attention," we heard, and with that, we were quickly divided and sent out to go to different factories. I was taken to a ceramic pipe factory.

That evening, we were all taken to the cafeteria, fed, and taken to different dormitories. The rooms were big; each had twenty beds in it. There were electric lights on the ceilings.

A young man introduced himself as "the commander," and briskly began to acquaint us with the place. He showed us the outhouse (which was a small wooden structure outdoors), and then he continued to the washroom. And what an outstanding washroom it was! You turned a handle and cold water came out! You turned another one, and voila! You had hot water! The washroom also had a number of large bowls laid out on stone tables for washing up. We figured out the washroom fast. It was almost the same as most of us had in our houses; except at home, we got hot water only by heating it on a stove. Here it was much easier!

In the dorms, the technology was complicated. There was electricity. The commander did not hesitate to demonstrate his knowledge. He saw us as ignorant. He no doubt thought, "These boys are from the country; they're all so uneducated." Thus, he proceeded to "enlighten" us. He was very enthusiastic about this process.

"Now boys," he began, "please direct your attention to this device by the door. It is called a switch. You pull the lever up, and the light turns on. You pull it down, and the light goes off. You may have read in books that there is a Lenin light bulb, but here, our light bulb hangs from the ceiling on two cords. It is called an *electric* light bulb."

"Wow," I thought, for it turned out that we *had* studied the Lenin light bulb, but here was an *electric* light bulb! We, the country folk, had probably gone behind in technology while it continued moving forward around us. It was true that I had hardly seen a light bulb before I was sixteen. We did not have electricity in our village yet; I had only learned about it in school. As I was considering all of this, the commander called me over.

"What is your name, young man?" he asked.

"Grits,"⁵ I replied.

"So, Grits," he said, "show me that you understood about the switch."

I came over, lifted the lever, and the light bulb shone brightly. Then I pulled the switch down, and sure enough, the light faded.

"So," asked the commander, "you got it?"

I made a dumb face and said, "Nope, I don't understand."

⁴ Reference is made here to the Communist Party.

⁵ Not a translation to the English word for *grits*, the edible wheat product. This is a Ukrainian diminutive of *Grigoriy* for the time.

"What don't you understand?" the commander asked.

"Why did they name it a switch? It's a 'turner on' or a 'lighter'. Wouldn't these have been better names?"

The commander appeared significantly upset and hurriedly replied, "Look, son if you want to be a wise guy, you'll end up in a bad situation!"

He went up to another device and said, "Boys, this is an *electrical* plug, and this is a *radio* plug."

Then he pointed at a box- shaped device and said, "This is a *speaker*."

He continued amazing us with his "knowledge." He pointed up to a large cabinet on the wall. "There are fuses in here. If you unscrew them, there will be no electricity. If you screw them back in, there will be electricity. Do you think you can remember all this?"

I said, "Well, sir, I can assure you at least I won't forget. My mom always scolded me about plugs⁶ when I took the cows out to pasture. So many times I drank the milk she gave me and put the bottle plug in my pocket. Then I ran about my business till evening. Well, as you can imagine, not only have I lost plugs, but bottles too! Sometimes, I not only lost bottles, but cows too. I searched and searched for them, but most times, they had already been home for a while!"

The commander did not see the humor in my reply. He proceeded to show us our beds. He gave us a short lesson, "Look closely, boys. Your beds are made with white sheets. You will have dirty jobs. Some of you will tend the furnaces where we temper our pipes. Some will pull coal in carts and will unload train cars. Your bedding will be changed twice a month even though by law it need only be changed once a month."

At this I got upset. "But my mother changed my bedding every day!" I said. "She took the old straw and burned it in the morning, and then at night she would put down new straw...."

At this, our teacher/bed assignor just walked out. I lay down in my new surroundings and began to think. How many new things I have seen today: the switch, the plug, and the speaker. The names were not new, but the laws were. For example, the bedding. Somehow I did not remember learning the particular law which called for bedding to be changed once a month. It was hard to understand all these new laws. "This must be upper level math," I thought. "The lower level math I know quite well: Ohm's law, the laws of Voltage and Wattage, the law of Joule, and the law of gravity." All of these laws and formulas I knew quite well; in fact, I could solve arithmetic problems with ease! That, apparently, was lower level math. Now, as far as I could see, we were to be subject to the laws of the upper level.

In the morning they gathered us all together in a hall. At a table sat the president of the factory, and next to him a Communist Party leader and managers of different departments at the factory. Here we were appointed our functions. When this had been done, the president of the plant gave a short, final speech, which was as follows: "Comrades! Your homeland has taken care of you. From this day on, you have been raised a rank higher. Up until this time, I would say you were at a lower rank; that is, on a collective farm. You were taught how to plan to rye, wheat, and other grain- bearing plants. You were taught how to grow beets and other vegetables. In the fall, I would say, you probably harvested it and

⁶ In Russian, the word for bottle plugs is the same word as electric plugs.

then gave it to the government for storage. For all this, your homeland will not forget you. But I will still say that collective farmers are lazy. Why do we call them that? In the summer, when it's warm outside, everyone works from dawn to dusk. But during the winter? What do you do during the winter? On Sundays you were brought a movie, a silent movie most likely. Now some villages get real movies. All of that has made the collective farmers lazy. Not only on Sundays, but also daily, the country youth have started to visit clubs and organize-as I will call them-dances. Now you are not collective farmers, but workers, and will work all year-round. Gentlemen, I extend to you a warm welcome to the Soviet Union! A warm welcome to the Communist Party! Welcome to the working people! Hurrah!"⁷

At this a few answered, "Hurrah."

"And now," said the master of ceremonies, "a few words from the party leader." The party leader then stood and gave us this speech: "Friends! I wish to continue in the spirit of the plant director's speech. The Communist Party is our steering wheel. It is leading the nation. On all fronts, the party is leading us. It shows us the way. You are young. There is always a way for the young to have respect for the elderly. Who provided us with the way to the youth of today? Lenin's party did! The party of Ilich!⁸ We are following the path of Lenin and live by his decrees. We have done so much and have such grand plans for the future! We are building heavy industry. Hard labor is needed for this.

"The Director has said that you will now work year-round. I would like to acquaint you with the conditions of your work. You have nothing to worry about; Your most beloved party has taken care of everything. Lenin said, 'Education is light, but ignorance is darkness.' Intelligent words, my friends; the words of a genius. In our country, education is free. You will be taught plant craft for six months for free. After these six months, you will work. No one will ask you to pay us back for your education. You will be fed for free, three times a day. You will live in the dormitories, also for free. For now, your education is your profession.

"Most of you will go on to tend the furnaces in which we temper our pipes, and of course, you will not be expected to be solely responsible for our furnaces as beginners. For six months you will learn your job by helping a furnace stoker, and this apprenticeship, too, is free. Gentlemen, the Communist Party has seen to it that you are taking care of!"

The factory staff then began to divide us into groups based on our abilities. This responsibility fell upon the *predsekhom* (the manager of a factory department).

"Comrades! We must divide you according to your abilities and strengths. Those of you who know how to work with horses will be coal haulers. Those of you with experience with horses, please stand up."

At this, we all rose. Being from a farm, all the boys knew how to work with horses.

"Sit down," the manager said, "you did not understand me. I want to know who especially loves horses. Please stand up."

The three of us got up.

⁷ In Russian: "*ura!*" - a way of shouting victory, or praise (related to the Communist Party).

⁸ *Ilich*, meaning, Vladimir Ilich Lenin.

"You; what's your name?"

"Grits."

"How can you prove that you love horses?"

Hmm. How would I prove this? At first I was at a loss. I thought for a bit and then replied, "Because I used to kiss all the horses on our collective farm."

The hall was filled with tremendous noise and laughter as if a clown had just performed. I saw that the authorities were all laughing, too. I was standing there, thinking, "What did I do?" Then the laughter suddenly stopped. The party representative continued, "So, Grits. Maybe you have learned to kiss, but you might not learn to be a coal hauler. To be a coal hauler, you must load vast amounts of coal up on carts. I don't think you have the strength for it. We need strong boys."

At this, they proceeded to choose about fifteen people to be coal haulers.

"The next position open is for furnace stokers. And let me tell you that here, we have only the best. Those selected will tend only Gofmanskiy and Periodic furnaces."

This time, I remain seated. I thought to myself, "What an embarrassment this is for all of us."

"Appointed persons," I thought, are those at the top, those with an official profession. Those at the bottom are workers, and those who are even lower are collective farm workers. And what about these Gofmanskiy and Periodic furnaces? I haven't even heard of them. To tend to Periodic, however, is no doubt better. You can probably work periodically and sit periodically, too." I hope I would be assigned to work in the Periodic!

The men of the factory were walking through the hall and assigning people jobs. They came up to me and asked, "Your last name?"

"Zinchenko. First name, Grits."

"From now on, you will no longer be Grits. You'll be Stoker Zinchenko"

Then I asked, "Periodic?"

"Is your father's name Period?"

"No, his name's Vasilii."

"That means your patronymic⁹ name is Vasilievich. Okay, you'll be Stoker Vasilievich Zinchenko of Periodic furnaces."

And so, I became a Periodic furnace stoker.

"The next position is for loaders," the man continued. "They also unload. For this job we need strong people."

⁹ In Soviet culture, one is called by their last, first, and patronymic name, which is a name derived from their father's name.

I went on listening as the factory men explained the job.

“Loaders will need to work inside the furnace at a temperature of two hundred degrees Celsius.”

“Wow,” I thought to myself, “water boils at one hundred degrees. Here, men will work at two hundred?!”

The *predsekhom* continued, “Those of you chosen for inside work will learn quickly, so you won't get burned. You will receive special clothing: a cotton-stuffed coat and pants. This special clothing will protect from burns. But I warn you now: make sure your clothing is always dry. It's true that there have been cases when the cotton caught on fire and the workers got burned. In any case, technology is moving forward. Now they make fireproof clothing.”

Somehow, I am not quite sure why, I started to feel frightened. I thought to myself, “What have I gotten into?” The factory men continued assigning positions, but I no longer listened.

Then they announced, “Today is Saturday; you will have tomorrow off. On Monday, you will be taken to your work places and instruction will begin. The plant operates in three shifts, eight hours each, six days a week. Now, you are excused for lunch in the cafeteria. We're giving you today as an extra day off.”

Everyone got up and left. Slowly, a feeling of intense worry began to come over me. From this point on, life began teaching me to be patient and courageous.

On the first day of instruction, they gave us special clothing and took us to different areas of the factory. My department was massive. There were four Periodic furnaces with a few carts for transporting coal standing near them. The smell in the pipe-tempering workshop reminded me of the forge we had had on the collective farm; only there it was clean, but here it looked just as I had imagined a coal mine.

I was led to one of the employees.

“Here, Timothy,” said my accompanying factory personnel. “This is your new student. Teach him... oh, and keep your eye on him.”

“What a request!” I thought. “‘Teach’ is understandable, but ‘keep your eye on him?’ That sounds more like espionage.” I was beginning to see that one needs to be careful.

I was reminded how the year before a man had been put in jail for some type of political problem he had had. His name was Ivan, and he was a horseman on a collective farm. He was still quite young and had three children. One night, they just put him in a car and drove off. First, they said they were taking him to the district committee to “reward him with a new cotton stuffed coat.” The authorities had observed that his coat was all ripped, and they claimed to be offering him a new one.

What a guy Ivan was! A wedding just was not a wedding without him. Who else could entertain the people with such jokes?

However, we never saw him at another wedding. The authorities did not let him come home ever again. To this time, his wife, Pasha, still does not know what they did with him. People say he was put in jail for talking too much.

Here is what happened: One day Ivan went into a store where a crowd was waiting for a bread shipment to arrive. It was clear they would be there awhile, so he said to the storekeeper, "Excuse me, sir, could I get some *vojji* (reins),¹⁰ please?"

But the storekeeper thought to himself, "What does he need *vojdi* (leaders) for?"

"Wait a minute," the storekeeper said, "has the manager of the collective farm sent you here? Are you going to take them to the accounting office in the town hall?"

"No," Ivan answered, "I'm going to throw them right into a horse stall."

The storekeeper looked at him and thought that perhaps new regulations had come out. Perhaps an order to hang the portraits of leaders even in horse stalls? So, he began to offer one to Ivan.

"All right then, choose one," he said, holding up a portrait. "Here, how about Lenin Ilich, the genius?"

"No, I don't need him," said Ivan.

"And this is Stalin Iosif Vissarionovich," offered the storekeeper.

"No, thank you, I don't need him, either," answered Ivan.

"Then who? Karanovich? This is Ejov here, and this is Sergey Mironovich Kirov, who was just murdered by Trotskyists."

"Sir, I beg your pardon, but what are you offering me?" Ivan briskly interjected. "Sure, those all need to be hanged, but I need something I can put in a horse's mouth."

Now the storekeeper understood that the man needed *reins*, not leaders.

Finally Ivan successfully bought the reins and, nodding toward the portraits, said, "Those you can hang yourself," and left.

Unfortunately for Ivan, people started whispering to each other in the store shortly thereafter. Some unknown man, whom nobody had noticed, started asking about Ivan: who he was, where he worked, and so on. This man wrote something down on a slip of paper, bought his bread, and left.

When they took Ivan to court, this unknown man appeared as a witness. It turned out that he was a spy in the village, and informer for the authorities. He testified that Ivan had gathered the people in the store and talked them into "hanging all the leaders." Ivan was charged with being a traitor to his homeland, a most serious crime. The final verdict read: "guilty of having a secret talk with his fellow villagers about the authorities and threatening to hang all the district authorities."

¹⁰ The word for reins, (*vojji*), and the word for leaders, (*vojdi*), sound very similar in Russian.

In the end, no one ever found out whether he was given ten years in prison or a death sentence because no one heard from him again.

I figured that I was now assigned to such an overseer. I dubbed him "Spy Timothy."

"Let's get acquainted," he said. "My name is Timothy."

"And I'm Grits," I answered. "May I call you Uncle Tim?"

"Sure. Can I call you Grisha?" he asked.

I nodded my head in agreement. I caught a glimpse of pain on Timothy's face, and he quietly added, I had a son named Grisha."

During the day Uncle Tim was sad and did not make for much conversation. Before long, our furnace was at its last stage of heating up for the day. Timothy kept going over and over his row of six burners, making sure that they stayed lit. He cleaned the ashes off and threw coal in. As soon as he had finished putting coal into the sixth one, he would immediately return to the first. That day I did nothing but observe his work.

Timothy wore a thick, red-colored glass mask on his face to cover his eyes, and an apron down to his knees that protected his chest and his body from fire. While watching him that day, I thought, "Not even a horse on a collective farm works this hard."

Uncle Tim was taller than medium height. He had wide shoulders, and you could feel his strength in his hands. It seemed as if he was made solely of large bones with skin stretched taut around them. He looked like about fifty. At times, he would lift his protective mask and look at me with his big blue eyes. I saw warmth in those eyes; they looked at me with love even though Uncle Tim hardly said anything.

Eventually, our shift ended and we left our respective sectors. After dinner I lay awake in bed; I simply could not sleep for a long, long time. All my thoughts were of Uncle Tim. I just could not figure out why they had told him to keep an eye on me. How much would he be paid for it?

"Well," I thought, "at least I'm not sixteen yet. I can't get put in jail for being a big mouth like poor Ivan until I am eighteen." Still, people say that they even spy on the young. I mean, Kirov was murdered and oh, how they avenged his death! How many they killed for that!"

I remember how our store in the village hung a speaker up so everyone in town could gather by the store in the evening to hear how a horn with human voice would talk! That was interesting. In our village no one had a radio, so they all came to listen. The radio talked about Trotsky's supporters, and how they were being caught somewhere and shot.¹¹ At first, only a few were executed, but then, one to two hundred "conspirators" were shot every day.

I was well aware that those who supported Trotsky were "enemies of the nation"; after all, I was taught about it in school. We learned all kinds of things. For example, in the government there was a very intelligent man named Ejov,¹² who caught a lot of Trotskyists! As soon as they announced that Ejov

¹¹ Kirov and Trotsky were victims of Stalin's repression.

¹² The literal English translation of the last name is *Hedgehog*.

had captured another two hundred of Trotsky's supporters and killed them, I would jump for joy by the radio!

Later, posters came out. I remember one with a person wearing gloves covered in needles with a text on the bottom reading: "Ejov catches the enemies of the nation with his hedgehog gloves." Soon, they stopped talking about Ejov on the radio, and people said that Ejov himself had been caught. But how could a person like Ejov be caught? That must be just talk.

There was another thing I did not understand: they had executed over a thousand people, and many more were put in jail, but how could they *all* have shot Kirov? He could only have been shot by, say, two people, maximum.

Also confusing to me was the question of why Uncle Tim needed me. He was not in some important position; he was only tending a furnace! I mean, Timothy was so tired when he went home that I really felt sorry for him. He burned so much coal during a shift I could never do much work. But before he left, he shook my hand and said, "See you tomorrow." So then again, maybe he would not spy on me. And why had he said he had a son named Grisha? Where was he now? My mind was spinning with questions! That must have been the last of it, though, for then I fell asleep.

And so, a new life began for me. I made some new friends. In the evenings we played cards and dominoes, and they taught me how to play *ochko*¹³; but most of all, I loved to play chess. We did not play for money, for we had none; so we paid out by hitting the loser on the forehead.

One day when I reported for my shift Uncle Tim asked, "Why is your forehead so red and swollen?"

"Oh," I replied, "I lost at *ochko*."

Uncle Tim scolded me and told me a story about a rich lord, whom he knew quite well. This lord had land and hired workers. He had a kind heart, and he paid his employees well. People came from near and far to work for him. In the winter he started going over to his neighbor's house to play *ochko*. That man was one nasty rascal. In the beginning, he lost a few games, pretending he did not know how to play. However, he soon had the entire court fooled, one over all the lord's possessions, and took the lord in to work for him!

"You should quit this *ochko* game," Tim said. "It won't do you any good. I suggest you read more books instead."

I loved Uncle Tim; and because of him, I completely quit playing cards. I started playing dominoes instead. For some reason, they had a game called goat; I am not sure why. Whoever lost would have to climb under the table and make a sound like a goat ten times. When someone else was under the table in place of a goat, it was fun, but my luck inevitably led me under the table, too. I started assembling myself on all fours and making goat sounds more often than I would have liked. Every day I ended up doing it five to seven times! And let me tell you, I practiced my goat bray so much that I could compete with any goat! I soon got the nickname "Goat" and was no longer called by my real name at all. Soon they would call me a ram,¹⁴ until I almost forgot my own name! In school I was hardly called by my

¹³ A popular Russian card game. The literal English translation is *score*, or *goal*.

¹⁴ A slang word: usually meaning *dumb* or *stupid*

own name, but at least they there they called me “Mathematician”. I mean, that sounded good and had a good response, but here: “Goat.” “Where am I headed?” I thought. So I quit playing this game, too.

I remember well my interest in chess. Once, I announced there would be a chess match. Four of the boys volunteered to play. The rules were as follows: whoever lost, the next player would take his place. I beat three of them, so the fourth player’s turn came. My opponent’s name was Liosha.¹⁵ He was a year older than I was. We played the first game and no one won, and the same with the second game. Then he got up and said, “Grisha, you play quite well! With a little practice, you’ll become a good chess player. If you’ll excuse me, I’m on my way to a chess competition; but let’s do lunch sometime.”

I laughed at his joke, and we became friends. We spent our spare time playing chess and telling each other about our lives. We were both members of *Komsomol*.¹⁶ The first news I found out was that his name was not Liosha, but Lev.¹⁷ Soon Liosha revealed another secret, which he made me swear never to tell. He told me that he was a Jew. Some time ago his grandfather had owned a shoe factory, which was allowed during the years of the NEP (New Economic Plan).¹⁸ When the NEP had failed and had been replaced by new plans for the Soviet economy, they burned down the factory where his grandfather worked and took both his grandparents away; possibly they even killed them. During that time the city was plastered with posters that said, “Save Russia...kill the Yids.”¹⁹

There was a massive pogrom against the Jews. Without reprimand, people burned their homes and their stores. If a Jew was killed, it was no big deal; you had only to prove that during the pogrom the Jew you killed attacked you first. In school, I had studied some things about the NEP. Our teacher had explained that it was under the “New Economic Policy,” that land was given to the peasants, and everyone received his own piece. The factories were given to the workers. If you wished, you could open your own store or build yourself a factory. Everything was allowed; you just had to work and not steal. The Jews, quick and intelligent people that they are, began to open their own factories and hire workers. Soon economic life was at its most successful point: people were allowed to trade their goods abroad.

The people were happy with all this happening around them; they did not take the revolution for granted. But the New Economic Policy did not stay new for long. It was enacted for just three years-- then it got old. At high levels, talks began that the Soviet Union needed to build more heavy industry, and that all that had been built before needed to be changed. It was announced that the Jews were “enemies of the nation,” and a pogrom started against them. This is how Liosha's grandparents disappeared.

Liosha had parents who worked at a large factory. His father was a head carpenter, and his mother was a technology engineer. The factory manufactured small tractors. His father was working on

¹⁵ A diminutive of *Alyosha*, a typical Russian boy's name.

¹⁶ A Soviet organization for young Communist Party members.

¹⁷ A diminutive of *Leonid*, a name known as a Jewish name to Russian speakers.

¹⁸ The New Economic Policy took effect in 1921 will encourage economic growth in the former Soviet Union. Under the NEP, the private enterprise was encouraged within set limitations in the areas of agriculture, domestic trade, light industry, and public services. For more information on the NEP, see Medish, Vadim, *The Soviet Union, Fourth Edition*, Prentice Hall, 1990, pp. 162, 163.

¹⁹ Slang for Jews.

the development of a large-model tractor. For this, he too, was declared “an enemy of the nation” because smaller tractors were easier to build than the big ones.

Not long before, Liosha's parents had been summoned to Moscow, and he had not seen them since. This happened in 1933 when Liosha was just fourteen-years old. He never told anyone his real last name.

During one of the *Komsomol* meetings, Liosha was chosen to be a *komsorg*,²⁰ and I as his assistant. Through our work together as partners, our friendship grew. My responsibility was collecting membership dues, and Liosha's was to organize trips to the movies and to plan meetings and lectures.

I remember one of those meetings. The director had prepared a report; therefore, attendance at the meeting was mandatory. In the building where we met, there was a poster covering the entire wall. It read, “We will build our own new world!” The bottom bore a single signature, “Lenin.” People took their places and the director began.

“The second five-year plan²¹ is approaching its end,” he said. “We have reached the quotas of the first five-year plan in just four years. Our plant took the higher level quotas, and we shall complete the second five-year plan in four years again!”

He talked for nearly an hour, but I do not remember much of what he said. Then the next speaker came up. This one immediately took the bull by its horns.

“Friends!” he said, “take a look at the inspiring words on this poster! We are in the process of building socialism, and we shall finish building it! But our goal is still in the future. We need to build communism, and we shall build it! We are already standing with one foot in socialism, one in communism. We need only finish building socialism, and then we will walk forward to communism on our own feet. For all this, we need to hasten our speed. A warm welcome to the Bolsheviks’ speed!”

I stopped listening because my memory was suddenly filled with pictures of life from our village.

At one time during the collectivization,²² the district manager arrived and gave an order: “Gather up all the men in the *kutki*.²³ That meant that all had to gather in the house which was taken away from a man who did not join the collective farm. The men gathered and the district manager announced that a representative of the village needed to go to Moscow to a collective farm conference. An educated man with a good memory and leadership skills was needed so he could lead the village. They met for a long time to decide who would be sent to Moscow. They chose a man named Onisk. Whether he was educated or not, I do not know, but he knew how to count money. When we had to sign something, he would put down an X. He did have a good memory though; he remembered everything. People would gather at his house to listen to the news of the town. He could even tell you

²⁰ The leader of the local Komsomol party.

²¹ The five-year plans, chosen as a unit for planning and development because five years was believed to be the usual cycle of better and poorer harvests in Russia's agriculture, were enacted as development periods from 1928 to the fall of the Soviet Union.

²² The forced mass collectivization of agriculture in the Soviet Union had been completed in large by the early 1930s. This policy, endorsed and carried out by the Stalin regime, had lasting detrimental effects on the Soviet economy.

²³ A place outside of the village where youth spend their time.

things like whose cow gave birth, and why “that man” was beating his wife, and so on. When it came to leading the people, he could do it easily. He led sheep; he would go ahead of them and they would follow. Then he would go into the office, and the sheep followed him there, too. So the men decided that if the sheep would follow him, so would the people.

Then the farm manager took Onisk to the conference in Moscow. For three days they “educated” the farmers in Moscow, and then the farmers all flew back. Our Onisk came home, too. This time not only men gathered, but also all the women and children. Now the meeting was where the church used to be, not far from the cemetery. They built a platform for him. Why did they call it a platform? I do not know. It consisted of two barrels with a barn door on top.

Onisk climbed up on the rostrum, stood there, and then took off his cap. He stood there a little more... shifted his weight to one side, and suddenly screamed out, “Comrades! They taught us at the conference that you are no longer men and women. That means you are no longer people; now you are *comrades*. For three days they gave us examples about the Bolsheviks’ speed. Even while we were eating, they were teaching us about the Bolsheviks’ speed. Someone said that because of the Bolsheviks’ speed, we had everything on our dinner tables. Everything was on the tables in Moscow, but here we only have such abundance of food on Easter. This is because we do not have the Bolsheviks’ speed.”

Some men began yelling, “Onisk, could you explain better what ‘the Bolsheviks’ speed’ is? Would you give us examples?”

“Comrades,” he responded, “let me explain the Bolsheviks’ speed using an example. Here we have an old cemetery which we have been trying to fill for two hundred years. ‘The Bolshevik speed’ means building things fast. For example, over here there’s another new cemetery; we filled it up all in one year: 1933! That is Bolshevik’s speed. And let me give you a second example. On our farm one horse dies every month, but if they were dying every day that would be the Bolsheviks’ speed. Comrades, a warm welcome to our...ah...I forgot. Comrades...greetings to you all! Amen!”

Eventually, April 1940 came. That year’s spring was warm, the grass had come out early, and the bright sun was shining. I was hurrying to work at two in the afternoon. I ran into Uncle Tim once again. We had become very good friends by now. We had been working together, and he had been giving me a lot of valuable advice. His talk always led to one thing: we have to work to live; and not everything that seems good is always good. We make ourselves terrific grand plans; we calm ourselves with our thoughts; our dreams lift us up to higher places, but life throws us down from the higher places into an abyss. At times it hurts so much that we say, “Why live?” Fate can throw you very far, and in the silence you will shed tears; then, after you cry for a while, it immediately feels easier.

Our work schedule was such that the first three days one could make it by himself, but the next three days were horrible. The coal haulers did not have enough time to get coal to the furnaces, and in addition, they needed to take out the slag at the end of their shift. Mountains of it piled up by every furnace. To cool the slag, we sprayed it with water. When we did this, steam and exhaust would burst out of the furnaces.

Cleaning a furnace is like swimming in fire; sweat and dirt flow down your face. Uncle Tim taught me not to go near the furnace with a wet face because one can get burned since water boils on a wet face. I learned this lesson quite well: wipe your face with your sleeve and continue working. It would

be better to wipe it with an old cloth, but where would you get one? An old cloth was a precious thing. Even if it was old, it could be used for patches. At the end of a shift, our work uniforms shone white from salt saturation.

One morning when the furnace was at its first stage of heating up for the day, we had a rare moment to talk.

"Tell me, Grisha," Uncle Tim asked, "why did Pavlik, one of your boys, throw himself into the furnace?"

"There was one reason, but many guesses. Sometimes tragedies happen when friends betray one another, but I cannot say anything definite about him. He was only sixteen-years old. He was not involved much with girls, only sports. They say that he could not possibly have had any complaints; it had been only one month since they had transformed us from students to workers. Before, they used to feed us and clothe us; even though they did not pay us, we could still survive. But Pavlik was a big guy; it always took more to feed him, and he was always hungry. We would finish our lunch and head home, but he would stand there by the kitchen and wait for all the teams to finish eating, and then he would ask for seconds. The cook would almost always give him some.

"When he ate, it seemed he would finish his portion and could eat three just like it. Once, the party leader was present at dinner, and the boy probably did not notice him, so he went up to ask for seconds. He got in trouble.

"Did you come here to stuff your stomach?" The party leader asked. 'You are still young and you already want to live on someone else's labor?'

"So, our Pavlik went away without seconds that night, his head hanging."

"Our nickname for him was 'little Pavel' (Pavlik), but he really looked like a bear. What strength he had! He was working as a coal hauler. He would load the cart so high that even the horse could barely pull it! He would even push the car from the back to make it easier for the horse. He was a quiet person and he often seemed sad.

"After his first pay, Pavlik looked like he was walking on clouds. We had received our first pay for six months in advance. We were expected to provide food for ourselves. At that moment, our Pavlik seemed like he had just been released from chains. He spent his entire pay on food, so he ended up borrowing money two days before the next payday. When we received our next pay, we saw that they had withheld a huge share of it for the dormitories, for the special clothing, and also for 'defective products' the factory had produced. I can understand, Uncle Tim, how they can justify deductions from the furnace stokers for defective products, but he was delivering coal! What defects could he have caused?

"After this, he just could not take it any longer and committed suicide by jumping into a furnace. There may be another reason, but who could ever know? He is gone."

"Yes, Grisha," said uncle Tim, "in situations like that they always say, 'He just couldn't take it, his nerves gave out.' But I say, nerves are nerves, they could be calmed down. In any situation, there is just one reason for suicide: despair. Remember this, and pass it on to your children and grandchildren: there is no situation in life in which there is no way out of. Do not give up your life unless it is taken from you

by force. In the hardest moments, do not fall into despair. Sure, there are songs about love, heroism, bravery, and the like, but there are none that glorify despair. Despair is neglected by all, and judged by all. Living life is not as easy as walking across a field. Life is a struggle, a struggle to live."

The shift ended and we went home. That evening I felt like being alone. I did not go to play chess. I read a book. My eyes were passing over the words, but my thoughts were wandering far, far away. I put the book aside and started thinking about Uncle Tim's words, "Do not despair." "Maybe there is meaning in this. Every person has moments of despair, but there is a way out of every situation. How many times does despair come in one's life? The ultimate despair comes only once; therefore, keep this motto for yourself: 'Never despair.' Uncle Tim is great. He said that he also had a son, Grisha, but where is he now? Why doesn't Uncle Tim ever talk about him? I must ask him some time."

The next day, Uncle Tim and I began our shift. We recorded the temperature in the furnace, cleaned the burners, and then sat down to rest.

"Uncle Tim," I said, "we have been working together for half a year now, but you never say anything about yourself. Tell me something. You told me you had a son, Grisha. Where is he now?" Uncle Tim then started telling his story.

"Grisha, I have been working for seven years at this factory, but I have not told anyone about myself. I don't trust people anymore, even those close to me, but I will not hide anything from you. I will share with you like with a son.

"Once I lived in a village called Panskaya. It was about fifty kilometers from Kharkov and fifteen from Zolochiv. This village no longer exists. I lived there before the revolution. My first job was working for a master blacksmith named Philip, as an apprentice in his forge. We made horseshoes and other tools, and I caught on fast. My master promoted me to a higher position.

"And what a master he was! Not like a usual master. One day he walked into the forge and said, 'Tim, I gave your helper three days off for he is getting married. Now, I will be your helper.' I could not believe my ears! He was a master, but he was offering to work like a typical man!

"'What job do you have to do today?' he asked.

"'Well,' I answered, 'people are coming from other villages order horseshoes.'

"'Horseshoes?' Said the master. 'All right; Then I'll make horseshoes.'

"He looked carefully at our selection of hammers. 'How will he know which one to choose?' I wondered. He lingered a bit as he looked at the different hammers in the shop, and then he put one aside and finally said, 'This is what I need.'

"Holding the pliers and a small hammer, I was hammering on the anvil. He was hard at work on the hot metal. After lunch, we switched. I became the helper and he the master. It was easy to work with him. At the end of the day he said to me, 'Tim, this is already your fourth year working for me. I am happy with you. I have not been greedy with your pay, and the income from the forge is not too bad. The village is growing fast. Some people are building houses for themselves; others ask for a loan. There is one very pretty house; it was built by my request. I will sell it to you for half the price; only, please get

married. Then you can gradually pay it off.' At this I could no longer control myself and bowed down at the master's feet.

"In a month, I moved into the new house. I was already twenty-five. Rumors about me started going around. 'Look at Timothy!' they gawked. 'He has been working for his master, and the master gave him a house!'

"People came from far and near to bring us their orders. We expanded the forge so six people could work! Back then, you only needed a desire to work. Everything else was provided.

"At first people came to the forge with orders and there was no time to talk. The only talk was who the order was from, what the order was, and how much it would cost. Then, people started coming to my house during the evenings with orders. Before one could leave, another would come in. Eventually, when a few men gathered, you all knew it would not be a short visit; so there was time to talk. Once one man told us how he got married--not like everyone else, but very differently."

"How differently?" I interrupted. "Tell me, Uncle Tim."

"Well, he started just like everyone else, but then it all came out quite another way. Here's what happened. He became friends with a man who had two sisters. He liked the younger one who was already nineteen-years old. She was lovely. He started having secret dates with her, and they agreed to get married. He told his father about his wish, and then they had a family discussion on this matter. When the talk became serious, his mother started to disagree. His father was for it, his mother was against it. His father stated his argument: 'Look, who is the richest in the village? They are. They have two pairs of horses, a pair of bulls, chickens, geese, a house, and lots of land--why, you could build another house on it! And look at the girl! Who can compete with her beauty? It is not a surprise that our son's eyes fell on her.'

"But his mother stuck to her point: 'Yes, that may be, but we should think more carefully. She is a good girl with humble character; she is young, and she looks like an angel. But people say that when you buy a house, you also buy the neighbors around it; and when you get married, you not only get a wife, but you also inherit her mother and father. Now, who is her father?' continued his mother. 'Everyone knows he's a horse thief; they're just afraid to admit it. And what kind of mother does she have? You'd be hard pressed to find a woman as argumentative in the entire region; you know that yourself! She won't give our son room to breathe! No, I am absolutely against this decision.'

"'That's enough,' his father replied, 'for goodness' sake! We're marrying our son to the daughter, not the mother! Look, they are rich, and we just have to make sure that they won't be too cheap when it comes to the wedding, and get as much of a dowry as possible. We can get a lot for our son and build a house for them apart from the in-laws since you are so afraid that your son will not get along with some old woman. You can go visit them and enjoy the grandchildren.'

"'Wait!' his mother protested, 'we haven't even married our son yet, and you're already going to visit your grandchildren! Tell me, have you ever seen bigger crooks than they? I'm warning you; don't get involved with them for they will deprive us of everything. You say they will give us a dowry, but what if they don't? They will promise us golden mountains, but we will receive only sorrow. They are not good people,' concluded the mother.

“‘Now, about a dowry,’ his father said sternly. ‘I will not allow my son to go to that wedding ceremony before that dowry is in our house.’

“Again, his mother retorted, ‘Oh, come now! Just look at their family! Her father stutters, and the older daughter not only stutters, but she also slobbers on herself.’

“‘Now you look. We are giving our son in marriage to the younger daughter, not to the older one. In any case, why don't we ask our son what he has to say about all this?’

“‘Dad, Mom,’ he said, ‘I love her, and we have already agreed to get married.’

Then, the father's order followed: ‘All right, then. Our son wants to get married, and his mother is standing in his way. Tell your bride...ah, what's her name? We didn't even ask her name! Anyway, the main point is that we have agreed. Tell her to expect her in-laws-to-be next Saturday.’

“And so, they did as he said. The in-laws had a strict order not to make any mistakes with the dowry. They were expected to provide a horse, a bull, a cow, at least fifty pounds of grain, enough money for a half of a house, and whatever else the groom's family asked. I won't go into too much detail, but everything seemed all right except that the bride's parents took a long time making their decision.

“Then one day they paid a visit, and with an authoritative voice her father boomed, ‘God has sent you to us as a family in marriage. We shall not go against God's will.’

“At this, everyone agreed. As was the custom, the mutual consent of the families was confirmed by a feast. Bottles were placed on the table, the hostess laid the table with food, including a fried goose. The wedding date was set, the church for the wedding ceremony was chosen, and then people talked casually amongst themselves.

“The day of the wedding came. The entire village was invited. The young couple went to the church to be married, but, unfortunately, the church had been all locked up. It seemed the priest had left town. The father of the bride said to their driver, ‘Drive them around the church, since they cannot go inside the temple.’ Three times they went around the church and then came back home.

“The best man warned the groom, ‘Be careful not to drink too much. You know the custom; they can steal your bride and ask for a big payment in order to get her back. You might have to give away half of your dowry! Do you have guards for your bride? If so, tell them not to drink too much, but then the next day they will be free to drink as much as they like.’

“No one had ever seen such a boisterous wedding. Anyone passing by was invited to drink to the health of the newlywedded. Midnight approached. The guests started to leave. The groom's new father-in-law sat down next to him and started a conversation.

“‘Son, there's never been a wedding as wonderful as this and never will. Let's drink to your future,’ he said.

“How could he not drink? It was his father-in-law offering. They had one drink, then another. Then his new mother-in-law came up and said ‘Well Son, for such a beautiful bride, it's no sin to drink with your mother-in-law.’

“Again, they drank. Again, the father-in-law said ‘Son, don't worry that you couldn't be formally wed; it's not your fault the priest went somewhere and took the keys with him! Even with all that, this is not the main point. The most important thing is that you have a good life. Just look how many people were at your wedding!’

“While talking with his new bride's parents, he did not notice that his bride had disappeared. The groom was suddenly worried, and his mother-in-law began again, ‘Son, don't worry; go ahead and drink. She just went to her room to rest awhile. Have another glass and then go see her.’ They brought him a glass right away. He drank it, too.

“In the morning, after he had sobered up from the raucous evening, he realized that he had not been married to the younger daughter, but to the older one, the one who stuttered! From that moment on, he began to stutter himself. What a story, huh?

“So, young Grisha, while my customers were telling me all their stories, the village youth passed by my house a few times. There was a harmonica player in the village. As soon as it got dark, you could hear the sound of the harmonica as though it was calling to everyone, ‘Come out everyone, the young and the old, after the day's work, come out to rejoice and relax.’ And at this beckoning call, the youth of the village would gather. At first, they would sing songs; then they would dance. Girls' competitions would start. The girls would spin around, dance, and smile to everyone as though saying, ‘Look how beautiful we are.’ Everyone wanted to be the best. That was a real competition, not like today at the factories where they have competition as to who works longest and hardest. If someone does an outstanding job, then they will be in the factory paper. The article will praise you ‘as the one on the frontier’....

“The last dance was called the ‘gopak.’ That's a competition for the boys. At first, it starts quiet and slow; then, the musician picks up the tempo, and they start to dance while squatting up and down! Now that's a real contest! Here the boys compete as to who can stay on their feet longer and better. When things would really heat up, I swear, the earth would shake! When only one boy was left, then about six guys would take him by the hands and throw him high up in the air three times. That was the prize for the winner.

“On the other side of the village there was another group of young people. There wasn't any dancing there; everyone just sang together. One girl, Katyiusha, nicknamed ‘nightingale,’ especially stood out. She lived at the edge of the village with her grandmother, whom she called her mother. She only went to school for three years. They never had a cow, but they did have geese. She used to take them out to feed; and as she grew older, she was hired to graze cows. At sixteen, she was hired by master Philip to work on the fields with beets. From then on, everyone noticed how much she loved her work. In addition, her memory and ability to sing amazed everyone even more. After she had heard a song just two or three times, she knew it by heart. All the village dwellers knew that ‘Grandma Ksenia’ (her grandmother) had an orphan girl living with her, but no one cared much about it. Young men primarily surrounded her because of her beauty. She had the fairest skin and dark, dark eyes. Everyone wanted to sit next to her and sing with her. Her voice would blend in with anyone's, and even the weakest of voices sounded clearer when hers joined it. But no one had a close relationship with her for she had one misfortune: she was poor. They say for a poor man it's hard to find someone who will marry him; but for a poor girl, it is even more difficult.

“Katyusha was almost twenty. She had lots of friends but no boyfriend. In almost every house where a son was getting ready to be married, Katyusha was first on the list of brides. Every time they asked the groom-to-be, ‘who would you like to marry?’ there was just one answer, ‘Katyusha.’ The talk about her did not last long because she was poor, an orphan; what dowry could you get out of her?

“Now I could hear the country youth unwinding outside almost every night, but I usually had customers over. They would order a few things that took ten minutes to do, but it would take an hour for them to tell me about their niece or some other relative, as though they were talking about some product. Or they would begin telling me about some girl they knew; they would describe her so well that I may have married her! When they left they would add, ‘When I come back from my order, I’ll bring her with me. You’ll see her beauty yourself! I cross my heart; I am not lying.’ Then they would cross themselves on the porch and leave.

“While I was at the house taking care of customers, the youth would gather around my house and the songs would continue till midnight. At times like that, I escorted Katya to her home. Later, to avoid spending a lot of time with my customers, I would not go home from work but rather go straight to the party.

“Once, men gathered to figure out how to build a bathhouse in the village. They decided to build it themselves, but for that, they needed to talk to master Philip because they needed to use his land. They needed to know how much they could purchase it for. They all decided that it would be best if I would talk to him. So, after work I went to see him as a representative of the village. This wasn’t too far out the ordinary; I used to visit him before for he was a master who enjoyed talking and discussing things like who got married or who was about to.

“This time, master Philip was especially hospitable. The servant at the gate met me and accepted my request to talk to the master. The master came out and invited me in for a cup of tea. Such fortune did not fall upon every visitor. His wife began to set the table. She put a *samovar*²⁴ on the table.

“‘So Timothy,’ said Philip, ‘sit down. Tell me, what trouble has brought you to me? Are you planning to get married?’

“He was asking a multitude of questions.

“‘You know yourself I don’t have a daughter. I have two sons, far away from here; they are studying in their homeland, Germany. For some reason, they have no desire to come here to Ukraine. So, tell me, what has led you to visit my house? Here, eat; drink; this is the best cherry jam I have ever had. Have you had dinner yet? It seems like you haven’t. And besides, who would make dinner for you? Do you know where your mother and father are? No, I see you don’t. And where did you get your last name, *Grossman*? Is that a family secret? No, no, don’t answer now. You just keep eating-eat-don’t be shy. Whatever has brought you here we can solve together; we will solve together.’

“‘So,’ I started, ‘say I have a need-but I don’t; a misfortune-well, not a misfortune either. I mean...well,...the men of the village have sent me here with a request for you,’ I added with difficulty.

²⁴ A large, decorative pot earlier used for making tea. The word *samovar* literally means “self-heating” (from the roots *sam* (self) and *varit* (to heat)). Today, a *samovar* is a popular Slavic souvenir.

“ ‘If your goodness will allow, can you sell us a plot of land at a reasonable price? The villagers insist that we need a bathhouse in the village. We are taking all the expenses upon ourselves. But first we need to have the land. Then we will think about how to build it. The labor is free; we will built it ourselves, but out of what I do not even know yet. I was sent only to talk about the land.’

“ ‘So,’ Philip answered, ‘if you had the land, the land behind the forge....I wanted to build a mill and oil churner there. Not just a windmill, but a real one with a steam engine so the people from all over would come with their orders. Say you need some oil-churn it; if you need grain-make grain; if you need regular flour or whole grain-make that. I have only been back from Germany for a week. I was doing some trading contracts there. What complex technology they have! Here, we don't have anything except horses and bulls. They have machines working in the fields; their grain is ground by a machine as well. Where a job used to take twenty people, now they just have one machine! My homeland is Germany, and I am German myself. My real name is not Philip, it is Felix. I visited my parents; they're over seventy already. I discussed my plans with them, but I think there is not enough land back there, so I'll give that space to you for the bathhouse. I also have the needed materials for it. Tomorrow is Sunday. After church we will discuss it.’

“ ‘My curiosity overtook me, and I decided to ask, ‘How did it happen, master Philip, that your parents live in Germany, and you are here in Ukraine?’

“ ‘He responded, ‘You see, it happened long ago. Look how beautiful the fields are here! Everywhere there is black, fertile earth. My parents decided to move to Ukraine from Germany. They did not come empty-handed; in fact, they had a little gold. The governor of Ukraine liked the gold, so they made an agreement and got the papers required for ownership of this land. There was steppe everywhere; ‘as much of it as you want,’ the governor said, and laborers could be hired- ‘just give them work, they are ready.’ The workers did not request a high salary; just enough money for food and some bread for the winter. Farms were starting to appear everywhere. At first, people didn't build houses, just huts. Like moles, they all lived underground. They lived like that for a year or two, and then started to build houses. Most people raised cattle since there is steppe all over and a vast expanse of pasture land.

“ ‘My grandfather had brought sheep from Europe, built the first forge, and then built a brick plant called *tsigel'ni*. There I was, a blacksmith from the age of fifteen. Back then, the fields were plowed with wooden plows. They called them *sohas*, but we bought about fifty metal plows from Germany called *Isaacks* which we traded for wood and leather. There were sheep in every yard, whole herds of them. People did not know what to do with the meat they had when they slaughtered the sheep. Wool and leather could be all used and sold, but you could not eat all the meat. Sheep meat was even given to the dogs, or at times it was buried in the ground. Then my parents opened up a shop for smoking the sheep meat. They started taking smoked meat to the city and selling it. From that, Timothy, look what a house they built! In 1921 Ukraine had an extremely poor harvest. My parents moved back to Germany and left everything as an inheritance for me. You see, Timothy, my people have been living in this area for a long time. They used their heads, worked with their hands, and became rich this way.’

I found all of these stories extremely fascinating. The more I heard, the more I wanted to find out about Uncle Tim and his life, so I constantly bothered him with questions.

“ ‘Uncle Tim,’ I said, “you go to the factory lectures. There they say that abroad, people practice capitalism, and that it is exploitation of one person by another because some are rich and others are

poor. In our country, we are fighting against the rich; here everyone is equal. I will only work here for two years to pay back for the education to be a furnace stoker and then leave. I don't know where I'm going to go. What a long time to wait—two whole years! I am amazed, Uncle Tim, that you could work here for seven years. This is not work, but slavery. The Volga burlacks²⁵ had a better life than us. Even though they used to sing sad songs, at least they were singing! We have forgotten how to sing. And what do they pay us? They give us one advanced payment, but there is so much withheld from our regular pay. I was hoping to save some money for the winter and buy myself a coat, but I can keep on dreaming. It looks like I will once again spend a winter in a ripped jersey. Why? Because I have been getting paid for five months already, but it is barely enough for food. I had hoped to save money enough not only for a coat, but for shoes too. What a joke! No, I cannot stand it for two years; I will run away. Either to the north or the south, but I will run away. During lectures, they say there is a struggle against capitalist aftermath, and that all people should be equal. But what will happen? Will everyone have to be like me, unclothed and half-hungry?"

"Yes, Grisha," Tim answered, "they are leading a fight against the rich people, and they are achieving their goal. There are no rich among the working class; everyone is equal. We are all poor. You say, as soon as you work off the two years then you will head south or north? What if they take you to places where you do not wish to go, to the east or to the west? They say that the factories are being assigned to workers."

"How can that be?"

"Simple. They pass a law—no one is to be dismissed from his job. You are to remain where you have been working before. You cannot leave or switch jobs."

"That means that it is not the factories being assigned workers, but the workers are being assigned to the factories," I said.

"That's true. That means you are not free even though serfdom was outlawed in Russia in the last century."

"If this is really happening, then what can we do?" I asked.

"Grisha, remember my words: Life is a struggle, never despair. Only the weak in spirit fall into despair. Now, our shift is coming to an end; we need to clean up our furnace."

That night, I could not sleep. The words, "Life is a struggle, never despair," kept running through my mind. "If life is a struggle, don't you need to figure out what you are struggling for? Sure, if there is a way out of every situation. People also say, 'Fight your fate'. But if it's fate, how can you fight it? Uncle Tim said it well, 'Never despair,' but what if it is very hard for you? What if it turns out that death is right at your nose; what do you do then? Not despair? They say if a pilot needs a parachute and he does not have one, that means the pilot will never need another parachute. That is fate."

I did not remember falling asleep. I had frightening nightmares all night long. It felt like there was a crowd of people making noises, screaming in my head. I dreamt that no one was getting paid. I

²⁵ The Volga burlacks were very poor serfs that dragged ships over the shallow parts of the river.

went up to the cashier's window where I normally collected my pay, and they told me, "We don't have the money for you. Sign here."

"Why don't you have any money?" I asked.

"Ask your leaders. They know why," the cashier responded. Just sign this and leave. Now!"

From behind, workers from our pipe factory were screaming, "Kill him! Hang him!"

I heard Liosha's voice, "Stop, guys! Stop! The police are coming, they'll shoot."

I saw the director in the corner. He had a noose around his neck. The police broke in and freed him. The director offered right away, "Cuff them all!" and we were all taken in. They cuffed my feet together and took me into the furnace building. They chained me to the wall like a dog on a leash and tied a shovel to my hands. People came from all sides and started beating me with heavy clubs; they were flicking me and yelling, "Work!"

I woke up in a cold sweat. I lay still, frozen for a moment before I realized it was only a dream. After that, I could not fall asleep for a long time. Why had I had such a dream? I must have dozed off while thinking this because before I knew it, terrible visions were again passing before my eyes. I dreamed about our village. I was dreaming about a lot of people on the streets. Everyone was running, yelling, whistling, and hitting buckets with sticks. That usually happened when someone's house was on fire. I realized (in my dream, of course) that there was a fire somewhere, so I started yelling, "Fire! Fire!" I wanted to wake my mother and father. I could not find them, so I started to look for my sisters and brothers, but they were nowhere to be found. I looked outside, and people were yelling, "Duck! Run to safety!"

I ran into the street where everyone was yelling, "Let your dogs loose, get the dogs, fast!" I ran up to one man and asked desperately, "Where's the fire?"

"It's not a fire," he said. "Look around, we are being surrounded by animals."

I looked around, only to find that there were animals on wheel carts surrounding me. They grabbed me, tied me to a car, and carried me away. My head was bumping against the ground, and I kept screaming.

I woke up from the sudden pain I felt and could not fall back asleep. That day I went to work tired. There was a lot of work to do, so Uncle Tim and I did not talk much. I told him about my dreams, both the first and the second. Uncle Tim did not say anything for a long time, and then said, "The dream is prophetic, but accept it only as a dream. When the beginning comes true, so will the end."

The authorities started to visit us more frequently. Inspectors came, wrote things down, discussed them, and appeared to be making some decisions. They gathered all the furnace stokers and gave us a new schedule for tempering our ceramic pipes. Now, instead of tempering them in six days, we needed to do the same job in five days and eight hours. Supervisors came around every hour, checked the temperature, and recorded it. At first it was hard to get used to the higher temperature and all the interruptions, but soon we got used to it. Now they allowed two days for the furnace to cool instead of three, so the furnace only cooled to 250 degrees Celsius instead of the 150 like it was supposed to. It seemed like the "Bolsheviks' speed" had officially arrived!

Our factory committee started putting up pictures of the top workers on a “board of honor.” The factory director was first, then the party leader, followed by pictures of the workshop managers. Our state production quota was filled, one hundred thirty percent in fact! The “appointed” class received significant bonuses for such triumphant work. They promised a bonus to the furnace stokers too, but somehow, those bonuses were delayed indefinitely—as was our pay. A month passed, then two, and finally, one day we were promised pay for our last month's work. We stood in line in front of the cashier's window and watched as the hours ticked by. Soon it was six o'clock in the evening. People did not know what to do. At first we joked, but soon people started to get upset. “What is this?” they demanded. “What's going on? What's taking so long?” Someone said jokingly, “Don't worry guys, they're just adding up our bonuses, that's why they're running late!” People began to take this man seriously, and after a while we all calmed down. For a little extra, we could wait longer.

Finally, the cashier's window opened and the voice of the cashier boomed, “Everyone, get in line! No need to hurry. I brought everyone's pay! Just so you know, though, it's thanks to you that we're running late. Some of you were out sick so, unfortunately, you will not be getting paid. Some of you have previous debts, so there's nothing for you either. Gentlemen, you are working very poorly overall, and I'm afraid this month our factory has produced a lot of defective pipes. But never fear! Your homeland will not forget you! The authorities have taken care of you. They will pay you in credit.”

The room was filled with murmurs of surprise and disbelief. My breath had stopped dead in my lungs. Women started to yell, and some even started crying. Men began to cuss, and I began to feel waves of hot anger washing over me again and again. “How could this be?” I thought. “What have we worked for the past month?”

Eventually it was my turn to step up to the cashier's window. I looked at my slip and saw that I had been given twenty-five rubles. “Wow!” I thought to myself, “I was paid thirty in advance, and now, after all the withholdings, I still got twenty-five! Now I can even buy shoes!”

“Sign here!” the cashier said, and I started signing. “Congratulations,” said the cashier, “you are now up to your ears in debt! They took pity on you though, and gave you a loan for twenty-five rubles.”

I was shocked. “What?” I thought. “I had worked straight through; I hadn't been out sick even one day! Uncle Tim and I had exceeded our production quota, and we had even made it onto the list of top workers!”

“This just can't be,” I thought. “There must be some mistake.”

I stepped aside and tried to think as I looked at the money in my hand. The noise and complaining did not quiet down.

“No!” my thoughts yelled. “I won't go to work anymore. I'll let your furnaces burn all right...”. My face and hands were covered in burns. The truth was that I had been working all by myself for the past month. Oh! How often I had cried by that furnace! I could not lift the furnace racks myself, and Uncle Tim had been out sick. It was so much easier to work together than alone! Many times, I almost fell into the furnace with those racks! They were very heavy, about forty kilograms each, and burning hot. Not everyone could even lift them.

"You can put me in jail, fry me, cook me, but I won't work anymore!" I thought. "I won't go! This job is worse than death!"

I started walking home. My anger had become so strong that even my hands started to shake. How could I vent my anger? I did not know. I kept walking, faster and faster, and suddenly I heard a voice in my head saying, "Why are you struggling? Why are you torturing yourself? Your job is worse than death, you say? Well look, there are train tracks right here; why not lie down across them and end your suffering." Hearing this, I jumped as far away from the tracks as I could. Who had given me such advice? I stopped and looked around, but there was no one to be seen. People say that death walks from behind; perhaps that's why I couldn't hear him. "No, I thought, I won't give up my life so easily. Uncle Tim told me to never despair."

Just then I heard a train whistle, and I looked up in disbelief as a train sped by. I froze in my tracks. Now not only my hands, but also my whole body was shaking, and cold sweat was pouring down my back. I could have been crushed on those tracks! My anger suddenly evaporated, and my thoughts eased.

"What kind of thoughts are these to be having at sixteen?" I said aloud. "No," I concluded, "I won't give up so easily. If I need to die, it will be for good reason, so I can be remembered as a hero. Then again, to die solely for glory isn't smart, either. If I have to die, it should be for those who suffer, so my death would bring some relief."

Although I did not know what good the death of a hero could bring people, we were all filled with grandiose ideas of a heroic death back then. I was ashamed of myself. "No," I thought again, "I won't give up my life so easily." With those thoughts, I walked straight back to the dormitory.

The next morning the sun was shining as if nothing had happened. I was walking to work, and as I passed the entrance gates, I saw that a crowd had gathered. As I came closer, I realized it was my fellow workers from the first and third shifts. They had all agreed not to go to work and had gathered there, saying, "If we're to be debtors, then why work? We will all quit our jobs. We're giving our two weeks' notice."

The superintendent came out and approached the group. "My dear workers!" he said. "What has happened? What's going on?"

As he realized what they were saying, he went up to one, and then another, begging, "Let the others leave, but you, at least you could stay and work!"

He came up to me, and said, "Grisha, you are the assistant *komsorg*; get to work first and I will give you a bonus of at least twenty-five rubles."

At that point, I began to feel like a fist was squeezing my very stomach lining. "But, sir," I answered. "I am a furnace stoker just like everyone else. As they do, I will do."

Other departments did not start work either. Before I knew it, all the workers had gathered at the factory club. The authorities also came there. The director started speaking with an authoritative voice; he did not even address us as "comrades." He said, "The Soviet Constitution says: 'Sabotage and protests are against the law.' Protest is a betrayal of the homeland and is punishable by law, even to the point of death. Today's disruption is seen as an organized protest. These 'requests' of yours are based

on personal desire. This is proof that this has all been organized for the purpose of bringing about the collapse of our nation and to destroy the state manufacturing plan. We accepted the goal to complete the five- year plan in four years, gentlemen, and we will complete it at any price! Two years ago, the Trotsky gang rose up, but thanks to the wise authority of the KGB, our party exposed the gang's hideout and destroyed the enemies of our homeland. They made an attempt on Sergei Mironovich Kirov's life and succeeded in murdering him! These were well- known people--scientists, designers, and so on--but, my friends, they were traitors of the homeland, so they were eliminated! Who are you compared to them? Mere ants! Who disturbed this anthill? You have stayed quiet until now, but the sons of the Trotsky generations have come here, too. They are the weeds among our growing people. We will expose them and destroy the weeds! The request for time off will not be granted for two weeks. In the meantime, we will judge the organizers of this petty uprising.

"For the last two months we have exceeded the state production quotas, but defective products have started to come out of this factory. Our ceramic pipes are simply fragments! The guilt lies with the furnace stokers. It is because of them that half the pipes we produced were unusable. We could not deduct all necessary damages from the furnace stokers alone; therefore, we divided it amongst everyone. We'll find who caused these defects; and when we do, they'll be sorry. We'll get rid of all who are guilty! They are sitting here amongst you. I believe you will help us find them. Those who can help expose guilty persons will receive a reward! The homeland will not forget those who help expose conspirators! Here's what you can do now: you can speak out and expose them in front of the people. Keep in mind that these are also your enemies, and because of them, you do not receive your pay this month and ended up in debt! Thanks to the leadership of our plant, it was decided to give you pay as credit from the government bank; but remember, this will not happen in the future. We will find the enemies of the people! There are probably no less than ten of them here! Now, who would like to speak first?"

The hall was filled with utter silence. Who wanted to receive a life sentence, at best? The voice of the director followed, "Don't be afraid; these are not your comrades but your enemies! Your freedom is guaranteed. Maybe some of you want to speak for yourselves. We will accept it as repentance and will forgive you."

I raised my hand.

"Yes? Come up here. What is your name?"

"Zinchenko. First name's Grigoriy."

"Will you speak for yourself or for others?"

"For myself and others."

"Good boy, Grisha! Say everything, don't be shy. Expose all of them so others will feel sick from it. Even if you were pulled into this dirt, we will take into account your young age and inexperience and forgive you."

"Friends," I said. "I'm not much of a talker, but I was deeply hurt when the director accused us of being first 'traitors of the homeland' and then ants. We might not be engineers or scholars, but we *are* workers. For six months now, we've been working without receiving a single penny. We were

considered beginners even though we have been working on the same level as others. Look at our labor. It is beyond our strength! Nevertheless, time has passed and that can be forgiven and forgotten. Now we have become workers, and we are left in debt for our labor! This humiliation is hard to forgive, but it is still possible. Still they now accuse us of 'organized protest.' We are accused of violating a government plan. We, who are thought of as lowlifes, we, who are thought to know nothing about politics, *do* know our jobs well. I think there has been some mistake. We need to look for wrongdoing at the top."

The voice of the party representative lit up like fire. "Zinchenko! I advise you to speak on the subject at hand, or you will be sorry."

"I have nothing to lose except the furnace room which I wish to rid myself of anyway, Mr. Representative! The director mentioned Trotskyists, and I heard how they were exposed and killed. Back then, I jumped for joy, but now I stand accused of no less heinous crime!"

Again the party representative spoke. "Zinchenko, stick to the topic. We did not gather here to study history, but to uncover the scoundrels who began the protest and find those who are responsible for defective products. We are quite sure now that you are among those who have not been completing satisfactory work. Who would like to speak next? You, Zinchenko, go away and think a little, and then you come back and inform us of your decision."

My brain boiled in anger! I replied, "If you want to accuse someone of producing defective pipes, you'd better accuse the ones sitting with you at that table!"

"Zinchenko, you will regret this, but by then it will be too late. We have enough evidence on you with your words alone. Who will speak next? Zinchenko, get out!"

At that, I got as hot as the furnace I tended and began to speak out against the director, the party representative, and the engineer. "So! You say we have caused defects in the pipes, but who changed the technology, and who approved it? The director and the main engineer! They gave us a new schedule with faster heating and cooling times. But who approved it? Was it not the director and the engineer? Yet all the blame is on the furnace stokers. For two months, the pipes have been cracking and no one has checked why. When I received the new schedule, I wondered, 'How will this effect our pipes?' I compared the new graph and the old one. It seemed like no big deal; I mean, the temperature is only two degrees higher, but the entire heat-tempering process is now sixteen hours shorter. The point is, our time is shortened, but our products still hold a lot of water. You don't need to be a genius to see that. It's obvious that at a high temperature, water evaporates fast. I did some calculations, and here are my conclusions."

I took out a sheet of paper with fine writing all over it and continued, "The evaporation of water occurs in steps, not at a constant rate. Based on my calculations, although the pipes are already dry on the outside, they are still very wet on the inside, so the pipes crack. And that's only half the problem! The problem also lies in the new cooling schedule. If subjected to sudden cooling, the pipes crack into fragments."

"So what have you decided to do about it?" asked the director.

"We have made our decision; now you make yours," I replied. "What I have decided is my business. But if you're looking for those who have made errors in production processing, don't point the finger at us. Point the finger at yourselves!"

I pointed my finger at the director, through my papers down on the floor, and walked out in front of everyone.

Liosha spoke after me. I was later told that this is what he said, "Comrades, there is reason to worry. The speech that Zinchenko gave is not of small consequence. We need to pay careful attention to his calculations about the schedule for pipe tampering. Now, he's my friend, but I am not going to apologize for him. He may have a short temper, and he might have lost it just now; but at the same time, he is right. I cannot consider him an 'enemy of the nation'. Throughout our friendship, I noticed in him a deep commitment to the homeland, as well as interest in our country's history and educational books. Losing one's temper is what we're all doing right now. What he started to say about the cooling of the furnaces, he didn't finish. I wish to add something to his observation.

"I don't have calculations, but I have experience. I work where the pipes are unloaded from the furnaces, and have heard many loud cracking sounds. That was whole chips of ceramic coating tearing itself off the pipes! Instead of unloading the pipes when they've cooled to 130 degrees, we're now unloading them twenty hours earlier at twenty0 degrees! We have orders to pour water on the walls and floor to bring the temperature down. Of course, the pipes crack!"

The director started to look worried. "Who gave you an order to cool them with water?" he asked Liosha.

"I was given an order by the head manager. Who gave it to him, I don't know," he replied.

"Please give me those papers Zinchenko scribbled on."

Liosha picked the papers up off the floor and put them on the table. The director scanned the calculations and said, "Gentlemen, if you'll excuse us, we're going to leave for a few minutes to discuss this."

The hall buzzed with whispering. People began to ask one another questions, "What's going to happen to Zinchenko? Where did he go anyway?"

I had gone back to the dormitory. I had lay down on my bed, fully dressed. For a few sweet moments, I felt completely at peace; all the fear in my body had receded. I knew quite well that after what I had said, I could expect nothing good. Soon, I was expecting the arrival of the "uninvited" guests. "They will take me away," I thought. "They will convict me and won't tell anyone of my fate. What about my friends at work? Some will judge me, some will defend me; but they will talk about me for a while and then forget all about this. What about my father? my mother? What about Olya, my favorite sister? What about my brothers? Will they also forget me? No, everyone will forget, but my family never will! My father will be waiting for letters telling him where and how I am and what sentence I received. My mother will be crying."

I remembered my father's face as he said good-bye to us as we left for school. It was winter time, windy with a storm brewing outside. Olya and I, poorly dressed, were leaving for school. Father came outside and watched us leave. After we had walked for a while caught, Olya would turn her back

to the wind and try to walk so the wind would not blow in her face. But not me. Even during the harshest storms, I never turned my face from the wind; as though I was fighting with it and using all of my strength to win. Occasionally, our father would say at dinner, "I wonder what our Grisha will become. Just look at how he loves to read all kinds of adventure books!"

I'll never forget how I read aloud a book called *How Steel Is Tempered*. I was in awe of its heroes. I remembered my father's words, "You may not go against authority." What did authority have to do with this? "I will never rise up against the authorities. The authorities are good; only, there *are* some bad people at the top. We need to fight against *them*. In a fight for justice, you can even give your life. Soon," I thought, "a few militia men will come in and handcuff my hands behind me. I can say good-bye to the 'struggle for justice'; then what? Who will be next? This way, they destroy all the 'fighters' one by one. No, I won't give up while I am alive," I concluded. It was a promise, a pact I made with myself at that very moment.

My thoughts ran through my head so turbulently that I could not keep up with them. I thought about taking my life while I was still free. A voice inside my head started rushing me, "Run! Run fast, or you'll be too late! The railroad is so close by..." I heard the train whistle. It beckoned to me, "Hurry! Hurry up, or you'll be too late." I jumped up from the bed and headed toward the door. Then a thought came to me. "Where are you going in such a hurry? Stop!" I stopped by the door thinking, "Just last night I was afraid of death, but I myself am looking for it today! Oh! I don't want to go to jail! I want to be free. But now it's too late; the director will never forgive me for what I have done. Maybe I should go to him and beg for forgiveness. No, that will be too humiliating; what will my friends say? Oh, that Zinchenko, what a 'Hero'."

Just then, I heard a noise in the hallway, so I hid behind the door. "You're too late!" A voice said inside of me. A group of guys burst through the door and stormed into the room.

"Where is he!" I heard them say. "Where did he go?" In an instant they had found me behind the door, taken me by the arms, and dragged me outside. Everyone was screaming at once, and I could not make out a word anyone said. I got only one thing clear, "They are waiting for you there! The authorities have asked for you!"

I started to scream, "Let go of me! I won't go! I won't put my very life in their hands!"

We had a short scuffle, but little by little they managed to drag me away and lead me to the meeting hall. When we arrived, the director was holding an official factory decree in his hands. "He must have come up with a reason to convict me," I thought. "He will probably announce his verdict now. They say you can not run from your fate. Perhaps I'll grow wiser in jail." I thought. "Oh, well! Whatever it will be, will be."

The director began to speak. I watched his lips move, but the sound hardly reached my ears. "Comrades," he said. "I want to share our decision with you. The general factory committee has reviewed the cause of our massive manufacturing defects. The cause of the defects has been exposed by the managers of the plant, the party, and the *Komsomol* organization. Furnace Stoker Grigoriy Vasilievich Zinchenko stands out particularly! Our decision is to forgive the debt to all factory employees. The money that you all received as credit shall now be seen as pay for the past month. For his active participation in exposing the cause of our defective production processes, Grigoriy Vasilievich

will be rewarded with a bonus of fifty rubles. "For now comrades, take back your request to leave us. I ask that you all turn around and go back to work this instant."

The meeting ended. After the incident I was no longer called a goat, but was given a new nickname: "Hero."

The next day I saw Uncle Tim, who had just returned to work after being out sick. He asked, "So, Hero, shall we get to work?"

I nodded my head in agreement. Because of my unexpected joy, I offered to work by myself for the rest of the shift. The work had never seemed as easy as it did on that day! I burned my face, but it felt like a cool breeze blowing over my skin. I could not believe I had achieved justice and remained free. Justice not only for myself, but also for all the workers! That day seemed like a holiday to everyone.

For two days, no one talked about anything but the incident in the meeting hall. People passed versions of my speech to one another. At our factory I was nearly a revolutionary, but the main victory was that everyone's debt had been forgiven.

The furnace was once again beginning to heat up for the day. There was not much to do then, so Uncle Tim and I could talk awhile. I remembered our earlier conversation.

"Uncle Tim, you never finished telling me how you got married and where your family is."

That day he was unusually talkative; his face was animated, and he talked freely and happily of days past.

"We last ended our talk where I was taking orders for the forge at my house," he began. "In the evenings I started meeting Katya. I was captured by her beauty and her lovely voice. No matter where we were in the village, whether alone or in the midst of a hundred others, I recognized her voice. At midnight, when everyone left, I always made an effort to walk Katya home. On the way home, she was quiet--as though her voice had flown away with the last song--even though she was always happy and talkative among friends. When we would reach her house, which was on the outskirts of our village, she would look into my face and say quietly, 'Good night Timosha.'²⁶ I would always answer, 'See you tomorrow.'

"It was about this time that an unusual customer started calling. I easily tired of him, but I just didn't have the heart to kick him out. As soon as the last person had left, he would appear on the porch.

"'Good evening, Timothy... ah, forgive me, I don't know your patronymic.'²⁷ Let's take this opportunity to get to know each other better. Today I have a special order. It's not for a knife or horseshoes but for a metal plow; one like no one in the village has. Let's decide together how a unique metal plow can be made.'

"He began to compliment me for all my accomplishments, going on at full speed: 'They say you can make anything! Let's think of something you can make me so everyone will be jealous of it! I won't

²⁶ *Timosha* is a very strong diminutive of *Timothy*, showing that the speaker is very fond of him.

²⁷ Formally (as with strangers) Russian-speakers show respect by addressing each other with both the first and patronymic names, omitting the last name.

run up a tab with you. On the contrary, I will reward you such that you will remember me for the rest of your life!"

"And I *do* remember him, Grisha; I won't forget him till the day I die! He said, 'Also, they say you are not only a blacksmith but a close friend of the master here. Is it true that master Philip gave you the forge, just like that? Of course, I don't really believe the talk. I mean, a new forge, where ten people work, just given away for nothing? Why, not even a father would give such a prized possession to his son for free. Tell me, is it really true?'

"As his beady little eyes pierced me, he went on, 'That can only happen if a man loses his mind! Why, everyone knows *Philip*; they come to him from far and near to find work. I hear he's building some factory or other and frequently visits Germany. Well that's his business--but to give away the forge, just like that! Frankly, I don't believe it.'

"'There is some truth in what you have said,' I answered. 'Once, the master came into the forge and called us together. We all dropped our work and came to him. The master continued, "'I have more than enough work to do the forge notwithstanding. Consider yourselves masterless. I give this forge to Timothy. He will give you work and he will pay you.'"

"Oh, Grisha, how I got scared! 'How can I manage the forge in the master's place?' I begged Philip for mercy. 'Have mercy on me master!' I begged. 'I can't do it! I am not able to manage this forge. If I am guilty of something, please, I beg you, punish me; but I cannot manage all this! I can't deliver the medal and the coal. I can't work for two.'

"'Then get married so your wife can help you out,' answered the master, and left.

"At this, my curious customer appeared to be outraged. 'You're such a fool, Timothy!' he roared. 'What a fortune you missed!' Ah, but he told you to get married; that's good. I can help you with that. I have a good candidate, and I even brought her with me.'

"My customer stepped outside. I heard some noise and girls' laughter outside; I heard singing, and Katya's voice, as clear as day. My customer came back, this time with his wife. She was as fat as a *kupchikha*!²⁸ A girl followed behind her, all dressed up as if she was on her way to church.

"'Timothy, you poor thing!' my customer was saying. 'You probably haven't eaten anything since you came from work, and besides, who's going to cook dinner for you anyway?'

"'Hey, honey,' he said to his wife, 'did you bring that dinner with you? Would you look at this place! One bedroom, two, three, a guest room, and boy, what a kitchen! Just look at it! What a pity he lives here all by himself like a badger in its hole. He doesn't even have a wife to run things properly. And the house is so new!'

"'Listen Timothy,' he continued, 'tell me, honestly; you must be in debt up to your ears for the house! Could master Philip really have just given you this place? How much do you owe him? Who will help you pay since you don't have any parents? Let's talk. You say he offered to give you the forge, *for free*? Well, I suppose miracles do happen...especially if you've had a head injury! Anyway, master Philip

²⁸ The wife of a businessman usually flamboyantly dressed.

suggested you marry, and don't you think he's right? You know, it's hard to be in charge of a house and a forge.'

"As he spoke, he got so out of control that I began to forget who was the host and who was the guest! My customer didn't allow me a word in edgewise! He just stood there, running his mouth like a madman!

"My dear daughter,' he said to the young girl who was now at my threshold, 'why are you just standing over there at the entrance? Why, we can't even have a good look at you. Come here, child; sit down.'

"And you, dear,' he said to his wife, 'why are you standing there? Put everything in your bag on the table and sit down. Tim, we've brought the best wines.'

"As if in a fairy tale, a fantastic feast appeared on the table. My strange guests sat at the feast table. The daughter sat at the very edge. Our eyes met, and then she looked down as if she were ashamed. She looked pretty, Grisha; I can't say a bad word about her, but she was quiet and did not utter a word. So how was I to figure out what she was like? if she was perhaps a potential bride? I'll tell you--it looked like the matchmakers had arrived, only not to the bride's house but to the groom's!

"The whole time, I could hear laughter outside. I heard everyone singing, but I didn't hear Katya.

"So, dear,' the man said to his wife, 'what do you say?'

"I want to know more about the house and how much he owes on it. What kind of debt and how much is it? Timothy. Hmm... that's a good name for men to call you, but to the women you will be Timosha. It sounds more gentle and closer to the heart. What do you say, dear daughter; do you agree?'

"She blurted out a brief 'yes' and immediately bowed her head.

"Hear that, Timosha! She's agreed to marry you! But first tell us about the house.'

"I was overcome by the ridiculous nature of it all. Nonetheless, I wanted to end the rumors these people had no doubt started and set the record straight before I asked them to leave.

"What's there to say?' I started. 'I've been working for master Philip for ten years. He has been good to me. At first I worked in exchange for food and clothing; then, little by little, he started paying me. After a while I started to save a little.

"Once, master Philip came to the forge to work with me for a day. He's not only a master but a good blacksmith. He offered to sell this house to me for half price. He took into account the materials and the labor I provided him, and I bought it without any debt.'

"How fortunate you are,' my customer exclaimed. 'You must have been born in a shirt!²⁹ Now where's your mother?'

"I don't know,' I answered, all the while thinking this was getting more and more ridiculous. 'I remember her until I was seven, but after that I don't know.'

²⁹ *Born in a shirt* means *Fortunate from birth* in Russian.

“So, you don't have any debt or any mother! Well, the question about having a mother is easy to solve. You marry tomorrow and you'll gain a mother. Honey don't you agree?”

“The embarrassed daughter muttered another ‘I agree.’

“Tim, the most important thing is that there be harmony,’ my customer said. ‘Then a family will come along. Now, we need to discuss the forge in more detail. You say the master offered the forge to you as a gift, but after some thinking you did not take it? That was smart of you, Timosha; you made the right decision. I mean, it's just too much work for one person! Master Philip has said you should get married. And Tim, managing a forge is not a woman's job. Her job is to give birth and to cook. Now, you can't figure everything out at once, but together we can correct that mistake. Here's what you do: tomorrow you go to master Philip, bow down to his feet, thank him for his advice and say, ‘For your kindness, I accept the forge as a gift.’ Also, don't forget this part: “Master Philip, thank you so much for your advice. You will be happy to know that I have just gotten married! But master, the forge is not a woman's to manage for she does not understand this stuff. However, her father, my father-in-law, knows how to manage everything.” Tim, make Philip do everything according to law and sign a paper saying: “For all his hard work, I hereby pass this forge to Timothy Grossman, which he in turn wills to Stepan Razumovskii.” Make sure that there's a seal on the paper and that both the master and the governor sign it.’

“And you, dear,’ the woman said to her husband, ‘could you agree to take such a burden upon yourself?’

“What can I do?’ he answered; ‘I'll do whatever it takes for the common good. Yes, perhaps I can even help poor Timothy with the burden of managing the forge. Our Tim will work with all his employees. And me? I'll free him from taking all the endless orders, and everything will be easier for him. Timothy, my son, you did the right thing by not accepting the forge as a gift. Yes, what do you think, dear; should we lighten Timothy's load? Perhaps we should let him work in the forge well we own it.’

“Oh! You've got such a good head on your shoulders,’ his wife said. ‘We should really take care of our son-in-law, dear. Timosha, just go to master Philip tomorrow and convince him to register the forge in your new father's name. Just tell him you can't possibly manage the forge yourself. What do you say, daughter? Oh, I forgot, you've already agreed.’

“The poor girl must have reached the peak of embarrassment for she suddenly broke into a voice of her own: ‘Mom...Dad, please--for the love of God! I want to get married the traditional way like everyone else! I do not want and I will not live with a man without first being married! I don't want it this way...’.

“What!?’ her mother shrieked, ‘what are you saying? Who gave you the right to go against your parents? Whatever your father or mother says--your job is to obey. Since when are you so disobedient, child! Look at your older sister! If she had protested, would she have a husband? No, I say, she most certainly would not! Now she has a wonderful husband. What else do you need?’

“But the poor daughter continued; although this time her response was far more contrived. ‘I want to be like everyone else so you can bless us and marry us in a ceremony! I beg you in the name of God! Lent will soon be over, and then we can have a wedding. I don't want to be married without a ceremony. Please, mother, I beg you!’

"Her mother seemed to respond thoughtfully to her daughter this time: 'Well dear, now what will Timothy say to the master tomorrow? The good master will ask, "Tim, where is your wife?" And what answer will Tim give him? My dear, I am giving you strict orders. You are not leaving this house, and tomorrow you will go to the master's house with Timothy to confirm Timothy's statement with your presence. You will say, "Master, we have been married for a while now, but we haven't been living together. But last night, we started to sleep together." And then our Tim should add, "And since we sleep together, she is my wife, right?" The problem is solved, my dearest one. You are spending the night here. Now let's celebrate the arrangement with a toast. So, Timothy do you agree?"

"At this point, things had gotten so-out-of hand that I simply rose from the table and said, 'I can think of nothing worse than your marrying me without my even being there! Sir, I took your order for a plow, but a wife? What is this? Down payment or payment in advance? What's her cost? I did not see her mentioned in your order for a plow. If I ask the master for papers regarding the forge, why shouldn't he ask me for papers for my wife? When and in which church were we married? What can I say; what answer could I possibly give? I beg your pardon, sir. Perhaps not zealously, but I *do* believe in God.'

"So tell him that you'll get married after Lent.' The customer replied.

"Sir, I don't know how to lie, and I don't want to learn. Yes, it's true that I don't have a wife, but one day I *will* get married. Lent will pass, and then I will find myself a bride; and we can get married and have a wedding ceremony.'

"What more could you ask of a potential bride?' the astonished customer replied. 'Didn't you hear? She agreed! Look at you--cheating on her already!'

"Who is she? Tell me her name,' I said.

"You have been sitting at the table with her for the entire evening and didn't even ask her name? What a rotten man you are! You haven't even slept a single night with her, and you're already looking for another bride. For such betrayal, I will pay you back such that you won't forget it as long as you live! And that goes for the whole village! I warn you, change your mind now before it's too late, or you'll always remember who Razumovskii is!'

"Then I am left with only one choice, sir,' I answered. 'I am not accepting your order for the plows. Go back where you came from and stay there. Don't leave a trace of yourself in my house, and take your family with you!'

"Well, then! I guess this is goodbye! Just don't forget, not only you, but also your whole village will be sorry!'

"Then, he turned to his wife and daughter and said, 'Come on, let's get out of here. How could we have offered such a beautiful girl to such a rotten man? That's what we get. My dear daughter, give him a well-rounded goodbye! Go on! What's the matter with you?'

"As soon as their carriage left, my friends stormed in.

"Good evening, Timosha, how are you?' asked one.

“‘Why are you asking him?’ questioned another. ‘Look at the table! There is a fried goose and wine! Oh, look! Tim secretly got married during Lent, without even fearing God? Show us your bride. Where are you hiding her?’

“‘Hey,’ said another, ‘I see you’ve left us a bit to drink like a good friend! Well, forgive us, Tim, but we don’t drink during Lent. Do you even know your bride?’

“Then: ‘Tim, didn’t you know she’s been married before? I was at their wedding; they live near Zolachiv. The entire village was at the wedding feast! I mean, there was a lot of noise at the wedding, but after the noise tripled! The day after the wedding, the groom saw that his bride had been stolen, and the older sister had been given to him! And did you know, Tim, that her father is a known horse thief? Everyone is afraid of him, but he is in good relations with the authorities. Why not, you can even buy off a king if you have enough money!’

“I had realized what kind of wedding they were trying to perform in my house, but I couldn’t speak because just then a group of girls walked in without even knocking.

“‘Oh!’ they gasped. ‘Look at the table! There’s been a wedding here! Let us sing for him!’

“‘Which song?’

“‘Let’s sing a song called “For many years.”’

“‘Yes, let’s.’

“They started to sing, ‘For many years, for many years; May God give them happiness!’

“Grisha! I was just standing there and watching; only one girl wasn’t singing. She bowed her head, her eyes filled with tears, and she looked at me in utter sorrow. She wiped away a tear with the scarf, but she could no longer stop them when they were streaming down her face. I almost started to weep myself, and without speaking, it was obvious that my love for her was just as strong.

“‘Make way! Katyiusha, this song was sung for us; they are wishing blessings upon us!’

“I don’t know how she ended up on my chest. She was weeping and quietly whispering, ‘Timosha, don’t forget about me, don’t forget.’

“‘Listen friends,’ I said finally, ‘let me tell you what has happened! They were trying to marry me today without my being there, but I’m still not married! I agreed to nothing! I am happy to know who I live for,’... I paused, and then, said, ‘for you, Katyiusha.’ Again the girls started to sing for us, ‘For many years, for many years, God give them happiness!’

“That was the biggest mess ever, Grisha! Thank God, I got out of it. Now look at you; you have lived through a lot during the last few days and came out a hero!”

“What kind of a hero am I, Uncle Tim?” I answered. “I was ready to part with my life.”

“Yes, Grisha,” Tim answered, “life is a struggle; sometimes it is difficult. Darkness is everywhere. At times it seems there’s no way out, and the only way left is to your grave. Fight with the circumstances, and don’t fall into despair. I already told you that every situation has a way out. Let that be an anchor of hope in your life. Happiness comes to those who know how to wait for it... A quarter of

a century has passed since the events I told you about. Now I've lived through many things in my life, but I'll tell you one thing like I would say to my son, 'Never, never fall into despair'."

Our shift was over, and I was in a great mood. I wanted to live. "Somewhere in the future there is a happiness I need only wait for," I thought. "Uncle Tim urged me not to despair through hard times. Just a week ago I almost made a fatal mistake, but Uncle Tim will never find out about it. Not only am I not going to tell *him*, but I am never going to let *anybody* know about it. I am too ashamed of myself. What is death? You exist, and then you cease to exist-or perhaps you do live on? Scholars might disagree, but who really knows? The dead can't tell us. What about dreams that predict the future; where do they come from? Life is so wonderful!" I declared. "It is worth living just for the happiness which lies ahead."

On Monday, after the weekend, Uncle Tim was in a good mood. So I started bugging him with my questions again.

"Uncle Tim, tell me how everything ended," I urged. And he continued with his story.

"Master Philip went to Germany again on business and came back quite upset. He requested that I stopped by for a talk. It was during the era of the New Economic Policy. Master Philip was sitting at a table which was piled high with important documents. He offered me a cup of tea and told me news of his sons. One was married and the other was getting ready to marry.

"I put so much hope in my sons!" he said. "I thought that eventually they would come here, and we would all work together. There is so much opportunity here now with all these economic reforms! I met with my old friends who insisted that I move back to Germany. We argued a lot about what awaits Ukraine; and although I did not agree with many of their presumptions, I felt in my heart that they were right. They suggested that I sell all of my possessions and leave. "If you don't sell it in two or three years," they said, "you will leave everything and run for your life...if that's still possible, that is."

"Anyhow, that's my news. How about you? How are things at the forge? What changes have taken place in your life?"

"Well, master Philip," I said, "there's a lot to do. We've extended our hours to ten in the evening, but the amount of orders is not decreasing."

"What are you suggesting?" Philip asked, "that perhaps we should stop taking orders?"

"If we were to stop taking orders, then we'd lose out on quite a bit of income. But if we expand the forge to five or six work places, it would be like opening a gold mine! All our costs would be paid off in six months!"

"Tim, that's quite an observation. Did you calculate this yourself, or did your wife help you?" Philip asked.

"I have no wife, sir; nobody helped me. I figured everything out myself-how much money we're losing and all the rest. I figured out what the construction will cost, and I realized that in half a year everything will pay itself off if we do this. I'm not terrific with math, but I figured this all out in my mind."

"Just how would you do all this?" Philip asked.

“‘I would hire six new workers. The first four hours of the day they would work in the forge and the next four hours, on construction. The forge will bring in income, and the construction will have costs; so together, it'll all balance out, and before long we'll have a new forge.’

“‘You are very good at this, Timothy,’ the master answered excitedly. ‘From this day on, I declare you the owner of the forge, and the owner does whatever he thinks is right. Tomorrow I will go to the governor and make it all legal. I will register the forge as a gift in your name. However, Tim, managing a forge is hard work. My friend, you need a wife. Let us discuss this question, for you marry once, and for the rest of your life! You can always build or break a forge, but a wife is something entirely different. You need someone who will manage the house. A smart wife builds the home, and you have the home already; so now you will have a wife.

“‘To tell you the truth, I wanted to run from master Philip’s at that very moment. I had to respect his wishes, but I was afraid he would suggest that I marry a relative of his, or perhaps a widow who already had children. And in my mind all I could see was Katya, my dear Katya, with tears streaming down her face. I wanted to run, to leave the forge, the village, the house, leave everything... but Katya. How could I leave *her*? ‘I’ve got money,’ I started to think. ‘I can run away to the city tonight. Then I can marry Katya later, in secret, and master Philip will never know!’ But I’ll tell you one thing, Grisha; it’s hard to leave your friends, or for that matter, the village of Panskaya.”

“‘Uncle Tim,” I asked, “why was your village called Panskaya?”

“‘Well, it was known that those in our village lived like masters. Everyone had nice homes, and we even had a church built out of stone. People from other villages came to our church-anyway, Grisha, let’s get back to master Philip. He must have noticed my unclean thoughts, for he said, ‘Why are you being so quiet, Timothy? Are you all right? Did some misfortune occur during the last few days? Or is it that you don’t want to get married at all and stay a bachelor all your life? Tim, whatever is bothering you, please understand that I only want the best for you.’

“‘Among my thoughts of escape shot a ray of hope. ‘If he really wants the best for me,’ I thought, ‘he will not insist that I marry a girl I don’t love.’

“‘You do not need to get married, Tim,’ master Philip continued. ‘But to whom? Let’s think. Do you want someone rich, well-known, or simple? Someone from Panskaya, or from another village? Whatever the case, I know them all. I can even list them for you if you like. I know a rich girl; she lives in Zolochiv. She walks eight kilometers to the morning service to pray. She is quite ripe for marriage, but there’s one problem: her father is the worst liar, and he’s looking to get into politics. The boss calls him comrade Razumovskii, and the simple folk call him respectfully, Stepan Ivanovich. Her mother isn’t much better than her father, either. She’s a witch but pretends to be an angel! Well, that’s her parents, but I can’t say anything bad about her. In any case, Timothy, it’s your choice; what do you say?’

“‘Razumovskii Stepan Ivanovich, you say? I know him. I’ve met him, but I don’t wish to see him ever again.’

“‘When; where?’

““He brought me an order once, and his daughter with it. What a horrible person! When he was leaving, he threatened that not only I, but the whole village would remember him for reasons I would rather not disclose. Forgive me, master, but I cannot marry his daughter.’

““All right then,’ Philip responded, ‘there are rich brides that are closer. Would you like to bring a real treasure into your home? I know one who lives at a far end of our village.’

“At this, my heart leapt from excitement because my Katya had lived at a far end of our village.

““She sings and dances very well,’ Philip continued.

“A defeat. No, he was not suggesting my Katyiusha. She sings, but I'd never seen her dancing.

““Her family is quite wealthy. She has three brothers, who are handy at everything; she's not afraid of work, but what she can do? That, Tim, I do not know. Of course her dowry will be quite substantial. How about her?’

““Forgive me, master,’ I said, ‘but I cannot; besides, I already have a house, and I am not so poor.’

““And what about the forge? Now you own the forge too. All right then, let's start from the other end of the village. I know an old lady who lives with her granddaughter. The girl works for me; I've got nothing to say against her. She is very hard working; always completes her work first. This summer she is working on the beets; that's hard labor. Not everyone can do it, but she took the largest part. If she has any riches, it would be from her own labor.... Yes, and she is a beauty. She sings better than a nightingale. What do you say to this? I would suggest her to to you, but the choice is up to you; it's your life.’

“I lit up, and master Philip understood my choice without any words. So, we decided, the master would be a father to me. After Lent was over we had the wedding.’

“So, Grisha, that's what it means to never despair; happiness is always ahead!”

The New Labor Law

After the shift, the factory was buzzing like a beehive.

"Did you hear the news?" some skinny guy was saying; "I heard a new rule has been announced on the radio concerning the labor arrangement. It's all so confusing! They're saying that work places need to be secured for the workers in order to strengthen labor discipline. If you want to quit, you can't; but if you have to leave for any reason, then you'll be put into jail for two years! After you're done with your two-year term, you'll be put back to your original work place," he said, and then paused to catch his breath. "They also say that even if the earth falls out from under you, if you don't come to work, even for a single day, you'll be taken to court! They'll assign you to a work place for six months and deduct twenty-five percent of your pay, and from the rest they'll take all that you owe them! Oh...and if you ever skip another day, the authorities will take fifty percent of your pay, and you won't even have enough left for bread! The ones who don't work well and do not make the required fifty percent will receive a year of hard labor until they earn that fifty percent!"

"That can't be; you've got it all wrong!" said another.

"Maybe I've got some of it mixed up, but I swear, that's what they said! And," he added, "they also said that if you run and don't make it to the factory in twenty-one minutes, they will also sentence you for six months until you give them twenty-five percent back!"

"Don't worry," another said. "It only takes us fifteen minutes to get to the factory! We'll be able to make it."

"But if you oversleep," someone interrupted, "how will you ever make it? I mean, what if they say, 'Today you were five minutes late'; then ten, then three, then again three more. This all adds up to twenty-one minutes, and you would have to give up twenty-five percent of your pay! For what? They've assigned all the workers, and they'll never let them go."

"Today," started another, "I saw a party leader putting up some posters. On the posters, people were flying like butterflies over a factory. Some of them flew into one factory, others into another, and they were being caught in nets! On another poster, those people were being caught, and their wings were being cut off with scissors! There were two of them cutting at once! They'd cut a whole pile. I just didn't recognize the two people with the ties; it was probably our director and a party leader. They always wear ties--or maybe it's the higher authorities; they also wear ties."

"You're over-exaggerating," someone said. "Where did you see such posters?"

"I saw them!" he answered. "I swear I did!"

"What did you think; they would assign us to our jobs for two years and then let us go?" yet another said.

"On the radio it was stated clearly that young people were assigned for only two years, but now they're assigned forever! In two years they will assign you, too--just like everyone else!"

That night, there was a meeting in the factory club. The director read the new policy for labor discipline. From what I recall, it went as follows: The old policy stated that if a worker wanted to quit, he had the right to do so by giving two weeks' notice. The law now stated that a worker does not have the

right to quit or switch jobs. There was one exception: when a person was changing his or her place of residence and had a proper document. If a person willingly chose to leave his or her job, he or she would end up in jail for two years and work in a labor correction camp. After his or her sentence was served, he or she was to return to the previous work place. For missing one day of work, there would be a fine-- that is, for a six-month period, twenty-five percent of the worker's pay would be deducted.

If this happened a second time, fifty percent of the worker's pay over six months or twenty-five percent over one year would be withheld. For being late to work over twenty-one minutes within a year, twenty-five percent of worker's pay would be withheld for three consecutive months.

I left the meeting with a heavy heart. I had hoped to work for two years and leave, but now all my plans were ruined. "Now," I thought, "I am an eternal slave. I can't go anywhere, or I'll be left without pay and won't be able to do anything about it."

Eight hours a day, six days a week, without an end--this was my job. "I'm not even seventeen yet," I thought, "and I can't change jobs, or I'll be put in jail! I work at the same level as adults, but I get paid half as much because I am still considered underage. And it will be this way until I'm twenty! I'll do my best to remember your words, Uncle Tim: 'At the hardest moment, never give up; happiness is still ahead'."

I met with Uncle Tim, but neither one of us was in the mood to talk.

"So, Grisha," Tim finally said, "your dream has come true. They have put you in chains. The first dream came true, but that's not so bad. The second dream is far more frightening, and it seems that it too will come true."

As the days passed, our worries started to fade a bit. Now we were more afraid of future labor discipline laws being passed than the current laws. I remember a rather humorous incident that took place one weekend during the late fall. We would usually leave for work early, getting up at six in the morning to be sure to arrive at work by seven. But that day, it was raining; and it is easy to sleep late on rainy days.

All of a sudden we awoke to a loud call, "Get up!" it said; "you're late for work!" Someone flipped the light on and we all woke up. "Come on! Hurry up, or we'll all be put into jail for sabotage! The seven o'clock siren has sounded! We should be at work now, but we're still sleeping! Get dressed, fast!"

Everyone got up, dressed as quickly as they could, and ran to work. We ran with all our might, even through puddles, because we were afraid we would be punished for being late. We had to run fast not to be later than the allowed twenty-one minutes.

At the factory entrance, a guard stopped us saying, "Stop! Where are you running?"

"Forgive us, sir!" we replied, "we overslept, just a bit! A very little bit! Please, let us into the factory."

"Where? Into the factory? But today is a weekend! What are you doing here?"

We walked home clutching our bellies from laughter. We arrived at the dorm and could not stop laughing.

Life was going on as usual. Young people get used to everything quickly. Soon it seemed like no big misfortune that we had been made pipe-tempering stokers for life. I became more interested in hearing about Uncle Tim's life.

"Uncle Tim," I said to him, "tell me more about yourself."

"What can I tell you, Grisha?" he asked. "As time passes, things are forgotten; but I will try to remember. Now let's see...Sometime after our talk, master Philip came into the forge. He was all happy and smiling.

"'Stop working!' he said.

"Everyone stopped what they were doing at once and looked at him. Then he started to thank us for all the work we did, and then he announced: 'Listen, my workers, I have come to inform you that you no longer have a master!'

"There were no longer any masters then, Grisha, because this was after the revolution. We still called him our master, though. What else could we call him? Looking at him, we couldn't understand what was happening.

"'Men,' he continued, 'I have decided to make Timothy Grossman the new owner of this forge. He is a hard-working man by my judgment, and his last name sounds good: Grossman--literally means *big person* in German. Perhaps Tim *will* become a big person.'

"With that, he gave me the ownership documents for the forge and left. We all stopped working and looked at the documents. Everything had been made legal; it had even been verified by a notary public. Everyone congratulated me.

"There was even more work to do then. I now had a house, a forge, and a wife! I had it all! This happiness did not last long, though, because in two years the NEP ended.³⁰ It was the end of 1927. This was the beginning of a tough time for wealthy man. It was shortly after he gave me the forge that master Philip and his wife secretly left for Germany, and I never saw them again.

"In the spring of 1927, the manager of Philip's house received a letter from Philip in which he gave an order to give away all his livestock to the poor, sell all his belongings, and donate all the money earned from their sale to the church. In the letter's closing he said, 'I will not be returning.' Everyone knew that the forge now belonged to me though, so no one touched it. Everything else was divided up among the people.

"Life was great back then, Grisha. Everyone had their own household; there was enough land for all. We lived to work. The people of the village were hard-working. Men were like ants running around day and night. But, in 1930, big changes came. They united small villages, creating one county center for every few villages. If one needed help in solving some question like selling a house or some other business, he would have to go to the county government at that center. Houses weren't sold very often, but land was bought a lot. People came from other villages with one goal: to buy land.

³⁰ The New Economic Policy was allowed just long enough to restore the Soviet Union's economy to its pre-World War I level. At the end of the 1920s, this was accomplished. In 1928, the NEP was replaced as the guiding policy directive by "five-year plans."

“Then the authorities came into the villages and said that there would be another regime coming soon, a regime that Lenin had always wanted to build. The people were mainly considered to be in one of two categories: the rich or the poor. They convinced the poor that they were poor because there were rich people, and that if you were to take away their riches, then everyone would be equal. The rich were called ‘kulaks.’

“I separated people into two categories, too: the lazy and the hard-working. The lazy people sold their land, and the hard-working bought it. Many of the people got so lazy that they said, ‘It is better to live and work for a master. You work during summer; then rest in the winter, and you don't have to worry about anything!’

“We were being convinced that exploitation of one person by another is not permitted. I remember one man saying, ‘The regime that allowed the NEP did not prove effective, so it was destroyed. Under their program, land was given to the peasants. When they started to work for themselves, who would think of others in such a situation? No one cared for the poor peasants. Our party noticed that and took care of the peasants. Lenin said, “We will build our own, new world,” and we are faithful to Lenin’s decrees. Small farms bring only loss--they need to be united! The Bolshevik Party has worked out a way for country farms to develop! It consists of joining all the independent farmers into one collective farm. What is a collective farm? It's a collective household where everyone is owner but nothing is their own. For this to exist, one must freely surrender their land and unite with the collective farms.

“To work the land, horses are needed. If the horses are to be collective property, then so are the cows and all other household animals. All the private cow sheds, stalls, and stables need to be torn down, and new ones must be built!

“There will be work for everyone--now one only needs to work! Where do we start? First, one has to join the collective farm. Then, all other skilled workers--woodworkers, cobblers, blacksmiths, and the like--should follow suit. Private forges need to be torn down, and bigger ones need to be built! All the plows and the rest of the machinery should be given to the collective farm and used collectively. From now on, everything should be shared! Everything will be yours, but nothing will be owned by you. We shall lead a fight against individual owners! There are no longer any masters, and there will never be! The name of your village needs to be changed. We suggest calling it *Pokrova*³¹ rather than *Panskaya*.³²

“In this way the collectivization started in our village. Do you remember anything about collectivization, Grisha?” Tim asked.

“Hardly anything, Uncle Tim,” I answered. “I was not even seven years old back then. I remember my grandfather; he had many sons. I am told that the land was given to each son back then, so he received a lot of land. I remember the funny tractor he used to have; there were two wheels in the front of it and one large wheel on the back. My grandpa ordered a motor from Germany and built his own tractor. When the collective farm was organized, he donated the tractor to the farm.

³¹ In Russian, *a covering*.

³² In Russian, *the Master's*.

"I remember something else. It was winter, and there was a very cold frost outside. There was a lot of snow that winter. I used to love running in the snow; it was better than eating bread! I was running outside for a little while, and then I heard a noise coming from the street. I ran there. I looked and saw it was our neighbors who lived three houses down. The children were sitting on pillows outside. They were all in tears, and their mother was trying to cover the children with blankets; but she had many children to cover and few blankets. I couldn't see their father.

"She said to me, 'Grisha, go home and get warm before your family is kicked out of your home.' I could not understand why she had put her children to bed outside since it was so much warmer in the house. I ran further and saw another family in the same predicament, only they had less children. The children were crying and so was their mother. This was happening all across the village. I became frightened and ran back home. Our house was warm; our mother had been keeping the fire lit. I climbed up on the hearth and saw there. I didn't even want dinner; I was scared for I thought that our mom would soon have to put us to sleep outside. I would be okay since I like the frost, but my younger sisters and brothers would surely freeze!

"Uncle Tim, so many years have gone by, and I still can't forget that night. When I remember it, I get goose-bumps all over. When my father came home in the evening, I became bolder and asked, 'Dad, why did all the *shtundi*³³ put their children to sleep outside?' He answered, 'Why do you think it's only the *shtundi*, son? The *kulaks* also had to evacuate their houses.'

"I don't know how it was for you, Uncle Tim, but where I lived they not only kicked the *kulaks* out, but all the *shtundi*, too.

"'Dad,' I said, 'let's take them in. They must be cold.'

"'We can't, son, or we'll be put out into the street. There is an order that states: "Anyone who takes in any of the homeless into their house and warms them will have to give up their house too.'"

"In those days many horses were walking on the fields with notes on their tails, Uncle Tim. I couldn't read then, but the men of my village read them and laughed, saying they read, 'I am running around homeless, not because I am old and useless, but because of the Soviet regime.' They said that the ones who did not want to join collective farms just left town, leaving their horses on the fields. That's all that I can remember about the collectivization. How did the collectivization occur in your village? It must have been the same everywhere."

"Yes, Grisha, it was the same everywhere. The county authorities once came and gathered us all in the village church, not to worship, but to sign up for the collective farm.

"Those who did join the collective farm had a right to have a house, a wife, children, and one dog. The rest had to be given away to the collective farm. In the beginning, only a few people would sign up for the collective farms. They were mainly those who had a wife, children, and not much else.

³³ A name given to the Christians.

"Then the government threatened the ones who did not join that they would be sent to the *Solovki*.³⁴ Everyone knew about the *Solovki*, but they did not know where it was. They only knew that people were sent there and never came back.

"Soon, even those who only had a horse or a cow signed up. They gave the animals away and joined the collective farm. The next thing you knew, half the village had signed up.

"The first year, things went well. Everyone was working together; we sowed, plowed the land, and reaped a harvest.

"But during the winter, horrible things began to happen. Those who did not join the collective farm were deprived of their belongings. Many left everything and fled to the city. Many had their homes confiscated, some even had their homes burned down.

"In the spring, everyone suddenly agreed to join the collective farm. The abandoned fields were added to the collective farm's property. They held a special meeting regarding my forge. The entire district committee was there. It just so happened that comrade Razumovskii was the head of the commission.

"The main question was what to do with the property which had belonged to master Philip. There was a high brick fence around the estate. On one side there was an animal yard, on the other a beautiful master's house with a park and an orchard. Comrade Razumovskii began to ask the people of the village what to do with master Philip's belongings.

"'You, who is standing up towards the front,' he said, 'what would you suggest we do with all this?'

"The man answered, 'What can I say about master Philip? He was a good man. He thought of us always; even when he left, he ordered all of his belongings be given away. Even I received something. I donated all of it to the collective farm, and now I don't have anything.'

"'That's nice,' the commissioner responded, 'but please, keep to the subject at hand. What should we do with the belongings?'

"The priest came up to the altar, crossed himself, and blessed all of us with a cross sign. Then he said, 'If we need to decide what should be done with all the belongings of master Philip, we will need much time.'

"'Then shorten it,' Razumovskii answered; 'stay on the subject.'

"'If you want my speech to be short,' the priest answered, 'then I say we should leave everything as is. The collective farm could use the animal yard.'

"'But it's too small,' said the commissioner. 'The entire flock of the collective farm can't fit there.'

"'At the edge of the field, we can add a structure and make it larger,' the priest suggested.

³⁴ An island in Siberia where corrupt Russian government leaders were sent.

“‘So!’ Razumovskii replied, ‘you’re concerned about the master’s goods? Do you hope the old days of being ruled by masters will return? Then go ahead and speak! Tell me your opinion about the house!’

“Quietly the priest stepped aside. Then someone continued, ‘The house is nice, and so is its yard. In a house like that, better perhaps it is proper for the management of the collective farm to have an office.’

“‘Did you drink with the master, or what?’ Razumovskii asked. ‘Where have you seen the management of a collective farm have their office in a *master’s* house? All right, you, in the back, what’s your suggestion about the orchard and the kitchen?’

“I raised my hand. ‘We’ll discuss the matter with you later,’ I said.

“One lady, who had seven children, got up and said, ‘I think we should make it a kindergarten.’

“‘Oh?’ Razumovskii said, ‘are you going to bring all of your children there and be the manager? Did you find a position for your husband, too? And will you have your oldest child be a babysitter? I see right through this request! You selfishly desire to live in the master’s house yourself and to feed your children with the collective farm goods! Ha! It’s a good plan to live on someone’s labor.’

“Not finding a satisfactory suggestion, Razumovskii addressed the public: ‘Comrades, collective farmers, think about it yourselves! What kind of preschool can exist one kilometer away from the village? During good weather you can carry your child on your back, but what about during the rain? The priest proposes to leave the animal yard there and to build on it. That, too, would not do; it’s too far from the village. For the management of the collective farms, being so far and separated from the people isn’t a good idea either. The management of the collective farm must be together with the people. When master Philip built his house, he did not want to live with you, and so he built the house outside the village. The master and the common man have never been in unity!’

“‘Comrade manager,’ someone interjected, ‘master Philip built his house before the village of Panskaya even existed. Then he gave part of his possessions away, so men left their huts which were over five kilometers away and built themselves houses.’

“‘How do you know everything, old man?’

“‘Why, everyone knows!’ he said. ‘The road from Zolochiv to Bogoduhov was empty, so the master proposed we build houses on both sides of it. Since then, our village has been called Panskaya.’

“‘Listen, old man,’ Razumovskii retorted, ‘today we are not having a lesson on history! We need to make a business decision, namely, what to do with the master’s property! What other suggestions do you have?’

“Everyone was silent, so Razumovskii himself started to pour out his plans.

“‘Comrades, on behalf of the people, we at the district council have decided to change things in your village. Some have bold ideas. There were even suggestions to move your village to a ravine and rebuild it there. I was against such a decision, so I defended your village and won. The village will stay in its place, but the master’s nest must be destroyed so that not even a single trace remains.

“We will build a stockyard in the center of the village. For this, we will take down about ten houses, and in their place we will put a pig yard, a stable, and a cow shed. We will not take down the houses right away, but after sowing season we will begin work on the stockyard.”

“Where will we get the building materials for the stockyard?” someone demanded.

“You don't know?” asked Razumovskii.

“Well, the wall around the estate is about three meters high, and it is made out of good bricks. Why don't we take it apart and build a stockyard?” said the same old man who had spoken before.

“Ha! If you think that's the case, old man, you're getting into things you know nothing about! Everyone knows the warmest and most inexpensive construction material can be made simply of red clay and straw, adobe, that is. You're right; we'll take down the wall, but all the bricks should be taken to the district headquarters because this kind of brick is a valuable thing. The authorities will decide what to do with it. We fought against the masters, and we won; now we will not leave a single trace of our repressors! Next question!

“What about the master's forge? This question we will give to Mr. Timothy Grossman. Tell us, Mr. Grossman, on what grounds did you attempt to own government property? Do you count yourself an heir of master Philip just because you are both Germans? Answer us, and the people will decide what to do with you and with the forge!”

“I don't have a forge,” I answered.

“Why are you lying to the people? Here we found the documents in the archives—they are invalid! Listen: “I, Philip Scottman, give as a present my own forge to Timothy Grossman.” At the bottom there's a signature and a stamp from a notary public.”

“Why are they invalid documents?” I asked.

“No master has any right to give away government property. Are you still going to allege that you do not own a forge?”

“Yes I will! When the collective farm was organized, I gave the forge to the collective farm and was assigned to work there as head blacksmith. The collective farm management placed me in charge of the forge work,” I said.

“And where are your copies of the documents referring to the forge as a gift?”

“I have them at home,” I said.

“Why haven't you given the documents to the collective farm together with the forge? Do you go to church and pray that the Soviet rule would fall and old days would return? Why are you so quiet? Answer! Now!”

“Grisha, he got so upset that the scar on his right cheek became as red as if it had just been put there! I remembered the threat he had made when he tried to fool me into trading the forge for his daughter. He said, ‘You will never forget me; not only you, but the entire village!’ Just then a loud noise arose which was inappropriate for God's temple. Everyone was screaming their own thing, and the

younger among us began to whistle; even the windows were rattling! The authorities got up and rang the bell which was on their table. Everyone quieted down.

“‘The collective farm has decided that the forge is to stay as is; it will not be torn down. We also will remove manager Timothy Grossman from his position, on the basis of his not being able to manage the work.’

“‘Who will be able to manage it, if not Timothy?’ asked the same old man.

“Razumovskii completely lost his patience. ‘Are you tired of living in a warm house, old man? You want to be sent to Siberia? Meeting adjourned!’

“Grisha, this is how we built a collective farm. To make our lives ‘easier’, the government made all the decisions for us, and we were not allowed to discuss them any further.”

The Great Secret

The Famine of 1933

My friendship with Uncle Tim was growing stronger. I remembered my past childish heroism and my dumb thoughts of committing suicide. At times I even imagined myself a martyr and took pleasure in it. However, those moments passed quickly, and I was ashamed of myself for having such thoughts.

Sometimes when someone bugged me with a question like, "Hey, Hero, how are you?" I thought, "do you really want to know how I'm suffering?" I wanted to forget about the hero incident, like a crazy dream, and to calm down after it, but I could not. Maybe I was better off this way.

Once I told Uncle Tim what I had thought at our first meeting, when the manager told him to keep his eye on me. I told him how afraid I had been of him, and how I thought that he would spy on me and tell everything to the management. When I finished telling that to Uncle Tim, he started to laugh. Then he patted my shoulder and said, "You're a fool, you harmless lamb; why would I spy on you? What kind of an enemy would you make?" so I kept bugging him.

"Uncle Tim, how did the collective farm authorities treat you?" I asked.

"Well, Grisha, pretty well, I would say, but I could see that they were obeying the district authorities. Once the head manager of the collective farm came into the forge and said, 'Tomorrow you will leave this job. You will go to the fields and plant.'

"Back then, the equipment for planting a field was very primitive. You would tie up a bag in front of you and put the seeds in it. Each man was given a strip of land about five meters wide, and the seeds to plant it with. That year, it rained soon after the crops were planted. Everyone was happy, for now the harvest would be good because it was planted on time.

"The collective farms sprung up and took all our land, so we had to cut down the trees to make new fields for ourselves to farm. Our storage sheds were torn down, too, because there was no need for them anymore; we had given away our farms. So we would work on the collective farms for ten hours a day, and then in the evening we would work in our own little gardens. Soon after we had planted, I was called on to cut down the master's garden.

"The authorities came from the district office and ordered that the wall on master Philip's estate be torn down. Everyone was forced to do this job; even the women and children were to help. Master Philip's entire wall was quickly torn down and carted off to the district office.

"That summer happened to be extremely hot, and we did not get much rain. In the middle of July, our own fields turned yellow. It was better on the collective farms because there, everything had been planted earlier. We were happy that the wheat ears were getting full. Now everything was ours; the land was ours, and the garden was ours, too. We hope that we would have our own potatoes for the winter.

"The harvest which was collected that year was fairly good. It had not been as good in the previous years. Most work was done at sunrise because it was too hot during the day, and seeds started multiplying for us to collect.

"We used to go to church on Sunday mornings, but now the authorities had closed the church until winter. 'Until the harvest is collected,' it was decreed, 'no one shall take a day off.'

"The inspectors visited us one after another. Where did they all come from? For every five laborers there was one manager. And each of them was well trained, too. One would say, 'You aren't holding the mower right,' and another, 'You won't mow a whole roll if you do this or that....'

Five-minute breaks were allowed every hour. Who knew when these breaks should have come since none of us had a watch? We were so tired from our work that we had no energy nor time to work on our own gardens. After the harvest, we separated the grain from the straw. This was done with chains. Once, a delegation committee and the district authorities visited us. They even said that representatives from Moscow accompanied them. They, too, were experiencing a heat wave, so they had to go around to all the collective farms. They announced new laws concerning seed planting. They scolded the village authorities and called us lazy. They explained where things needed to be planted and when it needed to be harvested. Then they announced that we were in great debt.

"For two years, they said, they had taken pity on us and attempted to stabilize the collective farms. Now, we owed them a lot. Also, they explained that a penalty had to be paid on the debt accumulated in the past few years.

"They took away all our grain and left nothing in return. You must remember that year, Grisha. It was the year of the great famine. Only eight years have passed since then. Things like that are not quickly forgotten. The famine did not only take place in our region, but also throughout the whole Ukraine and in many parts of Russia. Many people starved to death.

"You and I are still alive, Grisha. Even though things are difficult, we are still alive. Years will pass and much will be erased from our history. The newspapers do not write about the famine, and the radio is silent, too. In the beginning, there were mild protests and some local authorities were blamed. Some collective farm managers were replaced--but with that, things ended. Your family must have been affected by the famine, too. Do you remember anything?" Uncle Tim asked.

"Yes," I answered. "I do remember, not very clearly, yet a feeling of hunger has lingered inside of me. I don't know anything about the harvest. Back then I did not understand much about it. I remember once we were sitting at the table after we had just eaten. Mom and Dad were talking. All of a sudden they became worried; they looked outside and saw carriages coming. A few carriages stopped by our yard, and men headed toward our house. My father put his hands around his head and began to moan softly.

"The door opened. Two men came in and started to bark orders, 'Put your hands on the table and don't move.'

"Being frightened, I dove under the table, but one of the men yelled, 'Where do you think you are going, you scared little puppy? Get out! Now!'

"He took out a paper and began to read it. What he read was lengthy and confusing. I only understood one thing, and it sounded like we had stolen a lot of bread.

"I thought, 'We did not steal bread; we ate it with soup.' My father said, 'I did not take anything from anyone that did not belong to me. I have taken only what they have given me as pay for my work.'

"One man was holding a dagger. It appeared he thought it was easier to force the grain away from the peasants with the dagger.

"Search the barn, the cellar, and the attic!" he yelled. 'Take all the grain, all the cereal, and all the flour. I am ordering you!' Pointing to my father, he shouted, 'And you...stay quiet and keep your hands on the table!'

"I thought that robbers had come to our house. They had recently come to our neighbor's house and taken their cow away, but my parents had been silent while our neighbors screamed. 'If I scream,' I thought, 'the man will hit me on the head just like he hit our neighbor. I'd better stay quiet.'

"Before long, the men left in their carriages. My father went outside to look around, but my mom stayed at the table. In a moment he returned and quietly said, 'They took everything--our cereal, the cow, and the heifer. The only thing left is a few potatoes. There aren't enough left for next year's planting; not even enough to last us through the winter.'

"My mother could not hold back her tears anymore and started to cry. My sister Olya and I cried with her. Then the youngest two joined us.

"'You can't fix anything with tears,' my father said. 'Just be encouraged. Somehow with God's help, we'll make it. There's a saying that goes: "Just as God gives, God takes away."

"I thought to myself, 'God *did* give, but *people* took it away.'

"Two weeks later, the same two men came back again. Again, around dinnertime as my mother was serving us food.

"'You have more debt to pay,' the men said. 'Why didn't you surrender everything you had?'

"'I did not give you anything,' my father answered. 'You took it yourselves.'

"'Search everything!' the man yelled. 'Leave no stone unturned. Check even the pots in the oven!'

"'Look, here, sir,' said one man. 'I've found a bag of millet and a pot of porridge.'

"'Good!' answered the other. 'Take the millet away and throw the porridge out.'

"He came up to the table and sneered, 'Ha! Eating our government's food, are you!'

"He took my plate from me and threw it on the ground. Uncle Tim, tell me how they stole *your* food. My father has never talked about it with me."

"Grisha, it is dangerous to talk about it," said Timothy. "You were still a school-age child then. You could have talked about it to your schoolmates, and they could have passed it on to others! Then before you would have known it, one night your father would be missing. Now you're a grown-up, about seventeen already. Now you can decide whom you share things with and where you stay quiet. I don't have any family, children, or relatives anymore. I lost them a long time ago. Now I have nothing else to lose. Grisha, please remember, if you say anything without thinking, you will only harm yourself. As for me, I just don't care anymore.

"The year 1933 is a major governmental secret. For this secret, hundreds of thousands have perished. My advice is this, Grisha: never say *anything* you know about it. Listen to me, Grisha; I tell you this as I would my own son. Perhaps someday you can share this secret with your children and grandchildren. As for now, you could be taken to court for this talk and accused of blasphemy against your homeland. Don't forget that.

"On the radio and in newspapers they say that we are building heavy industry. That's true, but the industry is being built on human bones. The famine in Ukraine was devastating; entire villages starved to death. You can't find anything in print on this topic. In conversations, if anyone remembers their family or any relatives who starved to death, they talk about it very carefully. The cause of that tragedy is the famine of 1933. Nobody talks about why this famine occurred. It is explained quite simply: drought and bad harvest. You were only a little boy then, but you have not forgotten how a bowl of porridge was taken away from you. I have not forgotten how people were deprived of their belongings, either. The harvest was good that year. The older men said that the harvest was excellent compared to many previous years. Now people laugh at God, saying that if God existed, there would never have been a famine like that.

"God didn't bring the famine. People just did what they pleased without any concern for others, for our economy, for what was happening around them. In the beginning the authorities closed private banks and made them public. In this way, the banks became empty.

"As a result, common people did not trust the new authorities and kept valuables--like gold and silver--at home. That is what needed to be taken away from the people, the authorities thought. But how? Nobody would surrender it freely. Something must be given in return. Something like a plow, a mower, a grinder, or a sewing machine. Again, some would buy it and some wouldn't. Therefore, an easy method was developed. It was a method that had been proven for many generations. The method was simple robbery.

"'Volunteers' as they were called, would come into the house and say, 'Sir, put your hands up if you want to live and if the life of your family is precious to you. You, lady, bring out everything edible that you have and put it on the table.'

"For his own life, any man would give anything," Tim said.

"What if one had nothing," I asked, "did he die?"

"It depended on the robber," said Tim. "There is a song by Karmelyuk that goes: 'They call me a criminal just because I kill people. But I only kill the rich and reward the poor, so as I divide the money I no longer have any sin on me.' They see a poor man, but what can they take from him? But if they notice a peasant who is better off, they will take everything that can be taken. In the fall of 1932, a massive robbery took place. It was believed to be the greatest robbery of all. Right at the Kremlin! This is what I called 'the governmental secret.'

"Uncle Tim," I interrupted, "can you explain it in more detail, please? Somehow I am having difficulty understanding everything."

"I will tell you about our village, and you will understand." Tim answered. "Our village was popular for its wealth. Naturally, where there is wealth, there is jealousy. That year, we were not

bothered for a long time. All the people who were better off were called 'kulaks'. All the poor folks were assembled and called 'activists', and the youth were signed up into *Komsomol*. These *Komsomoly* were convinced by the authorities that the rich were enemies who lived on the labor of the poor. The *Komsomoly* were given the right to take any clothing they wished, but all the bread and all the livestock was now government property and needed to be taken away to the city.

"The easy pay tempted the poor youth. They had been granted freedom; they could do whatever they wished. So these *Komsomol* youth began to break into and rob houses. Every village received these 'visitors' along with the district representatives. The *Komsomoly* were sent to distant villages so they would not be ashamed to rob people. So it went...here and there, little by little, valuables were taken from the people. They took anything their souls desired; everything was so easy and free! *Komsomol* attacks hit all sides of a village at once. Nothing could be hidden. The village men did try to bury grain and vegetables at night. But if any buried goods were discovered, the owner was in deep trouble and could be beaten to death. Many people escaped on horseback. The elderly and the family men would only wave their hands hopelessly, knowing that they could not leave their families.

"There was trouble everywhere, but our Panskaya seemed to have been forgotten. We lived peacefully, and ate well, too. Soon the end of November had come, and it was already near freezing outside. Suddenly, unexpected visitors showed up in our tranquil village. They came in carts full of young men, as though they were going to a party. Every yard was invaded, and the robbery began.

"There was much to be taken. To make the villagers more frightened, our 'visitors' started fires all around the village. Five windmills were burned in the fields. The men in our village weren't simple folk. Everyone started defending their goods. Some took up pitchforks to defend themselves, some axes. We had many *shtundi*, however, and they did not defend themselves. The men could come into their homes and take anything. They stood in the middle of the yard and prayed with their hands lifted.

"Sooner or later, I noticed that Razumovskii himself was in charge of the robbers. I remembered again his promise that not only I, but the entire village, would remember him. The women kissed his hands and begged him to leave something for the sake of their children. That day he was not the same as he was when he had no authority. That day he was the boss. He just looked to his sides to make sure his protectors hadn't run away, for wherever he had protection, he was a hero.

"He took his anger out on the *shtundi*. They had not joined the collective farm, so now they were 'enemies of the people'. He had the right to treat them anyway he pleased.

"The *shtundi's* leader lived a few houses down the street. He was a smart man, a man who could quickly master anything he laid his hands on. His name was Pavel Matveich. He was well-off. He owned over fifty sheep. That day about ten carriages rolled up to his yard. They dragged bags of grain and all sorts of other valuables from his house. I remember hearing an argument that began between two of Razumovskii's men as they robbed his house. There were only two boots and each man wanted them for himself. One yelled, 'Give me that boot! I saw them first!'

"'I was taking it first, but you pushed me!' answered the other.

"They opened a chest. It had two coats and a sheepskin in it. They went after it like vultures. But Razumovskii stopped the feeding frenzy with his order, 'Nobody take anything from here! Put

everything back in the chest and load it onto my carriage. Take all his sheep away. This man is a heretic, a *shtundi*, an enemy of the people!’

“Our Pavel Matveich just stood there as though he had taken a mouthful of water. He looked like a saint from an icon and only repeated, ‘Just as God gives, God taketh away. Let your will be done, Lord.’

“They carried the baby sheep, but the other sheep were driven out from the fold. All sorts of stuff was being loaded onto carts. The sheep walked calmly--they were sheep, after all. Only Razumovskii was yelling, ‘Move! Faster!’

“They brought the last sheep in and said, ‘Comrade Razumovskii, only one ram is left in the fold, and it's quite rabid.’

“‘Take it too!’ said Razumovskii as he bent down to look at the sheep.

“They opened the gates to drive the ram out, but just then, something happened that nobody expected. The ram got loose, picked up speed, and hit Razumovskii head-on!

“Razumovskii flew out of his carriage and landed on the other side. He could only say ‘Ow!’ as he bent over and moaned. But then he yelled, ‘Kill it! Kill the beast! It belongs to Pavel Matveich! He made the ram crazy so it would kill me! Just look how he stands with his hands raised!’

“What happened next is hard to explain. Razumovskii was put on a carriage and taken away. I could not hold it in anymore, and started to laugh,” Tim said.

“That's exactly what the man deserved, Uncle Tim!” I said. “Even the ram was smart enough to figure out who caused all the trouble!”

“I was a godless man,” continued Tim, “even a *Komsomol*; but oh, how I wished that the ram would tear through all the *Komsomoly*’s pants!”

“What happened later, Uncle Tim?” I asked.

“Well, after that, they could not take the ram captive. All the sheep gathered around it. Matveich stepped aside and called all the sheep to him. The sheep were obedient. They put their heads down and walked toward the sheep Matveich. The ram followed. Then Matveich brought a rope. He tied the ram to the carriage by its horns. The sheep were tied up, too. Then the men on the carriage left.

“So, only God's servant, Pavel Matveich, was unfortunate that day. Grisha, I don't understand him. He was such a strong man, but not only did he not protest against the robbers, he also helped them himself! The next day he decided to leave. The entire village gathered in his yard. The people were so fortunate that his ram saved the entire village from bloodshed. Everyone was ready to protest his departure with all their might.

“Matveich just came out onto the porch, took his hat off, and suggested everyone else do the same.

“‘Let's all thank God for such an end,’ he said. ‘It could have been so much worse.’ Everyone took their hats off; some praised God, some just stood there. Whether they were praising God or not,

everyone understood that something big was happening. At the end Matveich prayed. Then he said his farewell.

“‘My dear villagers!’ he said. ‘Yesterday the wind began to blow. May God protect you from a storm, for a storm *will* come. This village will disappear. Those of you who believe in God, save yourselves by running away. God has made it clear to me that I must leave this place. Thus, I am leaving.’

“‘When?’ we asked.

“‘Today,’ he answered.

“‘Where will you go?’

“‘I don't know. My God will save me. All of you, please forgive me for anything I have done against you. If I did not give proper attention to someone, I ask forgiveness for everything. I will not take any grievances with me either.’

“And so he left. We had eleven *shtundi* families in our village. They all left with Matveich. We lived peacefully for the next two weeks. We even began to laugh at the *shtundi* for leaving when nobody was coming after them. Then, all of a sudden, news of a new law came from the city. It read:

All villagers must pay the debt which has accumulated over the past two years. All grain must be given to the government at once.

“The law implied that baked bread would be brought in and sold at the village stores, and that it was only there we could buy it. It turned out that we would have to pay for the bread that was ours to begin with. Those who protested against the new law were taken away at night and did not return. Everyone quickly understood that they should keep quiet if they wanted to live.

“Government workers came to take away all the grain and the livestock. The conversation they had with us was short. ‘For the smallest peep of protest you will be shot on the spot.’ Nobody thought of protesting. I checked what I had left. My dog, Riabko, was still alive. The granary the empty, not a grain was left. I checked the cellar. Everything was gone. Only a few cucumbers and a few potatoes were left for next year's planting.

“I asked my wife, ‘What are we going to do, Katya?’

“Matveich told us all to be saved from this by going away, but where were we to go? We had two small children and a third one was on the way. We needed to wait at least until winter passed before going anywhere. His words had come true so far, and there were still a few of his prophecies yet to come. He said that the village would disappear, as though God had told him Himself. What frightening words! I wished we could make it through the winter and then leave. But how were we going to make it? We counted all the potatoes. If we rationed them carefully, they would last only until the beginning of March. This was not only the case for us, but for the entire village.

“So, the horrible winter of 1933 began. The village felt like it had died out. People were not visiting each other like they used to. Once my family and I were sitting in our house. It had just turned dark outside, and a cold wind whistled in the chimney. Our dog began to bark. I felt worried.

“ ‘Katyusha,’ I said, ‘what should we do? We have divided all the potatoes among ourselves, but we have forgotten our dog! What should we do with him? Maybe we should let him loose, let him run where he wishes?’ The dog barked again. We just looked at one another. In such weather a good owner never kicked his dog out.

“A snowstorm was coming, so I didn't want to leave the house. Where could I go in such weather on an empty stomach? ‘But what if I was the only one that has nothing left, and everyone else does?’ I thought. Besides I needed a little advice. I decided to dress warmly and go out into the village.

“I came into a neighboring house where a widow lived. As soon as she saw me she burst into tears and said, ‘Everyone has abandoned me, Timosha! Even you no longer stop by. I was robbed in the middle of the day; they took everything, and left only a few potatoes! My poor widow’s head! In the name of God, I beg you, please don't forget me and my orphaned children.’

“It was difficult to look at her tears. I almost started to cry myself.

“‘My dear neighbor,’ I said, ‘they took everything away from me, too.’

“I left her house with a heavy heart. My legs almost refused to move. At home I was welcomed by my hungry dog. He rubbed against my legs and looked into my eyes as if asking for bread. I let him loose saying, ‘Survive as best you can.’ I asked my wife, ‘Katyusha, when was the last time you fed the dog?’

“‘I did not feed him anything today nor the day before,’ she answered. ‘Timosha, the potatoes are running out fast; what are we going to feed the children?’

“I heard a knock at the window. I looked up and in amazement, saw our dog knocking with his paw. He was begging for food.

“I took my portion of soup, gave it to my dog, and went to bed hungry.

“After some time, I decided to go around the village again. Maybe I could get some bread from someone for my children and the widow. Her tears would not give me any peace. I went out of the house, but I had no idea where to go. Then I got the idea of going to a rich man's house. I knew a man who used to be a beekeeper. He had many bee hives and was a good man. He and his wife used to treat me with honey from time to time.

“I went over and was invited in. The man was lying in bed. His wife was keeping the oven hot, and it seemed like she was preparing to cook something. I went to the man and could see he had lost a lot of weight. I decided not to ask him for any charity, and only asked, ‘How are things going?’

“‘What things?’ He could hardly answer. ‘People are swelling from hunger. My wife and I have worked from dawn to dusk; we saved for dark days. Now they have come. The men from the *Komsomol* stormed the house and took everything we had. They left only a few beets. So now we cook sparingly and drink all the broth. Nothing is wasted. My legs have started to swell up. I remember how much Matveich insisted that I leave my house, take my wife, and go. He was a good man, but who listened to him? Only his common believers left with him. I did not listen to him and depended on my own riches. I have saved up a lot of gold and could have bought a few cows with it. Now I would trade it all for a loaf of bread! Who would take the gold now? Who needs that trash? I've offered it to several men, but no

one even wants to look at it. I would go wherever my eyes could see now if I could, but I can't move my legs anymore. I can only walk through the yard with a cane. The rest of the time I lay in bed, waiting for my last day.'

"I understood that there was no hope of helping the widow and myself. I went home with empty hands. Katiusha was hoping I'd bring at least a handful of flour or a piece of bread.

"Grisha, I can't talk about those terrible times anymore. It's frightening just to hear about it, let alone seeing it in my mind's eye as I remember. I would rather you tell me how you survived the famine," Tim finished.

"Uncle Tim," I said, "I remember very little and know nothing about other people. I read in the newspaper that there was a minor famine because of a drought, but the people made it through. We had a harvest of potatoes, but I don't know how much. I remember how Mother used to divide the potato soup among us. While dividing the soup, she would say, 'There's no more left, so don't ask for seconds.' Sometimes she would cook potatoes in their skins, add some cucumbers, and split it amongst us. We would also make tea out of cherry and raspberry branches. Mother wouldn't give us any sugar, but she would fool us by putting salt on the table and saying, 'Take only a little. It's bad for you, since nowadays sugar is very salty.'

"Eventually, using salt in tea instead of sugar became a normal thing. Sometimes my father would bring home some flour, and my mother would cook us some flour soup. On those days we didn't drink tea because mother said that our tea consisted of the soup we ate. Sometimes family friends would come by and tell us that there was some bread in the city. They also told us about something called *torgsiny*. I never knew what *torgsiny* were; I thought they were something edible."

Here Uncle Tim laughed and said, "Not everything is edible! *Torgsiny* where the stores where you exchanged gold or silver for bread. These stores were unknown in our town."

"That may be how we survived," I said, "because we had gold." I continued, "In my hometown, everybody used to talk about *torgsiny*, even the children. Once my father went into town and was gone for two days. He returned home with two loaves of bread and said, 'Sasha (that's my mother's name), they gave me two loaves. They won't give more. The line was very long. People arrived there the night before, and we only arrived in the morning.'

"That bread was rationed extremely carefully by my mother, who made it last a long, long time. We would eat the bread in the morning and evening, drinking only warm water in the afternoon.

"I remember once on Christmas Father brought some more bread and said, 'Sasha, this is it; I don't have a penny left and nothing to exchange, either.'

"Once my father brought some liquid home from work. This liquid was the color of blood and tasted sour. We used to have an alcohol factory located in the village of *Dyblanka*. There they used to make alcohol out of our grain. After the plant closed down, all of the people of the village went there and brought home this sour liquid. However, I remember my mother said, 'Vasili, everyone has been poisoned by this. Please throw it out.'

"But most of all, I remember my birthday, the 24th of March. My mother cooked us dinner. She gave everybody, including herself and Father, one potato, but she gave me two and said, 'Today Grisha's the birthday boy.'

"Vladimir, my younger brother, suddenly cried, 'I want to be a birthday boy, too! Why does Grisha get two potatoes and we only get one!' There was crying at the table. That was a time when I showed my heroism and said, 'Let this be for everyone.' After that, we drank tea, and mother said, 'Now children, this is it. I cooked the last potato, and now we will have to live on water.'

"We all gained weight from drinking the water. Back then I did not understand that a body swells up because of starvation. We did not feel like eating anymore. It was during this time that our father went away for awhile, and our mother stayed with us.

"Once she brought in the wooden tub she used to make dough in. She saw that there was still some dough stuck to the sides and bottom of it, so she scraped it off, divided it into small piles, and made us some soup. For a while we lived on that alone. She kept repeating, 'Oh when will the nettle start to grow?'

"When my father returned, I hardly recognized him. He was thin and scary looking. 'Look, Sasha, I brought you some nettle; it has just appeared from the ground.' Mother cooked the nettle and gave everybody half a cup. To Father she said, 'Drink a little, and then in half an hour drink some more.' He drank it and kept looking at me strangely. I thought he was going to take the nettle from me, so I quickly ate my whole share. It has been so many years, but I still remember how scary he looked, and how he groaned, 'Hurry up,' when the nettle was being divided. He asked for seconds. My mother walked him over to his bed and said, 'Lie down and I will cook you some more.'

"Then she said to us, 'Now children, you can say we have made it. The grass is beginning to grow.'

"The next day my mother herself went to look for nettle, and Father stayed home in bed. In a week my mother let us go to a nearby meadow to pick the rushes. She did not allow us to eat the green part. We could only pick the roots and eat the white part of it. And so, Uncle Tim, we lived through that year.

"When I went back to school, I told my cousin how we were grazing in a meadow like animals. He said that he had also been eating the rushes to survive, but the neighboring boy had been eating raw nettle. My cousin had suggested he go to the meadow and eat some rushes, as we had.

"Because of intense hunger, the boy ate not only the white part, but the green part, too. After eating this the boy didn't feel very well. My cousin got scared and ran home. The next day the boy died. His whole family eventually died.

"Not everybody was as fortunate as we were. A lot of people died that year."

"Yes," said Tim. "I would not wish such suffering even on my worst enemy. Remember how I told you about Matveich and how he advised us to run to safety? Well, I met Pavel Matveich here in Kharkov. All his fellow believers survived.

"Grisha, I will now tell you things that I have not told anyone, but only if you have strong nerves and you are not weak of stomach," Uncle Tim said.

"No, I am not, Uncle Tim," I replied. "Tell me everything. One can't read about it in books, so I want to know everything." And Uncle Tim went on.

"Alright then. The death toll from that year is still a secret. In newspapers it is simply written: 'Accidental deaths occurred.' Just says you can't hide a needle in a bed, you can't hide a massive, widespread famine. No matter how much they try to keep the number of deaths a secret, it will be out in the open someday. The numbers are not small. Hundreds of thousands perished. Entire villages died out, but they can't speak for themselves now, can they? And the survivors are silent. We are afraid to speak about the tragedy that fell upon us.

"My family could not survive the winter on potatoes alone. At the end of January, the potatoes were almost gone. I went into the granary and found it empty. All I saw were mice running around. I suggested to Katya, 'What if we catch mice and eat them?'

"'I can't,' she replied. 'I can starve to death, but I can't eat mice. I don't mind if you cook them for the children and feed them. Maybe you can even eat some yourself.'

"'I can't eat them, either,' I admitted.

"'What if we roast them over a fire?' she suggested.

"'You can roast them but not eat them. We need to think of something since we are running out of potatoes.'

"'Timosha,' said Katya after a long pause, 'kill our Riabko. In these circumstances, it won't be considered a sin. The children are so weak already.'

"'But what can we get out of that dog?' I asked, knowing she was right; 'it's just skin and bones.' Then all of a sudden I got an idea. 'What if we feed the dog mice? Only how would we be able to do that? It's not a cat; it won't go after mice.'

"I decided to make up a mouse trap and try to feed the dog. I caught a mouse. I threw it to the dog, but he wouldn't eat it. He just kept looking at the mouse and then at me.

" 'Let's feed Riabko salty water and roast the mouse a bit,' Katya suggested.

"So we did it and it worked out fine. The mouse was eaten like a piece of meat. Riabko ate everything. A little later I brought Riabko a live mouse, and he ate that, too. Then I opened all the barns for the dog so he would catch the mice himself. If I ever caught one, I would give it to the dog. In a week Riabko had gained weight. We had fed Riabko; now it was Riabko's turn to feed us. I put a rope around Riabko's head and got a knife and a dish for draining the blood.

"'Please don't bring the blood in the house, Tim,' Katya said. 'You'll frighten the children, and I just can't look at it.'

"Riabko ran around and rubbed against my legs as though he felt his death coming. I tightened the rope on his neck and tied him up. He was used to a collar, so he didn't attempt to run away. I pulled the rope high above my head, and our Riabko was hanging from it on the other end. I grabbed a knife

and slit his throat. I drained the blood onto the plate and drank it. Then I skinned the dog, threw his hide in the corner, and took the meat inside. Although he had been our loyal dog, I felt like I had just killed a rooster.

“‘Let's cut this meat so it will last a month,’ said Katya.

“‘We started to divide it, but there was not even enough to last half a month. I looked at my children, Lyusia and Grisha. Their faces were swollen, and they had deep hollows under their eyes. They could hardly walk around the room. Oh, and poor Katyiusha, her eyes had no life left in them.

“‘There is nothing to divide,’ I said. ‘First, we will cook some bouillon and drink it. Then we will add some more. If we don't feed the children now, it will be too late.’

“‘After that meat we all gained a little strength, but the meat ran out far too quickly. What were we going to do now? Katya reminded me about the dog's hide. I ran into the barn to get it so that maybe we could cook something from it. I looked around, but there was not even a trace of the skin left. The rats had eaten it all. I almost broke into tears from this. I was so angry at myself! ‘Why didn't I take the skin inside?’ I thought. I was so depressed, and what would I tell Katya? She had sent me for the skin. How could I go back empty-handed? I thought of catching the rats, but even cats die from eating rats. How can I feed that to my children? They had just gained a little strength; How could I feed them such a thing?

“‘I thought I was going to lose it. ‘Why should I live like this?’ I thought to myself. I lived for my wife and my children, but now I was thinking of killing them myself! In front of my eyes, I could picture my dying children and Katya--all swollen up. I tried to calm down. What if I did bring the skin to them? We could live on it for a week, and then what? We would just die. What's the difference whether you die today or a week later? Katyiusha said that the cellar was completely empty, but what if I checked it again? I went down to the cellar. Everything was gone. I began to move barrels around and look in the corners behind them. Suddenly I saw some potatoes in one corner. From all the excitement, I forgot to take any with me and ran back to the house.

“‘Katyiusha!’ I exclaimed, ‘we have some potatoes left in the cellar, in the corner! I went down again and took half a bucket full. I could not carry any more.

“‘Katyiusha! there's more!’

“‘More’ meant a full bucket. It was only the beginning of February. We warmed up the oven, cooked some potato soup, and ate it. It felt so good. I brought all the potatoes into the house. I climbed up to the attic, dug around, and found some planting corn. Now we came back to life. We had made it to the middle of February. I noticed that Katyiusha was very weak. I took all the household duties upon myself. I cooked, heated the oven, and picked what kernels there were from the corn. Katya still served the table. She said it was a woman's job. Later, though, she got so weak that she gave that up, too.

“‘Sometimes she would walk around the room, but with much pain. Our family would be increasing in two months. I started to do everything myself and fed Katya with double- size portions. Poor Katya couldn't even make it to the table. She asked me to go around the village again.

“‘Timosha,’ she said, ‘save our children. We have both money and gold. Give it all away and at least buy some bread.’

"I went around the village, trying to think who I could ask for help. I decided to visit my neighbor, the widow. Because of my own troubles, I had forgotten about her. I knocked, but nobody opened the door. I kicked in the door and walked in. There was complete silence. I looked in the kitchen and could tell that the oven had not been heated for awhile. I went into another room. A bed was piled high with pillows, but there was not a soul to be seen. I went outside but saw no tracks there. 'Maybe they're dead already,' I thought; 'but if they're dead, where are they?' I decided to look through the house. I checked on top of the oven and under the beds but found no one. I glanced at the bed again. I lifted the pillows, and there they were. My neighbor and her two daughters, just lying there.

"I jumped away. I immediately decided they were dead, but then I thought, 'What if they are in a deep, deep sleep?' I went up to them again. At first I called them each by name quietly and then louder and louder. I touched one's forehead and found it was cold. I took off my hat and crossed myself. I began to think how to dig a hole and bury them. The earth was frozen. I decided they could lie there until it was warmer.

"After the initial shock left me, I decided to forage for food since they would no longer need it. I went down to the cellar; I looked through everything. There was nothing but three potatoes left. I checked the barn, but it was entirely empty. I looked in the storage room, but found nothing there either. In the hallway, a small bag was hanging. I took it down and felt something like beans inside it. I looked and found it was beans. But how could I take it? I would be stealing from a widow! I went up to the bed and asked for forgiveness for taking her food without permission. I asked God for forgiveness of my sin. Then I brought the food home and Katya said, 'Save the children; I can't live any longer.'

"I looked at them. They were so extremely emaciated! 'I needed to give them more food,' I thought, 'but where could I possibly get it? Maybe I could go to my friends' house and bow down to their feet. Maybe I can go to the newlyweds' house? They were just married last summer. Many times on my way back from work, they invited me in for tea. They were a good couple; they would even share their last piece of bread.'

"Even though they lived quite far away, I decided to go to them first. I went up to the house. The gates and the door to the house were open. The samovar was standing on the table, and instead of sugar, there was salt. The house was so clean; it looked like they were expecting guests. A note was lying on the table. It read: 'God forgive us' and it was dated February twenty-third. That looked like it was written three days ago. I looked around and saw the two of them lying on the bed, as though they were sleeping. They had fallen asleep forever.

"I went closer to them. Their bodies were extremely swollen, they must have been drinking water with salt up to their last days. The woman was lying with her wedding dress laid right on top of her because it was too small. She was twice her size now. The man was dressed in a suit with one hand in the sleeve and one loose. What a beautiful couple they were! How horrible to look at them! For reasons I do not understand, I went closer still. I saw that the woman's dress was stained with blood and that the man's hand had blood on it.

"I lifted his hand a little, and saw that both of them had slit their wrists. I came up to the table again and re-read the note. I read simply, 'God forgive us.'

"To me, these words are filled with horrible meaning. They say that those who commit suicide don't go to heaven. I crossed myself and said, 'Please God, forgive them.'

"The pain I was going through and the pain people were experiencing all around me made it extremely hard to walk home. When I got home, I told Katya about the shocking picture that I had just seen. She just gave me a pleading look.

"Please,' she said desperately, 'don't do that to yourself. Tim, please, save the children.'

"Grisha, it is so painful to remember everything that I have seen and all I have been through. But let me go on, for your sake. I decided to go into the village again. I resolved not to return until I had at least a piece of bread to give the children. In my head I kept hearing Katya's words, over and over again: 'Save the children.'

"I walked into another house. It was completely still, quiet, and cold. My legs became heavy, and I could not walk. Could it be true that the entire village had died? 'No,' I thought, 'just for my wife and children, I have to keep living.' I felt like a thief, but I had not come to steal. All I needed was some bread.

"The table was nicely decorated, and something was on it, covered with a hand-sewn towel. I could not believe my eyes when I lifted the towel and found gold coins with a note that read: 'You bastards. You took our lives. Go ahead, take this trash, too.'

"Who needed gold when their family was starving to death? I just wanted to live and to at least find a piece of bread. The bastards had taken their lives? That meant they were no longer alive. I went through one bedroom, then through another. Everything was silent. Then I came into the living room, and there I saw two dead bodies hanging.

"Seeing all this horror, I lost all the fear I had left. I repeated in my head the words on the note, 'You bastards. You took our lives. Go ahead, take this trash too.' No, I was not a bastard and I did not need that 'trash'; but if they even had one piece of dry bread, I *would* take that. I searched the entire kitchen and found about half of a bucket of potatoes and some millet. 'Why did they commit suicide?' I thought. 'They could have lived for a few more days.'

"The potatoes were frozen solid and felt hard as a rock. I brought the food home and said, 'I have collected a large harvest today!'

"Katya only answered, 'Please, feed the children.'

"I heated up the oven, and soon the room got warm. I was happy that Katya would eat now since she had been just drinking water lately and gave all her food to the children. She kept saying that she did not want anything to eat. I came up to the bed and said, 'Katyusha, please, don't die. I will prepare something to eat now.'

"Timosha,' she said, 'it's too late now. Just save the children.'

"She was terribly swollen. 'Give me some water,' she said quietly.

"I cooked the frozen potatoes and tried to feed her some. 'Timosha,' she said, 'I can't swallow. Please, just give me water.'

"I mashed the potatoes and mixed them with water. With great difficulty she drank that. I felt horrible. What was I to do now? There was no one to help me. And even if there was, how could they help me when they were starving to death themselves? My daughter started to cry. I came up to the bed again and said, 'Katyusha, please, eat for my sake! Please! What will I do without you?'

"She took two sips and swung her head away. 'I can't,' she said, more quietly than ever.

"Even the children began begging her to eat. She refused. I decided to eat some myself; I hadn't had a bite to eat that day. I started to eat, but my thoughts were all of Katya. I looked at her; she was swollen and could not swallow anything. I looked into her eyes; they were just as blue, except now they were motionless."

Suddenly Uncle Tim became silent. I looked at him and he was crying.

"I can't talk about it, Grisha," he said quietly; "it's too difficult. What did I do to deserve that? Why did they take my wife away?"

"What about your children?" I asked.

"I could not save the children either. I can't talk about it today. One day, when I have enough strength, I will tell you. Grisha, I just ask one thing of you. Please, don't tell anyone anything I have told you. Nothing can give me back my family, but you can get into very, very deep trouble. I could not fulfill my wife's request to save our children. She lived only for their sake, not her own. She hoped to save them. We lived together for only seven years! She was an orphan since she was two! May those who destroy other people's lives be cursed!"

He sat down on a bench.

"Uncle Tim," I said softly, "the shift is over now; it's time to go home."

Uncle Tim left, but I could not calm down after his story. There was a lecture in the factory club that day called "The Origin of Man." "Maybe I should go there," I thought. "Admission is free, why not?"

When I arrived, many had already gathered for the lecture. As usual, the lecturer started talking about God. He criticized the ancient Egyptians for turning their pharaohs into gods.

I sat there and thought, "What's so different about modern people and the ancient Egyptians? They put up statues of the pharaohs and bowed down to them. Here we have a statue of Lenin on every corner. How is he different from an idol?" I was in such deep thought that I realized I was missing the lecture.

I started to listen again. They were explaining that God did not create human life, but that human beings had created God. Only where did human life originate? The second lecturer said that human life had come from nature. He was speaking so foolishly though, that he did not even seem to understand it himself. He told us about human-like monkeys, and how they had developed over time to be quite like humans. But then, they had disappeared somewhere, and humans appeared. The life forms which most likely filled the steps in between were called "The Missing Link." Even Darwin had attempted to discover The Missing Link, but he could not. So monkeys and macaques are our ancestors.

"Does anyone have any questions?" the lecturer asked.

Everyone was silent.

I stood up.

"Yes," I said. "How can anything that's not living create something living and give it life?"

"You need to study chemistry," replied the lecturer. "If one chemical is combined with another, a third chemical is formed that is totally different from the previous two. It's as simple as that. Are there any other questions?"

I decided that the lecturer had not answered my question at all and most likely could not.

The following Monday, Uncle Tim continued his story. "My dear Katya did not get up from bed again. I kept going out and looking for food. Sometimes I would come upon a house where there were still some people alive. They would ask me for bread. In those cases I would just leave. I looked for houses that had dead people in them. There I could at least find something to survive on."

"I even saw cases where a dead body lay ravaged by rats or dogs. I came into one hut and saw two children's heads. The man must have eaten the children and then died himself. I did not take anything from that place, and hurried home. As I came closer to the house, I heard my children crying. I went in and saw that Katya had fallen asleep forever. I crossed myself and wished for her soul to go to the eternal kingdom. I was exhausted. I had no more tears to give my dearest Katya.

"With tremendous difficulty, I managed to drag her body into the barn so it would lie there until it got warm outside. The children could not stop crying. I decided to do everything I could to keep my children from dying. Again, I went into the village and called on different houses.

"I came into our blacksmith's house. He had a very pretty daughter; she looked just like her father. I thought he might have had something to eat and could possibly give me some since we used to be good friends. 'He could not have been deprived of everything,' I thought. 'His hands were strong enough to take on ten men!' I went into the house with hope, but what I found was horror.

"Two bodies were lying in the middle of the room, still warm. The blacksmith had a rifle in his hand. He had shot his wife and then himself. 'Oh, God!' I thought, 'what can I do; who can I go to for help? There is no one left!'

"Although I was shocked, death had become almost a daily sight to me. I had things down almost to a routine. I went into the kitchen as usual to look around for anything edible and was surprised to find a pot of meat on the table. I was amazed, for it seemed that this man had been able to keep some of his sheep alive.

"I decided to take the meat and to look for the hide so I would not make the same mistake as I made with my poor Riabko. After searching a little, I found the skin but the hair was covered in blood, so at first I could not make out what animal it was. Little by little, though, I stretched it out--and froze dead from horror. Grisha, I am afraid of even saying what it was."

"Don't be afraid, Uncle Tim," I said. "Tell me. I promise I won't tell it to anyone else."

"Grisha, it was the head of their daughter," Tim said.

"That was a difficult day. I simply did not know what to do next. My mind was going crazy from hunger and from all the incredible horror I had seen. As I witnessed all this, my children were waiting for me at home, suffering from hunger.

"I went into another house. It was empty, too. There were no bodies, living nor dead in it--it was completely empty. I went into another house. It was the house of a couple who had been married just three years ago. I heard a child crying.

"Is the head of the household home?' I asked.

"A quiet voice answered from somewhere, 'He is no longer alive. Is that you, Timosha? Timosha, save my child; he is still alive. You can leave me; I won't last much longer, but take my son. The poor baby is sucking at my empty breast. He has bitten it all and now he is licking the blood.'

"I was completely shocked. Oh God, what a horror! I don't know how to explain it, Grisha, but the baby was eating his mother's breast. Was it a cannibal? No, the baby was not a cannibal. The cannibals are those who have forced these people to starve to death, and these innocent souls are their prey. How could I help this baby? I desperately wanted to. I decided to stop by on the way back.

"Grisha, how can I explain it. It was so incredibly difficult to see all this horror! I walked by one house and heard puppies barking. I went into the yard and saw three well-fed puppies lying next to the hay stack. This was the *shtundists'* yard. 'They left a while ago,' I thought; 'perhaps there is some food left in the house.' I went in. Everything had been turned over, and everything edible was simply gone.

"There was no one there to ask for food. Even the puppies' mother had left. The innocent puppies were trusting. I called them into the house, hit them on the head with a bar, put them in a bag, and took them home.

"I hung the puppies up and smoked them. This time I did not throw the skin aside so I would not repeat the previous mistake. A pleasing aroma filled the house. I made meat bouillon and decided to be generous with it because my children had gotten so weak. I poured the bouillon into plates and put a piece of meat in each plate. It was dark outside already. The children asked for something to drink. I had not made my tea, so I gave them more bouillon to drink. Then I put them to bed, crossed myself for the coming night, and went to bed myself.

"In the middle of the night, the children woke up and asked for a drink. I felt thirsty myself. I drank a glass of water and then another. The water seemed too cold for the children to drink, so I gave them bouillon instead. 'Maybe they'll gain strength from the rich bouillon,' I thought. In the morning, I was the first one up. The children were still sleeping. I fried some meat on a skillet, heated up some bouillon, and decided to wake the children since it was close to lunchtime already.

"Grisha, I lifted the blanket and found them cold. I panicked. I blamed myself for killing them with my own hands; I just did not think that I could have killed them with food!

"Now, I was left all alone. 'Why live?' I thought. 'Who needs me now?' Then I remembered the young mother who was begging me to save her son. I took some bouillon for the baby and a piece of meat for the lady. Then I decided that the meat could harm her, too, but that the bouillon would be good, so I took that, instead. I went out to save others since I could not save my own.

"I went into the house. It was as silent as a grave. I went up to the bed, but it was too late. The lady had already given her soul to God together with her son. The poor baby had bitten his mother's breast all over. He died with the mother's breast in his mouth. Again, the same question came to my mind, 'Why live?' I decided to go around the entire village to see if anyone was still alive. It seemed that the entire world was dead, and I was the only one left alive. 'What if it's just our village that died out,' I thought, 'and I am left alive to tell the others what happened?' The dead cannot tell anyone what happened. So now I had a point in living. My point was to tell everyone the truth.

"I decided to go as far as possible from that place. It was fifteen kilometers to Zolochiv, and from there, a train went to Kharkov. How would I make it to Zolochiv? I could not walk such a distance; I was so weak. I needed to gain some strength.

"There were two puppies left. I decided to finish them up, which would be best, because by the time I had, it would be warmer. While thinking this through, I arrived home. I needed to bury my wife and children. It would be good to call a priest over, but where would I find one? And how was I going to dig a grave for them outside? Was freezing cold.

"I decided to bury them in the cellar. There the earth was soft enough. I left the children in the house for the night, and the next day I had a funeral for them. I carried my loved ones down to the cellar and began to arrange them. I put Katyiusha next to the wall and the children next to her. I covered them with a blanket, kissed them good-bye, and started to destroy the cellar walls so the bodies would be covered with soil.

"March was unusually warm. Every day I sat next to the cellar-grave. I did not wish to go into the house; I wished I could just lie down next to my loved ones and fall asleep forever. The warm weather was bad for everything. There were dead bodies in every house and they smelled so horribly that I could not stand it, even outside. I could not stand living among the dead any longer, and I thought I would loose it for good. I began to prepare for my departure. I finished eating everything I had and took all my goods--my gold coins, and gold pieces. I remembered the gold I saw my neighbor's table, but I changed my mind about taking it because it was not mine; and it also had human blood all over it. I did take my gold, thinking I could throw it away if it proved useless.

"I kissed the grave and the entrance to my house goodbye and left that evening. I walked the entire night. At sunrise I was only half-way to my destination. I saw a stack of straw near the road and lay there to rest. It was nice and sunny, so I slept well. When I woke up, I continued on. In the evening, I arrived in Zolotchiv. I could not believe my eyes when I saw living people. I did not expect to see a living soul."

"What happened to your village, Uncle Tim?" I asked. "Have you been back there since all this happened?"

"I've been there many times," Tim replied. "Maybe someday I will tell you about it."

"Why haven't you married, Tim. Isn't it lonely to live by yourself?"

"I can't marry anymore, Grisha. Listen, I will tell you a secret, but you *must* keep it to yourself. The secret is hidden from the people, but all government decisions reach the people. Life itself shows the effect of government decisions.

"When I came into Zolochiv, I got on a train. It was not very crowded. Begging children walked through the train cars. Three men sat in one seat. I decided to sit next to them and listen in on their conversation. They talked about bread and where it was cheaper. They asked me, 'Which *torgsin* are you going to?'

"'I don't know where I am going, or what a *torgsin* is,' I answered.

"'Do you go to the city often?' the men asked.

"'This is the first time since winter. I was there last year before the harvest began,' I said.

"'That explains why you don't know what a *torgsin* is,' the men replied. 'Everyone knows about them. It's a place where gold is traded for bread. In the beginning when the government took our grain away, they brought in bread from the city. Then they announced that we had to go to the city ourselves to get bread. The stores that sold bread were named *torgsins*. Didn't they announce this to you?' the man asked.

"'No,' I replied, 'no one did.'

"'How did you make it through the winter? Didn't they take away your bread?' asked the men in astonishment.

"'Yes,' I replied, 'they took all of our bread, and all the people starved to death. I am the only survivor from an entire village.'

"'We all decided to go to a cheap *torgsin*. There were many people waiting in line outside. Some said they had been in line since the night before.

"'So I waited, too, and bought four loaves of bread for a piece of gold. I remembered my village. The people that lived there were well off. Everyone had gold to give, but they had all starved to death. It was all Razumovskii's fault. Nobody had told us anything about the *torgsins*. When Razumovskii said that everyone would remember him, he made sure to keep his promise.

"'So now I have told you the great secret. To build heavy industry, much gold was needed. Most of the gold was kept by the people. So the government decided to take all the grain away from the people so they would have to come to the city and trade in gold for the bread. At that time, a human would give anything away for a piece of bread. In this way, the government took all the gold people owned.

"Grisha, do you remember the lecture on the origin of man? I remember you were there; I saw you."

"Yes," I answered. "I remember you even went up to the lecturer, looked at him, and left."

"Yes, Grisha. When this lecturer came up to speak, I could not believe my own eyes. It was Razumovskii, the old horse thief, the murderer of our village. Look at the position he's in now! I decided to go up to him and to look into his eyes. I was so angry that I was ready to slit his throat for everyone he killed. For my village, for my family, and for the children and parents who had perished. If only he had told us that we could exchange gold for bread in the city, then nobody would have died! Our village was

friendly; no one would have been abandoned. I wanted to set his house on fire and let him burn in it, but God protected me from that murder. God does exist, Grisha."

"Uncle Tim, what's wrong with you? Why are you talking like this?"

"I had no rest in me, Grisha. I found out where this terrible monster lived. I started to develop a plan to destroy him. Once I was taking a trolley car after work to buy some things I needed to carry out my plan. Suddenly I heard a familiar voice, 'Excuse me, but aren't you from Panskaya?' it asked. 'Timothy, is that you?'

"I looked up and realized it was the *shtundist*, Pavel Matveich. He was going to his church service, and he invited me. I didn't want to go to their service, but I really did want to talk to him. I was burning inside. He noticed my behavior and started a deep talk with me. My soul had hardened so much since everything happened, but I felt it melting during our conversation. So I revealed to him what was not allowing me to have any life. He did not leave me alone; he started to instruct me. He was convincing me not to take this deadly sin upon myself. He was frightening me with harsh judgment from God. I was attached to Matveich. Grisha, my soul was attached to him."

"Uncle Tim, have you become *shtundist*? I asked.

"No, Grisha, not yet. I just think there is a God," Tim answered.

I was confused, but Uncle Tim went on. "You say you don't believe in God. Those who don't believe in God, don't believe because it is an advantage to them. Who's advantage? The sinner. He who will have to give an account for the death of millions of people. Even though they did not kill them with weapons, they caused them to starve to death. Only sinners murder. They have the power to. They pass laws against the people, so there is hatred for anything good. When a person loses his faith in good things, it becomes very easy for him to lose faith in God. You have trusted the scholars, Grisha. When you were at the lecture, didn't you feel empty? Didn't you feel their conclusions were empty? What ungifted minds! The man was a horse thief! He collected money from people's tears and managed to get into government. I won't talk about God. Now it is common to call this 'religious propaganda.' It is restricted by law, and you can be taken to court and put into jail for that."

"Uncle Tim, it can't get any worse. I would rather go to jail now than work like this. Look at our job. The heat is unbearable; it's terrible. Every day it's the same thing: the shovel, the coal, and the hot furnace. Look at our pay. It covers only bread, soup, and our uniforms! We have no money to go to the movies or the theater. I only went to the movies once when I was a student and worked for no pay."

"What are you thinking, Grisha?" Timothy said. "Don't you dare run away! You can't run any further than your own village! I heard that two guys ran away. They were caught and taken to court. They say the boys received mercy because they were underage. They each got a year in prison. Now they work at the coal mine for no pay. Afterwards, they will be sent back here or left to work in the mine." Tim gave me a glaring look.

"Whatever happens, Tim, happens, but I won't work here anymore."

"Patience is the best quality of man, Grisha," Uncle Tim replied. "Be patient; time will tell. Just gather enough patience, and then you will see what happens later and know what you need to do."

On June twenty-second
At exactly four o'clock
Kiev was bombed and it was announced
That war had begun.

"Grisha, did you listen to the radio this morning?" Uncle Tim asked. "Have you heard the news?"

"News, Uncle Tim? I asked. "I don't need to listen to any news! Here's my news: I was four minutes late this morning! I overslept again! Altogether I have been eighteen minutes late over the past three months! I have only three minutes left till I am convicted and sent to jail! I must run away before it's too late."

"Grisha!" Timothy said. "Stop it! What are you saying? You don't need to run anywhere; you will be taken away anyway."

"Taken? Where? How?" I asked.

"Last night a war started," said Tim, solemnly.

"A war!" I exclaimed. "With whom?"

"Germany has begun a war with us without any warning."

"Who? Germany? Ha! In three days their troops will run away all the way back to Berlin! You know, Uncle Tim, their tanks are made of plywood! And even if they were made of oak, they're still wooden! We have special chemicals for burning those tanks! Our army is undefeated! What is Germany? Their army was emaciated by the time it went through Europe to reach us!"

"You are still joking, Grisha, but I am serious," Uncle Tim continued. At eight this morning, Stalin will address the nation on the radio. Let's add some coal to the furnace and then go listen," Tim concluded.

In his speech to the nation, Stalin called on all people of the Soviet Union to rise up in defense of their homeland. His voice sounded worried. His speech did not reassure me we had an undefeatable army.

Military troops left to go to the front that day. War conditions were declared in effect throughout the country. In many places the enemy had already defeated the coast guard posts and was moving into our territory. All across the land, our army had begun to withdraw deeper into Ukraine.

In just a month-and-a-half, Ukraine had been occupied all the way to the *Dnepr* river. Enemy troops landed behind ours, cutting off their access to much-needed supplies. At the end of the month, the front had already reached the Sumskaya province, which was quite close to Kharkov. Our plant and many others were evacuated, and workers were sent east to defend the border.

Workers, consisting mostly of women and teenagers, were taken to Sumy³⁵ in large groups to dig anti-tank trenches. I was among them. We dug trenches all day long with German bombers flying above us. At times the planes circled around very low and dropped leaflets down to us. Once I managed to catch one and read it. It said:

Soviet ladies, don't dig those tiny holes. Our tanks will come and crush your meager work.

"How dare they!" I thought. "The Germans think this is their home already!"

One morning we awoke early to announcement that we were surrounded. Our order was to go down into the trenches and withdraw with the troops. In other words, "Save yourself any way you can."

We did as we were told. We hiked out of the trenches with the soldiers and set out on one path or another, but no one knew where we were going. Some said we were heading toward the front while others said we were withdrawing. It seemed to me that such a crowd of people was an excellent target for German fighter planes. After some debate, I managed to struggle out of the crowd and climb up on a hilltop. It was a cloudy day, and I had difficulty determining our location. I thought I might be close to my home village. I heard horses and thought that a wagon train might be nearby, but I couldn't be sure whether it was our troops withdrawing or the Germans attacking. I decided to climb down into the trench and hide there for a few days so the front would pass by and then I could try to find my way home.

Thankfully it was summer, and the days were warm. By the movement of the sun, I determined which way was south and headed toward Poltava. On the way I passed through many unfamiliar villages and asked for the directions home. Our people were very hospitable; they would give me directions and feed me. Many even offered to let me spend the night. After ten days, I finally arrived home. It was late in the evening, and I noticed two carriages standing in our yard. I knocked on the window, but no one answered. I could only hear sounds of dinner being prepared in the house. I knocked again, louder this time. Olya's voice answered, "Who is it? Who's there?"

"Are you keeping your own relative out?" I answered.

"Dad, it's Grisha!" she cried.

The door opened and my mom rushed out to meet me. "Come on in, Son; hurry!" she said. "Where have you come from?"

I began singing: *A rascal ran from Sakhalin...by the narrow animal path...Now he is home.*

"Weren't you expecting me?" I asked.

"We didn't know which direction you would come from. Some were taken west, others east. ... You must be hungry, Son!" said my mother suddenly.

"I wouldn't mind having a bite of something," I answered. "Something that *tastes* good! I'm so tired of plain, dry bread crusts!"

³⁵ Small city near Kharkov

We went into the house, and my father came up and immediately began to kiss me. My mom suddenly cried, "Oh! I was so overwhelmed I even forgot to kiss you."

"Well, better late than never, Mom," I answered.

"You keep joking with us," she said. "Tell me where you've been!"

"I've been studying the Soviet countryside! I went down to the southern mountains and up to the northern seas. I've never seen a country where so many people are dying," I said.

"Calm down, Son; this is wartime!" my father replied.

"Still I don't understand what side I'm on! And who's this? Do we have the Germans here all the way from Berlin?"

"We do have guests, but they're not from Berlin."

I looked at the strangers who occupied the other half of the house. The table was set quickly, and we sat down to dinner. I began examining our guests. One man looked familiar. He was the manager of the train station.

"My name is Nikolai Ivanovich Kolesnikov," he said. "These are my wife and children. And who would you be?"

"The son of my parents," I replied. "I was born by my own will and will die when the state lays me off. I speak ten languages--all of them Russian. In Ukrainian, I'm Gritsko."

My father was noticeably upset and glared at me, saying, "Now Son, don't get out of control. I've told you--we're living in wartime now."

"Did I disclose a military secret, Father? I said only my name, but I guess from now on I won't mention even that."

"Grisha, it would be better if you told us about Kharkov."

"What do I know about Kharkov? Entire factories are being evacuated to Siberia. Kharkov is in chaos. Everyone is going somewhere; all the trains have been full. At first we were forced to dig trenches, and then we were handed over to the Germans. We were told that we were being taken to dig trenches, but we ended up on the front with only a shovel in our hands! We were to fight anyway we pleased. One morning, we were surrounded. We threw our shovels down because there was nothing to dig, except perhaps a grave for ourselves. The soldiers began to withdraw, and we joined them. I decided to see where I was and climbed up on a hilltop. I looked and saw the Germans heading in the same direction we were. I decided to wait until they passed. The Germans headed east, so I headed home the long way--south. I used the sun for navigation until I found my way home."

"You've been through quite a lot," my father said. "God only knows what's ahead of you! I remember how things were during the civil war. I was then only three years older than you are now. After the revolution, there were all sorts of troops in Ukraine. Some were called *Petliura*, some *Makhno*. Every faction wanted to recruit anyone and everyone they could. It was confusing as to whom you would defend. At that time, all men were being taken in, so I decided to put on a skirt and go out to weed the garden. Before long, I saw a crowd of people coming, so I bent my leg under the skirt and went

on with the weeding. Sure enough, the crowd stopped, looked around, and left. Who needed a lady without a leg?

"I did go to the front, though, too. I remember when we were ordered to withdraw. I didn't feel like withdrawing, but then again, I didn't know whose prisoner of war camp I would end up in. Even if you ended up in a camp, you would still be forced to fight. Only the red Soviet star on your sleeve might be a swastika instead. Trying to think, I looked around and saw a dead soldier. I took some of his blood and put it all over my hands and face; then I took the man on my shoulders and started to run. Soldiers were passing me right and left, so I asked them where the medical and sanitary battalion was located. They suggested I take the soldier to the rear. So I carried the body and saved myself from the bullets. At night I made it to the woods and made it home just like you, Grisha. I hid in the cellar till the people decided whose authority was better."

By the end of September, the war zone had spread deep into Ukraine, beyond the city of Kharkov. The front lines were circled around us. Germans came into our village and appointed two men to be their police. Life was suddenly very different. There were cows and horses running loose in the fields although people were catching them and trying to take them in. Once, we were told that the SS troops were coming into our village, and they needed to be welcomed very warmly; so all the village citizens gathered in the center of the village. An order was given that as soon as the German authorities came in, we were to greet them with bread and salt, as was the Ukrainian custom. Everyone was ordered to get on his knees and bow down to them. The Germans arrived at lunchtime in their armored cars. They were met with bread and salt and bowed down to. They began to announce their laws through an interpreter. They announced that they did not come as conquerors of the territory, but as redeemers to save us from the Bolsheviks' egos. They were only in a war against the communists and the Jews. Everyone else was deemed free and independent from the oppressive yoke of communism. In return, the people needed to help them uncover any communists and Jews who might be in hiding. Anyone who disobeyed the new authority would be killed.

"Today," said the German commander, "you are to surrender all communists and Jews and deliver them promptly into our hands. We will conduct a fair trial for them. All communists and Jews need to be hanged! If any of you are hiding a communist or Jew in your house, you will be shot. If any of you know where they are hiding and don't tell us, you will be shot. However, those who hand over members of these groups will be rewarded."

Sometime later, the Germans came back. They took all the men away. They announced that partisans³⁶ had shown up in the forests. So for any connection to them, there would be execution. For any one German soldier killed in the village, fifty people would be killed in return. Two boys my age were brought over, and the Germans announced that they had connections to the partisans. The boys were shot. A village overseer was appointed. This man was ordered to tell on anybody who looks suspicious. If he was not going to tell on people, he himself would be shot.

One night Nikolai Ivanovich showed up at our house unexpectedly. This time he was alone. He talked about some prisoner of war camps with my father. Then my father called me over.

³⁶ Soldiers that were not in the Soviet Union Army but fought gorilla warfares against the German army.

"Grisha, a messenger is urgently needed for a good job. You are a good horseman. People need to be saved from death, so get ready."

"I am ready, but for what?" I asked.

"The less you know, the better," he said. "You won't take much risk; you will only be a messenger. For example, you will go into a house to which you are sent and say, 'You are invited.' This will be done with just a few words. You may be asked, 'Where are we to go. When?' But you will not know an answer."

So I became a messenger. My father suggested I hang around with the young people and listen to what they said. If I found out anything important or interesting, I was to tell him. Nikolai Ivanovich often asked, "Have you heard anything new lately, Grisha?"

"Nothing unusual. They say Nyura was brought her husband back from the prison war camp. He says many prisoners are starving to death."

"Is there anybody who would like to help them out?"

"I don't know. Sveta said that she felt very sorry for them."

"Can you get her to come to us?" he asked.

I went to get her. Nikolai Ivanovich and Sveta talked for a long time. He gave her suggestions on how to help the prisoners. She could cook potatoes and throw them to the prisoners, but he told her not to come close because the guards may kill her.

After sometime, Sveta and other girls would go from house to house and ask the women to cook potatoes in peels. Nikolai suggested to the women, "Stand on the side of the road. When the lateral escorts pass, jump into the middle of the colony and begin to wail. From the side this will look like you have recognized your husband or your brother, according to age of course. An escort will run up to you and will try to push you away, but just ignore him. Just keep crying and pulling the prisoner out of the colony. Beg the escort. They won't understand you, but they will assume you are some type of relative. At times in those cases, they let a relative go. The weakest men are usually the last ones left in the colony. They usually fall behind, and an escort tries to get them to catch up. Try to save those first. The very weak are shot, and they may let those men go just so they won't have to shoot them. I warn you, though; watch out so you will not be beaten!"

I don't know where Nikolai Ivanovich got his information, but he always knew in advance how many colonies of prisoners would pass through and when. He slept quite rarely at night. I really liked to listen to his discussions. He knew where the front was and made his own conclusions about it.

"There is no way we will allow the Germans to rule us! They will lose the war. In the beginning our men were not afraid to surrender and go to prison. But now they know that prisoners are taken straight to cremation chambers. Because of such cruelty, the Germans will lose. For one killed soldier, they burned down an entire village! You know what happened in the village of *Kniajna*? The Germans stayed there--they robbed the people and raped the girls! Some people couldn't stand it anymore and killed two soldiers. The SS soldiers drove all the people to the school and began to question them to find out where the partisans were. Of course, no one said anything. So the Germans threw the children into

a barn and set it on fire. Mothers were tearing their hair out from terror and threw themselves into the fire. They could not save their children and died themselves.

"Afterwards a note appeared on the commander's door. It read, 'For every burned child, we will derail a train. That's a *partisan's* fair trial.' You could only be amazed how one could hang up such a sign, right in front of a guard! The Germans did not bring freedom, but destruction.

"In Kharkov there was a major pogrom against the Jews. For their entire lives, people had lived next to each other, and it seemed they were best friends. Whether one was Russian, Jewish, or Ukrainian, nobody cared about their neighbors' nationality. Then an order came to turn all the Jews in. A huge hole was dug behind Kharkov's tractor plant. All the Jews were driven there and shot with machine guns. Some were killed and some were just injured. All of them fell into the hole, and immediately the Germans took tractors and started filling the hole with dirt. They didn't even bother to kill the injured. They buried them alive. Before long people began to understand what fascism meant and began to hide the Jews, risking their own lives. Even though the Germans conquered all of Europe, they were stuck in Russia. Partisan troops appeared in the forests and were paying the Germans back. They were blowing up railroads."

I became terrified from those stories. What were we to do? The communists were bad, but the fascists were *worse*. Much worse.

Soon Nikolai Ivanovich had disappeared. He no longer came to our house. For a long time we could only guess what had happened to him. Then in mid-1942, a beggar came to our house. At that time there were beggars everywhere. Many city people walked around villages trading their clothing for food. The old man asked for a cup of milk. My mom brought him a cup, and he asked her, "Does Vasiliy Pavlovich live here?"

"Yes," she answered.

"Is your son's name Grisha?" he asked.

"Yes," she said again.

"Nikolai Ivanovich says 'hello' to you."

My mother invited the old man in. For a long time he talked to my father and then left at night. Later my father told me that Nikolai Ivanovich was a Jew. His family had been murdered by Germans. He was not home at the time; that is how he was saved. Afterwards he was hiding at the his friends' houses. Nikolai Ivanovich was now a commander of a partisan troop.

Germany

The harsh winter had passed. The spring sun had warmed the soil which was practically begging to be plowed but could hardly be: there were so few men left. The men that were left came together to discuss planting techniques. A choice was to be made: should we follow the old way collective work, or should we plant individually? The fall planting had been done collectively, so it was decided the spring planting would be done the same way. As for the future, life would determine it.

So I became a farmer again. It was fun to work together with everyone and spend evenings with the youth. It was so much better than being a furnace stoker at the factory! A few prisoners of war that had been rescued lived in our village. The women were proud that they had been able to save the men. There were only a few horses left, so we had to get the cows to pull the plows.

The front lines moved out toward the city of Kursk.³⁷ We were far from the front now, so things calmed down, and life started to bloom. The seventeen- and eighteen-year-old girls were assigned to direct the cows in plowing, and the boys directed the horses. During the day we would get worn out running after the plow, but in the evening we still wanted to go out and relax a little. I had a good pair of horses. I used to walk behind them and daydream. The girl who directed the cow next to me was my classmate. She was seventeen just like me. She was a good and courageous girl. In school all the boys had been afraid of her because she often fought with them. I had not had any conflicts with her, however, and further, I saw it was as an insult to get into fights with girls. At one time I used to help her with math. Now, once again we were working side by side, and in the evening we would gather in the same circle of friends.

Eventually, the month of June came. I remember the tenth of June very well. It was an extremely hot day, and we were all very tired. I was hoping to go swimming in our river after work, but at home different news awaited me. All young people were called to go to the overseer of the village. I had to go. When everyone had gathered, the overseer read an order which went as follows: "All young people of the village are hereby ordered to work in Germany. The work is voluntary, and you are advised to bring a week's worth of food with you. I give you a warning; whoever has been called to go is forbidden to leave the village. Whoever does not show up will be considered a deserter. For desertion, criminals will be taken to court by the military tribunal. Tomorrow at ten o'clock in the morning, everyone is to be at the station."

The news spread like fire across the village. Houses were filled with tears for the departing children. It was clear to everyone what kind of "voluntary labor" awaited their children. At that time to send one's children to Germany was as good as burying them. We were all warned that the village was surrounded, and anyone attempting to run away would be shot dead on the spot. After they heard the news, my parents went into shock and could not come back to their senses for quite a while. All was quiet until at last my mother began to speak.

"It would have been better if you had never shown up at all, Grisha," she uttered sadly. "Then maybe there would have been some hope of you surviving the war. Now, my son, I don't know whether you will make it or not."

³⁷ A Russian city that is located about 200 miles from the capital city of Moscow.

My father sadly said, "Today is our day to say good-bye to Grisha. Tomorrow he will be taken to Germany. There is no other way; therefore we have to let go. They said to prepare enough food for a week. My dear," he said to my mother, "the journey is long. Why don't you prepare at least enough for two weeks."

"Vasia, I won't let him go! This is the end; don't you understand it? Take him into the woods!"

"Where?" he asked.

"Don't you know anywhere?" she asked back.

"It's too late. The village is surrounded," my father answered solemnly.

My mother began to wail. My sisters and brothers followed suit. Soon my father could not hold it in either and began crying. I was the only one who did not know whether I should cry or not. I was scared but on the other hand, I was curious. I was ready to let myself be taken anywhere they pleased, save only for the factory. I wanted to see the world. I thought perhaps I would work in Germany, save up some money, and come home. "What if I don't come home?" I thought. I did not want to say good-bye to my village, nor to my friends, nor to my field-plowing co-worker. Suddenly I remembered the dream I had had when I was still a furnace stoker. The first dream had come true a while ago, and now it seemed like the second one was becoming a reality. The dream did not hold anything good for the future. I was pulled by a rope and hit my head against the bridge. No, that dream was much too bad.

"Son," my father was saying, "go say good-bye to everyone. Stop by and visit our relatives and spend some time with your friends."

I went to say good-bye. I was stopped by all our relatives. Wherever I went, everyone was crying as though it was someone's funeral! Later I went to the center of the village where the youth were meeting. We started to sing sad songs. Nobody felt like dancing. We decided to walk around the village. I have seen many good-bye parties for soldiers leaving for the army. At those farewells everyone was offered endless advice and good wishes. But this going-away party was certainly different from any other. There was no party; this was good-bye. No one said anything out loud, but everyone understood that this could be his last farewell.

There was something else different about this farewell: the fact that not only young men were leaving, but also young women. It was perhaps more terrifying for them since many of them had never been beyond the village.

People hugged and kissed each other and cried. No one was embarrassed to shed tears. My field-plowing co-worker came up to me. We hugged and cried for a long time; then with full assurance she said, "Grisha, I won't let you go."

It was already after midnight, but nobody wanted to go home.

At home no one slept that night. My mother baked bread and fried chicken. I laid down to rest for a bit but could not fall asleep. I saw how my mother's eyes were filled with tears, and then I could not hold mine in any longer. Did I feel then that I would not see her again? I don't know. Around eight o'clock in the morning, my father began to saddle the horses and get the carriage ready.

"Son," he said to me, "get ready for the journey. Look for dependable friends. A good friend will not leave you in trouble. Things will be difficult but whatever you do, do not despair."

Then to my surprise, my co-worker from the field came into the yard.

"I am here to see Sasha," she said.

We went in the house, and she placed a package on the table. "This bacon is for Grisha's journey. My mom sent it for him. When will everyone say the final farewell?" she asked.

"At nine the entire village will go to the train station," my mother answered.

At nine we left. The crowd was led by the village police, the overseer, and some guards; three German soldiers with machine guns followed at the rear. It felt like the entire village had been arrested. There was nobody left in the village, only stray dogs. I walked with my father and my mother. Our relatives followed. My cousins were leaving in the group also. The whole way my father kept giving me advice while my mother cried.

"Son, take care of yourself," he said. "Don't risk anything in vain because no one knows where you are being taken. When life gets difficult, drop everything and run. Only by running away will you be able to save your life. Live by hope. Look, you are not the only one who is leaving your loved ones. Don't forget to write to us. Don't write too much, or anything bad, either. The letters may be checked over and thrown out if the authorities do not like something you've written, and then they will never reach us. Just right where you're staying and how it is. We can talk about details when we meet again."

"Dad," I said, "I've read how Lenin once lived in a foreign country. He wrote many secret letters. The letters were brutally censored; but no one in authority could actually read what the letter really said because Lenin had written a bogus letter with ink, and between the lines he had written one in milk. When milk dries out it doesn't leave any trace. When his friends got the letters though, they knew what to do. They ironed the letter, and what he had written in milk showed up. I've tried it already, and it comes out quite well. I will write in the same manner, and you already know what to do."

"Grisha," said my father, looking worried, "be careful; don't risk anything. You've read many books, but in real life things are much different."

"Don't worry, Dad," I said. "Everything will be fine."

"I pray for God to grant that," he answered.

Finally, we made it to the train station where cargo train was awaiting. Some of the cars were already full. The doors were closed, but the top windows were open, and you could tell which cars had girls in them and which had boys. Two train cars were opened for us. On the floor there was straw; that was our blanket. Police surrounded the train cars and ordered us to climb in. As the parting began, we realized what a horrible fate awaited us.

It was time to go. My co-worker came up. We hugged and kissed and even cried. She gave me a handkerchief for memory. Then my father and mother were saying good-bye. This was not the same parting as we had had when I left to work in the city. I looked hard at their faces; I wanted to remember their faces forever.

“Good-bye, dear son. This may be the last time we see each other. We will hope for the better, however, so let's say only till we meet again.”

That was the last time I saw my parents. It was very hard to separate the mothers from their children. The police began to push the parents away and beat them, but that was useless. The train was starting to move very slowly. The entire crowd followed it. They ran for a long time, and then as the train picked up speed, they could not keep up. They all stopped, and from far away we could see them with raised hands, as though they were turning to heaven in their last hope and pleading for help.

It was very hot in the train car. In the corner there was a container with water in it. One guy began to warn us, “Drink only a little bit and don't let a single drop fall on the floor. Eat your food economically in case we have to travel for a long time.”

This boy became the leader of our train car. The girls from our village were riding in an adjacent car. It became very muggy inside, and some began to climb up to the openings, and others complained that there was no air left. Gradually, everyone quieted down. We wanted to think about what was happening to us. The last twenty-four hours seemed just like a dream.

Toward evening the train stopped in an open field. The doors were opened from one side, and we were warned not to go too far from the train. This was our first test, but we were not animals. I wished they had stopped the train at some station where there was a bathroom. They told us that there would be no stops at train stations so that nobody would run away. At times half-hour stops were made to let fresh air into the cars.

The ride to Brest was very long. Some people's food, especially the boys', was almost gone. I tried to conserve what I had, and rationed the bacon into miniscule portions for myself. We were stuck in Brest for awhile. They said that our railroad tracks did not come together with German ones, so we had to get on a different train. We tried to hold onto our friends. I was with my own acquaintances. My cousin, Katya, kept telling me to eat my food very slowly and not to go too far from her. It was our tenth day of traveling, and we had not been fed at all. Once, we found ourselves looking at a Gypsy wedding. I had never seen any Gypsies, so out of curiosity I devoted my attention to watching them dance. Soon I got hungry and decided to eat, but I found that my bag of food was completely gone. The next day I was sitting down hungry, and Katya noticed.

“Grisha, is all of your food gone?” she asked.

“Yes,” I answered.

I was too embarrassed to admit that I had not been very careful and my food had gotten stolen. So I ate with Katya for a few days. Soon after, we were put on a train again, and after twenty-four hours we crossed the German border. We were so exhausted that the weaker ones were starting to lose consciousness. We had only taken enough food for a week, but we had been traveling for two weeks now.

In Germany we were sent to a camp. No one said that we were volunteers anymore. It was obvious that hard labor awaited. Only the next day did we receive any food. Our meal consisted of bread, margarine, and hard-boiled eggs. I stood in line for over two hours for that. There were hundreds of “volunteers” there, and they were all extremely hungry. I broke one egg and found it rotten. The

other one was even worse. Soon after, an order was given to not break any more eggs, but to give them back to the kitchen. So that was the first day of Germany's welcome.

Later it got much worse. Local citizens began to come to the camps and pick people to work for them. They put us in lines, as if we were products at a market. Ladies came in hats and men in coats to inspect us as goods. They had a lot to choose from. They looked at me but decided no; I was thin and dark like a Gypsy, so they moved on. We simply did not know how to act in those situations. Later I found out that I needed to bow whenever a lady passed by; then she may notice me because I would look respectful. It turned out that I just needed to know how to sell myself as a slave.

We were looked at just like at the horses at a village market. They looked in our mouths and made us turn around, but we did not know whether that was good or bad. Every one of us was afraid to be separated from the others. Only later did we find out that those who were chosen to work for a private master were much better off than we were. They had much work to do, but the master fed them better. Those of us who did not get chosen to go to a house were sent to a military factory. Its address was *Greditz bei Risa*. Right next to the factory was a camp made out of wooden barracks with a steel barbed wire fence five meters high surrounding it. The guards walked around the fence with rifles and dogs at night. The camp exit went right into the factory. This was called a "civil camp." What were military camps like?

I remember the layout of the camp as if I was there yesterday. From the entrance there was a road which extended the entire length of the camp. We called it "the main alley." On both sides of the road stood our barracks. They were long and divided up into large rooms. We slept on double beds, thirty people per room. In the middle of our barracks stood a metallic stove for heating, with a few stools around it. It was very crowded, and there was hardly enough room to walk. The barracks closest to the entrance had men in them. Then there was a large clearing that separated the boys' barracks from the girls'. Co-ed walks were allowed in the evening. On the weekends it was the most crowded. The place looked like a market with everyone walking around like that.

The camp had only young people in it. After some time we all got acquainted. It was strictly prohibited for couples to go into the barracks. There were no married couples in the camp, and it was strictly prohibited to marry. The plant where we worked also had French, Czech, and Polish people working in it. They had a separate entrance because they stayed at a camp far away and were brought in on closed train cars.

Our clothing was stamped with the letters OST, which stood for *Ost-Arbeiter (working labor from the East)*. In the beginning my job was quite easy. I was a machine worker in the instrument department. The job did not tire me as much as the hunger did. We were fed with rutabaga or spinach soup twice a day. In the summer twice a month during the weekends, we were taken for walks outside the wire fence, but we were always watched. On these walks I often remembered my father's words: "If it becomes unbearable, the run away."

In the fall blueberries became ripe. During our walks, we could eat them, but we were not allowed to take any back with us. If anyone was caught at the entrance with any, the guard would smash them all over the culprit's face. No food was permitted at the camp. At times the local people felt sorry for us and brought cooked potatoes to the plant. If the overseer ever found anyone with food, he would beat the person with a lash so hard that nothing could make him happy anymore.

One boy from my home village, Ivan Golovko, who was twenty years old, used to be big and strong. Now, he was only a shadow of his former self. He kept going through garbage cans, looking for something to eat. He found only the grains of used coffee that the Germans threw out. Often fights rose up by the trash cans over the coffee. Then the Germans started to mix the coffee mush with sand, but our people still ate it. They rinsed it with water to make the sand settle out.

Once a camp guard caught Ivan next to a trash can and beat him severely. The boy could not take it anymore, so he hanged himself right there on the fence. He received double death. The night guard saw him on the fence and shot at him, but the boy did not care anymore because he was already dead.

It was hard for me to take that first loss, but soon, many from our village began to get weak and emaciated. I watched helplessly as my best and closest friend, Ivan Prilutskiy, died from hunger. I could not even count all those who died that first year.

For me, the first year was bearable. A German man worked right next to me at the factory. They were not supposed to talk to us, but this was a special German man. We could not talk, but he still managed to help me. He spoke with his eyes, and I understood quite well. He kept looking at me until I noticed him; then he would look at the machine, and then down at the leaves on the ground. I stayed after the shift ended to clean his machine, and I knew I could take anything that was left there. Often I found a piece of bread with a thin layer of butter, and sometimes, two or three potatoes. He never left any more, because if he had, it would have been noticed at the entrance. This saved me from starvation during the first year. Once, this man was called in to see the head manager during our shift. In half-an-hour, he returned very upset and said something in German to me. I understood enough German by this time to make out what he said. "Russian friends are no good; they are no good."

During a break, German interpreter came up to me and said that I was guilty of something, and that I was being transferred into the foundry. I figured that someone had told the authorities that my co-worker was feeding me. After that, terrible times started. I began to starve. I was always working over in my mind one and the same question: "What can I eat?"

I was going on my nineteenth year and felt very lonely. I understood that I could not survive like that for a long time, and I needed to do something, but what? I met a girl. We walked the same way to and from work. I decided to ask her where she was from. We met more often and talked. I got used to her and began to trust her. We walked around the camp together during our free time. We remembered the past together and hoped for the future. I never went into her barracks. If a boy went into the girls' barracks, he would be severely beaten with whips. I was afraid of such punishment and did not wish to get her into trouble. If someone wanted to take a walk with a girl, they could not hold hands. They had to have some distance between them. That was how things were in the camp.

Once, because of my carelessness I got into deep trouble. It was in the evening after work. We were walking together and talking. We took guesses about the present location of the front and wondered if we were ever going to see our loved ones again. Her parents were in Ukraine, just like everyone else's. We wondered what would happen to us when the war was over. We were considered "voluntary" workers in Germany.

"What if we are stuck here?" she said. "No one knows where we are or what's happening to us. Even if the war is over, who would care for the ones that voluntarily went to work for the enemy? We'll all just die from the starvation and from the labor."

"We are like slaves," I said to her. "This is not a life. Just look at us! We look like skeletons! We are beaten for the smallest disobedience. Let's say I wanted to take your hand; what's so big about that? But if I just try I will be beaten immediately."

"Some people can even kiss," she answered, "but here, for such an action you will be put in the bunker for the entire weekend!"

The "bunker" was a large, round building divided into small, windowless rooms. In the summer, the heat was unbearable there. Many of our girls had been put there for punishment. One could be put there for breaking the smallest rule.

"Grisha," she said, "one girl from our room was put there for three weekends in a row! She was going into the foreign entrance without the OST sign that all of us Russians wear. We are foreigners too, but we are not considered people, rather, just a work force from the East.

"After being put there for the third time, she announced that we had traitors in our room who had told Grimberg, the German camp director, everything that was said there. She suspected one girl and screamed at her, 'Go ahead and sell me to that skunk for a plate of porridge! Just be aware that it will be too late! When the Germans come, I will no longer be here.'

"We tried to calm her down, but she announced that she could not stand such humiliation anymore, and she was running away from the camp." Many people tried to run away, boys and girls alike, but they never made it very far. They were all caught. They were whipped and sent back to the camp bruised and bloody.

"Yesterday," she went on, "deserters were brought back. There were four girls and several boys. They were totally exhausted! And we thought they were so lucky and ran away successfully. We thought they had made it to Ukraine, but they were caught in Elba! The trains were checked by special dogs. Not a single cargo train goes by without being checked now! They say they had to work underground in some disciplinary camp called 'Bricks', for six weeks before they were sent back here."

We said good-bye to each other and went back to our respective barracks. On my way back to the barracks, I kept thinking about those runners and did not notice Grimberg, the camp director, coming my way, accompanied by his retinue. I kept walking, and this was breaking one of the camp's rules. I was supposed to stand aside until he passed.

When he was close to me, I was supposed to bow down respectfully to him and anyone accompanying him. That day, I was in such deep thought that I did not do so. Grimberg got furious that "some rascal" had not bowed down to him. He ordered me to go to the entrance. Everyone knew what that meant. It was obvious I would be whipped.

There were five men there, and each one hit me once. Being hit did not bother me as much as my grievance against them. I wanted to pay them back and run away.

On Sunday we were told that there were criminals in the camp. Everyone was to line up in the clearing because a concert was to take place. An armchair was placed in the center of the clearing for Grimberg. They brought the deserters that my girlfriend had told me about, and yes, a wild concert started. They brought the girls out half-naked and made them go into the middle of the clearing. They gave us a speech so others would not run away from the camp. Then Grimberg got up with a lash and ordered the criminals to come up to him, bow down, and kiss his boots. Everyone stood on their knees before him, bowed down to his feet, and kissed his boots. In return, he gave them a lash on the back. He did not spare the girls but rather, beat them with great rage. "Now," he said with fury, "show me how you ran away from the camp!"

Every one of them ran around in a circle, and he used the lash to get them to move faster. The girls began to fall behind.

"Stop!" he cried with fury. "Why have you left your strumpets behind? *Russisch shvein* (Russian pig)," he cried, "get on the boys' backs, and they will carry you!"

He made the boys get on their hands and knees, and the girls get on their backs. Three girls got on and were whipped they could make the boys go faster. The fourth girl protested and did not get on. So they made up a new exercise for her. Grimberg made her get on her hands and knees and carry the boy runaways. She protested again and did not obey the order.

"Get on your four hooves!" he ordered.

She did not.

"You have gotten too fat to do so! Here, let me help you," he said.

He pushed her so hard that she hit her face on the asphalt. He began to yell at one boy and ordered him to get on top of her. These actions drove Grimberg mad with glee. He made this boy get on his hands and knees and ordered him to crawl behind the disobedient girl. Then, Grimberg's assistants got another boy and put him on this girl's back. In this manner, Grimberg tortured the runaways, making up new scenarios for them to play out, one after another. He made them recreate the scene of the dogs discovering them in Elba, trying to cross the bridge on a cargo car. The girls were put in a circle and the boys had to bark at them and bite them. He went around and hit those that did not carry his order well. Then the runaways had to do different things: make frog noises or coil like snakes on their stomachs.

After two hours of torture, one could not look at the "convicts". They looked like humans with their skin torn away. Their blood had mixed with dust. In the end they could not even move or stand on their feet and began to lose consciousness. The authorities splashed them with water to make them regain consciousness. This was a visual lesson for us. I stood in the first row and thought, "Who would not take a sickle to all these Germans and crush them?" There were so few of them, and more than two thousand of us. We all left this "demonstration" deep within ourselves.

The further the Germans withdrew from Ukraine, the more furious Grimberg became. With time, we were more assured that we were not volunteers but imprisoned slaves. We worked to the extreme, and our feet began to swell from malnutrition. Being young and sharing my feelings with someone who understood me kept me going. This, too, was restricted to an extent. When my girlfriend and I met, we discussed our situation over and over. We were always worried about one thing: "What

will happen to the 'volunteers' if we are set free?" The camp alleged to have only "free-willed" youth working in it, and how could we prove that we were forced to come here? The first thing to happen if we returned home was that we would be blamed for betrayal of our homeland and sent to Siberia. But then again, perhaps not.

Once, we had agreed to meet again. At that time, the excruciating hard labor and hunger had taken all my strength. Before our walk, I decided to lie down on the factory bed.

We met when it was getting dark already. Before an hour of walking had passed, we heard lots of noise outside; and someone began to scream, "Everyone! Round up immediately!"

Everyone ran toward the girls' barracks. At the time, i was just saying good-bye to my girl. Police surrounded the women's barracks and began to take boys out of it. The girls followed. They brought the law-breakers into the main alley and put four chairs there. They made everyone move away so they could all see better what was to happen. They undressed the boys completely and ordered their hands to be tied behind their heads. The order was immediately carried out because everyone knew that Grimberg could beat to death anyone he wanted. He ordered that each boy receive ten lashes. The first and the last lashes, he gave himself. The girls' embarrassment and hatred could be visibly seen mixing on their faces, into one feeling. It seemed that they would attack the whippers and tear them apart. It was impossible to look at such torture.

Escape From the Camp

The summer of 1943 was coming to an end. I was still meeting with my girlfriend. We always exchanged news. People kept running away from the camp despite Grimberg's "refinement." I decided to run away also. I decided it would be best to run away by myself. That would create less suspicion, and it would be easier to hide. I began to try to think where I could get enough food to cover my first days after an escape. Nikolai Brus, a guy from my village, came up to me and suggested that we break into the dining hall at night and steal some millet. I agreed, and we went to steal it. We left more tracks behind us than the amount of grain we took! We broke a window and dropped some grain on the ground, but managed to make it safely out of the building with the millet.

When I went to sleep that night, I had a very vivid dream; a dream that I have never forgotten and will never forget as long as I live. I dreamed I was running away and hiding from someone. I knew this was happening in the middle of the night, but it was as light as day. I looked up and saw three moons lighting the land; then I looked back and saw yet another moon. It was very easy to run, but then, for some reason, it started getting dark. I looked and saw that one moon became dark; then I looked at the other, and it went black right before my eyes. The third one also died out. It got so dark that I could hardly see the road. I was very much afraid to look back so that the other moon would not die out, but I could not stand the curiosity and turned around. The moon was obscured by clouds, and it got so dark that I could not see a thing. I ran faster because I knew if I slowed down, I would be caught. I did not know whom I was running from. Then suddenly I heard a loud, clear voice that said, "There is a barrier ahead. If you pass it, you will live."

I was confused for a minute and stopped because I did not know where to run. Behind me, I was being chased, and in front of me there was a barrier. What could I do? I needed to run down into a grove. It was easy to run down, but something sparkled in front of me, just as it seemed it would be all right. I ran up to it and saw power lines that ran all the way down to the ground and sparks flying off of them because of high voltage.

My pursuers were close by already. Where should I run? The lines were touching the ground in front of me. There was no way I could climb through them. Then I noticed the thinnest line was lying on an even thinner strip of rubber. I began to think how I could get through. Even though there was very little clearance, I decided to try. I lifted the thin line with the rubber on it and began to slide right under it on my back. I had almost made it; only my head was left. But it turned out that the space was too narrow for my head. So I took the line in my hand and swiped my head under it very quickly. I got up from the ground, and suddenly I saw a wide-open road in front of me. It became as light as day. I began to scream for joy.

"I will live!" I yelled.

Suddenly I woke up and realized that I was repeating the words "I will live!" out loud. I began to think about the dream and could not fall back asleep. I lay in bed till morning, thinking about the meaning of my dream.

What did it mean, and who had said the words: "There is a barrier in front of you, but if you make it through you will live"? Could I believe in dreams? Who knows the future of a man and what's waiting for him? Only God could know, if God existed. What did the moons that had lit my way mean?

Maybe I needed to stay here for a few months. In the dream I was very close to death and was saved at the last minute. In the end I came to a conclusion. I needed to run away from the camp and run immediately. It was not time to get up yet, so I lay quietly on the factory bed. Everyone was sleeping, and it was very quiet.

I heard the barrack door open slowly, and someone called me with a quiet voice. "Grisha, Grisha, get dressed. Let's go to work together," said my girlfriend.

"Wait," I replied. "I'm coming."

I immediately decided that something had happened. She would never risk going into the men's barrack for no reason. I got dressed quickly and kept thinking, 'What could have happened?' I went outside. Awash with tears, she fell upon my shoulder. I did not know what to think. Why was she crying? What was so bad? Perhaps she was thinking about running away and had not told me, but now she had come to say good-bye? Then she must be a brave girl. Perhaps we could run away together! I waited for her to calm down, and then she said, "Grisha, we are not meant to be together as I had hoped. I don't know why, but our ways will separate," she sobbed.

"Where did that come from?" I asked.

"I had a dream last night. You and I were going to the church to get married. The church was nice; it was made out of white stone. We went up to the priest. He got us on our knees and prayed for us. But when the priest was putting on my ring, you disappeared! I started to look for you everywhere, but I could not find you! I guess we are not meant to be together. People say that if you have a dream of a wedding, then jail awaits the groom. I know your hot temper, Grisha. Someday you will not be able to hold it in anymore, and you will be put in jail. You probably won't live because I could not find you in the dream!"

"Maybe we are not meant to be together," I said slowly, "but I will live. Maybe we will be thrown into different parts of the world by fate, but I will live."

"How can you be so sure?" she asked.

"I had a dream last night, too. It was no ordinary dream, but a special one, in which I heard a voice. The voice warned me of hardships that awaited me. I almost lost my head, but I survived."

I told her about the dream in detail. She breathed a sigh of relief, and tears of joy appeared on her face. "Oh, you will live! I am so happy for you. You are very fortunate. God himself must have spoken to you," she said.

"Maybe it is God, but I have never thought about God," I replied.

"You don't have to believe a dream, but when you hear a voice, it's a prophetic dream. Plus, the voice spoke about the end of your wandering. You will meet hardships, but the voice confirmed your survival. May you have happiness in life, and maybe someday you will remember our meetings," she said.

"Much can be forgotten, even each other's faces, but I know that our dreams will come true and I will live. The dream that I had today will be my hope. If I stand next to a noose, the rope will break. If I am shot at, then the wind will carry the bullet aside," I finished.

Saying this, we parted and left for the day. I worked till lunchtime, and then a policeman came for me. Grimberg was waiting for me at the entrance. He ordered me to go to the barracks. In the barrack the policeman lifted my blanket, and said in Russian, "Millet?"

The planks had some millet on them, and I had no way out, so I answered. "Millet."

In a rage, Grimberg hit me on the face so hard that I fell to the floor and started to bleed. I was taken to the whipping room. My friend, Nikolai Brus, was there, too. I immediately understood that we had been betrayed.

Grimberg ordered that we each receive ten lashes and afterwards be taken into a special jail. When prisoners were put into this special jail, their bodies would get taken somewhere, but where? Nikolai was ordered to lie down on the table first. Then they began to beat him. They told me to stand right next to him so I could watch him being beaten. This time Grimberg did the lashing himself, stopping to breathe after each strike. After each hit, Nikolai made a dry sound which echoed in my head. I felt like I was being beaten already. I became dizzy. Before long, it was my turn.

Grimberg ordered me to take off my clothing and lie down on the table. He probably noticed that I was losing consciousness and decided that the lashing would bring me back faster. He hit me with delight and dragged the whip across my back after each hit. Afterwards, Nikolai and I were dragged into a criminal cell. We did not receive any food that night, so my fellow villager and I sat there until it got dark. Soon we heard voices. Suddenly the door opened slowly, and someone said, "Run!"

It turned out that our own boys had come to the rescue. Nikolai rejected the offer.

"I will not go anywhere. I have no strength and can't run," he said.

"But surely death awaits you!" the boys replied.

"So what, I can't run anyway," he answered.

So I decided to run myself. This was my last meeting with Nikolai. I have not seen him since. His relatives do not know anything about him, either. I left by myself. The boys led me to the wires. One of them put his back against the wires to lift them apart, and I climbed through the fence. I waved goodbye and walked into the darkness to face the unknown. Towards morning, I made it to the nearest village and decided to eat something in the orchard. After picking some fruit, I took some with me and continued on my path. I did not risk hiding in the corn because that is the first place someone looks. The potato field was not so dangerous, though, so I lay down in the potato field and began to fall asleep. Even the smallest noise made me shudder; and when a bird landed on me, I jumped to my feet from fear. This is how I made it through the first day outside the camp.

The camp was not far away, though, and I needed to move on at night. The next day I hid in a wheat field and ate the wheat, crushing the seeds in my hands. I attempted to gain strength for my journey. When it got dark, I continued my journey. I made it to the forest. It was harder in the forest. I could not get used to the animals that jumped out of bushes and were afraid of me. I was afraid of every noise myself! As soon as I started picking berries a crow would go "Kaw!" right above me. From fear, I would fall to the ground, thinking I had been caught. I walked the entire day in the forest. Gradually, I got used to the noise of the forest and was no longer afraid, even at night.

On the sixth day, I got enough courage to go into a village and walk down the street. As I was walking down the street, however, a woman came toward me and said something. I did not understand anything and kept walking. I did not make it through the village before police caught me. They searched me, put me in a car, and took me away. My appearance had given me away.

When we had reached our destination, they started questioning me. I gave them my last name. Where I was from, I did not tell them. They asked me something, but I could not understand from fear, even though I already knew some German. In the morning I was taken away again. This is how I was put into the Dresden jail.

The Dresden Jail

The jail was located on the shores of the Elb River. From the outside, it looked like a nice brick building, a few stories high. I would never have thought it was a jail. In the yard of this jail, however, was another structure. This was a wooden jail, built especially for Russians.

I was thrown into a cell. As I listened to the speech around me, I was amazed to find that everyone was speaking Russian! When I was taken in to be questioned, I decided that no matter what happened, I would not say anything about the location I had escaped from. My main goal was not to blurt out where I had “worked.” Let them beat me as much as they wished; I would not say anything. I could not go back to that camp to receive Grimberg’s torture. He would probably think of a special torture for me. He was probably tired of the rubber whiplashes and would begin the games again. I would have to carry someone on my shoulders and bark like a dog. No, no, no!

Thinking this, I went in to have my first questioning. I remembered my dream and felt relieved that I would remain alive. Thankfully, the questioning was very short. They asked only my last name, age, and a few other insignificant details about me. I was not even beaten right away! I was not expecting such treatment. I came back to my cell in good spirits.

I began to get acquainted with other prisoners, however, and soon I was terrified about where I had arrived. They began telling horrific stories of what was happening there. Some said that people were treated like lab rabbits here, and all sorts of medicines were tested on them. Others said that our blood would be taken out of our veins and some other chemical put in.

These were only assumptions. The reality was much more gruesome. Here the Germans conducted a “circus.” It all started with changing the menu. Usually, we received bread and soup for breakfast, but during the “show” days we received only salted sardines for breakfast; they gave us plenty. From hunger, we would eat it all in five minutes. In an hour, we would become very thirsty and ask for water, but they would not give us any. Toward lunchtime we felt like our eyes would pop out from the thirst. The mouth was so excruciatingly dry, but no water was given. Soon we found out that such feeding always came before a special torment.

The Germans would select their prey from the cell and take it to “the circus”: a “concert” where they set up a “trial.” They would bring the prisoner to a German who played the role of an “investigator.” They would look at the suspect’s case and then announce the verdict. The convict’s last name, first name, age, why he was in jail, and his punishment were read aloud. At times a person would receive thirty or forty lashes. At other times, they would beat a man until he died.

There were many beatings. While one man was on trial, another was being beaten. This went on, day after day. All of the prisoners had to go through such judgment. If you were not beaten to death right away and were lucky enough to survive in your cell after the beating, then such “lucky men” were sent somewhere in a group. When men returned from this part of the circus, they were gruesome to look at. It seemed as if the man had his skin stripped away; the entire body was simply a bloody mess. He would just fall down, unconscious. The Germans would bring a bucket of water and dump it on the man. That was the end of their “medical help.” When the guards left, we tried to help the injured as much as we could. There were no beds in the cells, only double wooden planks which were perfect nesting grounds for bed bugs. When the planks were moved, the bugs remained. The bugs were the

worst enemy for the injured. As soon as the lights were turned off, the bugs fell off the ceiling. A healthy man could make it, but what could a poor, beaten, and bleeding man do?

Those who made it through the “salt days,” and survived the “circus” for more than a month spoke to the newcomers. They advised them to abstain from eating the sardines and wait until evening. Nobody listened to the advice the first time, but afterwards, they had enough patience to make it until evening.

Once, an entire barrel of sardines was brought over. If they had given them to each man separately like they used to, one could have saved it until evening and eaten it with soup; but now, everyone was afraid that they would not receive anything later, so everyone jumped toward the barrel. In a matter of minutes, it was empty. I crammed fish into my mouth without any control whatsoever. My friend kept warning me not to eat so much, and when I had eaten, I became afraid. I remembered that today they could call someone; what if they called me? I imagined how I would be beaten, and my body began to hurt even though I was not being lashed yet. Through all this, a voice inside me kept telling me that I would live.

The doors opened. I thought they were bringing in water, but they had only come to take away the empty barrel.

After lunch the door opened again, and a hush came over our quarters. Names were called, and those prisoners were ordered to come up to the stage with their belongings. I was the only one left from the newcomers who had not yet been called. “Now,” I thought, “I could give advice to the ones who would come later!”

I was wrong. At about four o'clock in the afternoon, my name was called, along with that of a friend. I decided that this was the end.

We were taken to the main building of the large brick jail and then lead deeper into the building where there was yet another jail. We walked through a long corridor and finally emerged into a huge hall. This was the “circus” about which I had heard such horror stories.

The grand hall had high ceilings with lights everywhere, and it really did make it look like a circus arena. The hall opened out into a large empty space where two stone tables stood. On one side of them stood a row of men--men who carried out the sentences. On the other side sat judges. I was taken to one of them.

He asked my last name; then he looked through the papers and said, “Forty lashes.”

When I heard those words, I shuddered in fear. I was sure I would be beaten to death. There was nowhere to run; no way out. Two men in leather shorts came up to me. Their looks alone were enough to frighten me; they were taller than me by one head each and at least four times as wide. Their faces resembled cold stone; there wasn't a trace of anything human in them. I began to feel sick.

One of them pointed to a table. The other went up to the judge and took something white from him. They ordered me to disrobe. I took off my shirt.

“No,” they said. “Strip completely.”

Of those who tormented me, a few were civilians, but the rest were military soldiers and officers. Some soldiers had shed a great amount of blood in the war, and those soldiers took great pleasure in the sight of blood.

I was humiliated beyond belief. Hundreds of people looked at me as if I were an object of some sort; a curiosity for sale. Having undressed, I turned around twice as they ordered. Then, one of the beaters gave me a white handkerchief and said, "Here. Put this in your mouth, between your teeth."

Their concern for me was so I would not choke on my own teeth. It was a good concern; I have nothing to say against it.

"Lie down on the table- on your chest," they ordered.

They proceeded to stretch me between two tables, chaining my hands to one table and my feet to another. A beater stood on a mat beside me. Suddenly, a bell sounded and music began to play--so my screaming would not bother the delicate ears of the beaters. The show had begun.

I was beaten slowly; my tormentors savored each lash. My body was stretched taut like a string; therefore, every lash brought great pain. My skin cracked open from the lashes, and I started to bleed. I chewed on the rag to stay conscious.

After the first ten lashes, they stopped, and I could see my own blood dripping down onto the floor. I heard the beaters move away to rest. They were not beating me, but they had not released me either. One beater had visibly tired of his duties even though he had paused for breath between lashes.

I was left chained, hanging between the two tables for some time. Then, once again, I heard footsteps approach. The bell sounded, and music started to play. I felt one lash, then another, then a third. A pain more unbearable than I had ever felt ripped through my body.

After the twentieth lash, they paused again and exchanged places. No one was hitting me, yet I could feel blows in my head. I was in excruciating pain. The bell sounded again, and they continued to beat me. I wished they would not stop, for the first lash in each set of ten was the worst. "When will this all end?" I thought. I completely lost track of the lashes. My body was burning unbearably. I thought burning steel was being poured on my back and my body was being torn apart. From some distant place, I could hear the bell ring from time to time. I felt like I was flying somewhere, now up, now down. Little by little, I heard voices somewhere in the distance. At times these voices became louder and clearer, but I could not make out any words. When I flew down, I felt noise in my head; and when I flew up, I could hear voices again. At one point, I could clearly distinguish voices; but I was no longer flying, just lying on my stomach. I came back to my senses and thought, "What a horrible dream! My body keeps burning like fire, and I am wet as though water has been spilled on me." Then I opened my eyes and heard clearly, "He's alive! He's coming too!"

Someone gave me some water from a spoon. "Move away," said a voice. "Let him get some air." Then they brought in some porridge and began to feed me.

That night, the prison doctor came in and said, "The beaters were trying extra hard today. I spoke with some authorities who were at the circus, and they were surprised that this one lived through! The others didn't make it. I've seen a lot here, but I've never seen anything like this! He

received forty lashes and is still alive! He's lost a lot of blood. If any more lashes had been given, he wouldn't have made it."

I knew the doctor. He was a Russian prisoner. He used to be a major and had been taken prisoner with the hospital. Usually, all imprisoned officers were killed by the Germans, but medical workers were kept alive. He now worked here as a prison doctor, helping ones like me who had returned from the "circus", having only a whisper of the breath of life left in their bloodied bodies.

He washed my wounds with water and asked my cell mates to watch out for me. I opened my eyes and asked, "Was I burned with metal?"

"Wow!" he said. "You've regained consciousness! Now listen, you need to get better, buddy. No, no one burned you with metal; that feeling came from the lashes. Now get well. I'll visit you tomorrow. If you don't have an infection, you'll make it. I'm afraid I've got no medicine other than water. Hey, you guys, see to it that no bugs crawl on him; otherwise, he won't make it."

Then, not addressing anyone in particular, he continued, "Soul killers! At the very least, they could forget about serving the salty food before they beat! The wounds already have a terrible time healing, but they add to it! It's not enough for them to see a man being tortured right in front of them; they make every effort to extend the torture as much as possible."

A cell mate who was taking care of me said, "Look. Most of us will go through this 'circus'. If we don't help each other, we're not going to make it through this. From this day on, we will each give one spoon of soup to the injured during breakfast and dinner. We will do this for a week. One spoon won't make much difference to *us*, but for the injured it could mean the difference between life and death. Do you agree?"

"Yes," my cellmates answered, "we agree!"

So I began to receive double portions of soup. The next week, we weren't served any sardines. That meant that there would be no "circus." Little by little, men fed me their soup, and by the third day, I could walk around the cell. I was again checked by the prison doctor who said, "It's a good thing you didn't eat too many sardines the day they tortured you. They sure did give lots of salty food that day! Almost everyone was ready for death by the time they were tortured. You're a lucky man, Grisha. If you live through that, you will survive." He continued, "What they do with their prey is simply gruesome! At times, I think it would be better to die myself than to watch their brutal behavior! Sometimes they call me in just to check whether the victim is alive or not. I mean, a person is lying there, and I'm not sure whether it's a person or a bloody piece of meat! Some victims twist and turn in their pre-death pain, but that's not enough for them. Those sadists get up from their places and get drunk on the torture of the victim.

"When it is hard to know whether the victim is dead or alive, they do an inspection like so: they pierce the victim's stomach. If a person is alive, he will move; but if he is dead, he will not give any sign of life. If those sadists would just finish the job by crushing the victim's skull, death would be much easier. When a man gets lashed to death, he suffers for about two more hours before he dies." He was silent for a moment; then he said, "Tomorrow, Grisha, there will be another circus. Be strong, and don't eat anything salty, or it will be too difficult for you to make it. You know, they keep prisoners here for two to three months and then take them some place; I don't know where. But I do know one thing: the

longer one stays, the worse it gets. Those who've been here too long can't walk from malnutrition and have to be led by their arms.

“Good-bye for now, Grisha and be strong.”

I counted the days and realized I had been there for two months already. I walked around the cell to get away from the heavy thoughts this gave me. I got very homesick and wished I could see my loved ones at least one last time.

At times I got mad at my father for not taking me out of the village when my mother begged him to the night before I was taken to Germany. Beyond all that, I could not stop thinking about the camp. Just the name “Grimberg” got me furious. It was his fault after all that I ended up at the Dresden jail! I just could not stand seeing him torture the innocent youth any more.

I paced from corner to corner in my cell like an animal in a cage. Now I understood why animals acted distressed when they were not allowed to roam freely. They had the same fate as I. In such distress, some animals even refuse food and die. I, too, was at that point; except animals refuse to eat, but I was not given food.

I had hardly enough strength to move my legs, but somehow, I knew I would live. I would live on hope and on my faith in the dream I had had. I had dreamed of an obstacle that I had to pass. Now it was in the past, and I had survived. “Finally,” I thought, “the road will be lighter for me.”

At times I was bothered by the same thought I had shared with my girlfriend in the camp. “Even if I am freed, where will I go? Perhaps I could find a good job, and then it would be easier,” I thought. “I just have to make it through jail.” My legs were refusing to move any longer.

We were served salted fish again. There was so much, it was all one could do not to eat it! One of the guys said that we should not touch the fish now, and eat only a bit after lunch and no more than one fish in the evening with soup. “Only this way,” he said, “can we save our strength.”

After lunch, one man was taken away, and we ate a bit of the fish. At this someone warned, “Chew the fish well and slowly; then the salt will have a less damaging effect. The best thing to do, though, is to leave it for tomorrow when you will have water. You will have a good dinner then. If you want to live, be patient.”

That night, the tortured man came back. He was bloody and his back was covered with wounds from the lashes, yet he walked by himself without any help. He even brought back his own clothing. He put on his clothing and lay down on the bed on his stomach. At dinnertime he got up and ate his first portion of fish; but when we offered him some of our soup, he refused. All this time, he was quiet, and we could not figure out what could have happened. Only after we had dinner did this man tell us his story.

“As soon as I was taken out of the cell,” he said, “men with stretchers came toward me. They ordered me to turn around and stand against the wall. When they came up to me, they stopped, said something to my escort in their language, and left. I could see that the man they were carrying on the stretch was bloody and moaning heavily. At this, my legs started to cave in from my fear.

"We went further down, and when we got to the lower level, I saw another man being carried toward us on a stretcher. I began to say good-bye to my life. The closer we came to the 'circus', the louder the voices of men singing a funeral march got. A door opened, and I was led into the hall where officers were marching and singing the funeral march. One of them come up to me and said, 'Twenty-five'.

"The man with the whip approached me. He was tired, and I was the last one for the day."

"This saved you," someone said.

"The bell rang, then music began to play, and the officers walked around me in a circle," he continued. "As they were marching, they lashed me. Then the music stopped and so did the marching and lashing. They stopped beating me and ordered me to take my clothing and go back to the cell. That's what happened."

"Friend," said a cell mate, "you had an easy one."

Buchenwald

I stayed in the Dresden jail for two-and-a-half months, and then in the fall of 1943, I was taken to the Buchenwald³⁸ concentration camp with a large group of prisoners. All prisoners transported from the Dresden jail were loaded onto special train cars. For the trip they gave us some dried food which included about a half of a kilogram of rye bread and even some margarine. Our train car even had a tank with boiled water in it. Seeing this I thought to myself, "This is living high!"

I did not know then where we were being taken. The first time the train stopped, it was already surrounded by military men with dogs. A row of covered cars with barred windows waited for us. Again, they loaded us onto train cars. I got a seat by a window and could see the places we passed. My old habit of memorizing the names of the places came back. This is how I remembered the name of the station *Weimar*.

Slowly, our train climbed into the mountains. As we reached a forest, we stopped so everyone could be counted. After the inspection, we went deeper into the hills. There were more inspections. I could never understand why there were so many precautionary measures taken. Who could run? I looked out the window intently and tried to remember every turn, even though I had no idea where we were being taken. No matter how long I looked, I could only see forest and a small strip of road that we were taking, higher and higher, into the mountains. Finally, we made it to the peak.

We stopped at a wall that was about ten meters high. No matter where I looked, it seemed the wall had no end to it. We were all put into rows for "inspection." Angry dogs and military men in uniforms with SS³⁹ written on them surrounded us. I remembered how the Germans had claimed we were being taken in voluntarily, and now, here I was in the hands of SS men.

They took attendance and lined everyone up by nationality. Our Russian group was at least one hundred people strong. After we had been inspected, the gates opened up, and we saw another high fence inside. I had no more doubts that I was now at a camp where there was practically no way out. There were a number of gates inside the second fence. We were lined up by fives, the gates were opened, and we were forced in. Just inside the fence we saw a huge asphalt square without a single tree near it. Past the square, there were so many barracks that I could not see where they ended.

Many of us Russians needed support just to walk. I turned out to be one of the "strong ones," although I could hardly move my legs. All those too weak to move were placed in the middle of the group and forced to walk. As we walked across the square, musicians appeared and began to play. There we were, a group of starved, beaten shreds of life, headed for imprisonment in a forced labor camp. Yet as we stumbled toward our fate, we were escorted by music!

We passed two-story barracks, and the road started going downhill. Every barrack had a sign on it that said "Block," followed by a number. When we came up to an entrance covered by a high barbed-

³⁸ In German, the word *buchen* means *oak tree*, and *wald* means *forest*. *Buchenwald*, or *forest of oak trees* was a way of marking the camp as one in a connected stream of Nazi camps. Many of the concentration camps were given forest names: each camp bearing the name of a different tree; all connected by the suffix *wald*. The constant reference to forest, however, is also accurate; many of these camps were placed deep in forests, far from the public eye.

³⁹ Special German division of the army.

wire fence, the Russians were separated from the group and taken inside. The rest of the prisoners were taken to long, single-story buildings. Ours turned out to be a quarantine camp.

We started to get acquainted with one another and realized there were only Russians and Ukrainians here. The first thing I asked was, "How do they feed you here?"

"You can make it in the quarantine," a man said. "They feed you so you can recover from the torture and endure more. In the evening you get vegetable soup with millet, even! But you don't stay here long. Soon enough, you get transferred to the main camp."

"What's the main camp called?" I asked.

"Buchenwald."

When I heard the name I got goose bumps all over my body. Where had I come to?! Even back in Ukraine, everyone knew that Buchenwald was a death camp. "So much for my dream!" I thought. "No man can escape from here! Not even a mouse can get out!" Now I had no hope left of being saved. Could it be true that my torture had not ended at the Dresden jail?

I looked around. Everyone looked horrible. There were very few young fellows like me; most men were from middle age to fifty years old.

"And this 'quarantine camp' is considered okay?" I asked.

"They don't feed you lunch in the camp," one man answered, "but here you get forty grams of bread, thirty grams of margarine, and even some tea in the morning. At lunch and dinner you get soup--without bread. You can make it here. When they send you to work, that's when it becomes hard. You work for about ten hours without food. At the end of the day you can hardly feel your feet.

"And," he added, a bit softer, "when someone gets very weak, they send him to the crematorium."

"To the crematorium?"

"Don't worry, young man," he said. "They only send you to the crematorium when you are very weak or get sick, but while you can move, keep working."

So, in this way we found out where we had come.

Early the next day, we were given bread and tea. Someone told me, "Leave some bread for lunch; you will get very thin soup."

I thought to myself, "Hey, it can't be as bad as salted sardines, and besides, how could I wait till the evening to eat my bread? I was starved."

After breakfast, all the newcomers received clothing consisting of underclothes, pants, and a coat without padding. Everyone received a triangle-shaped patch with the letter "R", which stood for our Russian nationality, and a rectangle-shaped patch that had each person's camp number written on it. My camp number was fifty eight thousand something; I forgot the last three digits.

Next, they shaved a cross on our heads. All the prisoners in Germany had those crosses shaved on their heads, and everyone knew what it meant.⁴⁰

I began to count the days and awaited with horror the time I would be transferred to the main camp. A new period in my wandering life had begun. Within a short time, I learned the rules of the camp, as retold through stories too horrible to mention.

⁴⁰ This mark meant that this person is a prisoner.

The First Stage

My life did not go as I would have liked it to. I wished I could have made it through the war in the quarantine camp, but soon I was transferred to the main camp.

Inside the camp itself, there was little work to do, so prisoners were taken outside the camp to work. Some worked at coal mines and some at military plants. The entire camp knew where each job was located. The trips to work ended with the crematorium for many. There were even stages where the people were sent to work, but not a single soul returned. They said that those who happened to work on the construction of secret projects got killed. The Germans do not want any witnesses.

My turn came to go to the main camp. In closed train wagons, we were sent to the sector of Buchenwald where we would be forced to work. Again, we were divided by nationality. Our new barracks held French, Italian, and Czech sections, along with others. The barracks were not much different from the ones we had lived in at the quarantine camp. They were the same buildings with the same painful plank beds; only here, guards lived with the prisoners.

The guards were prisoners who had been appointed this duty, but they were ready to send you off to the other world just so they could have their pay of extra porridge. This was not surprising since the battle here was just to survive. It did not matter whether it was on someone else's account or over the dead bodies of your fellow countrymen, the battle was for survival any way one could achieve it. The guards were called *Vorarbeiters*.⁴¹ The head guards were German, and they wore arm bands with the "Kapo" sign on them. They all carried rubber bats. They were the ones in charge of the camp, and at the barracks, everyone was afraid of them.

We did unbearably heavy work for twelve hours straight. The plant we worked at manufactured planes called *Messerschmidt 88s*. Our department manufactured wings, and our particular job was to put rivets in the steel they were made from. Here, the *Vorarbeiters* showed their loyalty to the Germans most. They would turn you in for any mistake possible. Either you had an uneven row of rivets, or they would count the number of rivets you used and find it wrong. For a distance of ten meters, you were to have exactly three hundred rivets. If a *Vorarbeiter* counted and found you had even five less, he would hit you with his club, or even worse, not allow you to have dinner. Because of those rivets, we had unpleasant situations all the time. Once, they took away dinner from all the Russians. They blamed everyone for "agreeing not to make the quota." But how was it possible to do any more? Twelve hours on end, with only one thirty-minute break, one could not leave the bench, and was forced to do only one thing: hit steel wings with a hammer.

We received no food at work. At first there was as much water as you wished, but then they put a limit on that, too. Only two glasses per shift. Not everyone would return to the barracks after a shift. Some would sit down with their head bowed at their bench. If one fell dead, the guards would not care, but if one collapsed from fatigue, he would be brought to his feet with the rubber bat, fast. One day, I collapsed from fatigue. Just as I fell, a German appeared out of nowhere and hit me with a bat so hard that even a dead man would have jumped up from it. After the Dresden jail, I was so afraid of bats, I would avoid them as if avoiding fire! My screams caught everyone's attention. A deafening voice screamed, "Get up!" with fury, and I did.

⁴¹ Supervisor prisoners that helped the Germans watch other prisoners.

Everyone knew this voice; it came from an individual who had the nickname “noseless.” They say a person has a soul, but this man had neither soul nor nose. All Buchenwald prisoners were afraid of this man and tried to avoid him as much as possible. He went everywhere with a dog and probably slept with his rubber bat. Once when he yelled, one prisoner close by did not rise. The guard took all of his fury out on the poor man. At first he hit the man with the bat; and then, when the man fell to the floor, the guard began kicking the man with his boots and finally stomped on him with both feet. He looked totally insane. At last he jumped away from his prey and made an alarming noise. At this the guards and *Vorarbeiter*s came to his aid. They started to beat us indiscriminately. When the guards were tired of beating us, they ordered us back to work. My neighbor did not rise, and when they came up to him, he was already dead.

Once I made a mistake and put in ten more rivets than I should have. The next day a German *Kapo* came up to me. I broke into a cold sweat because I knew if I was caught by an unmerciful German, the crematorium awaited.

“What were you punished for?” he asked.

“I was trying to do such a good job that I put in ten more rivets than necessary.”

“Follow me,” he said.

I walked behind him with a German guard escorting me. I had so many thoughts in my head! Visions of my childhood came to me. Although I had been hungry and barefoot, my childhood suddenly seemed so happy and memorable. My entire life, if you can call it life, passed before my very eyes.

We began walking up to the third floor, and I started to think how I could prevent my suffering. “I could do it fast and painlessly,” I thought to myself; “just jump off the third floor, and that would be it.” It would be good to at least pay back this German. But suddenly I remembered Uncle Tim's words: “Never give up,” his voice said to me. “Yes, why give up when this German is not saying anything?” I thought. “Maybe this will go all right. I want to live so much; I will wait.”

My escort opened a door. I came into a large room and began to look around for those who would beat me. Behind a large table sat the German *Kapos*. I knew a few of them. I was told to sit at the table. “This must be a new form of torture,” I thought. “Before, I had to lie down on a table, and now I have to sit down.”

They began to question me: how old was I, where was I from, where were my parents, and where did I work. They asked me many questions but did not record anything. Then they stopped questioning me and began to talk among themselves.

“At night there is much stealing in the camp. It can only be done by Russians.”

I thought I was dead. I had not taken anything from anybody, and I was to be blamed for stealing. They beat thieves mercilessly in the camp and then sent them somewhere to die. Now I understood why inspections had increased in our barracks. The Germans continued.

“So, Grigoriy,” one said, “tell your Russian fellows that the next one caught will have no mercy. Tell them their own country does not need them, so they'll have no one to defend them. They will go to the crematorium; you got that?”

It was clear. How could they make it any more clear?

“Now, we will drink coffee together,” they said.

The table was set with canned foods, bread, sugar, and condensed milk. I remembered how I promised my father that I would write him a letter in milk. It had been two years since I had seen milk! I sat at the table together with the Germans. They drank, and I just watched them. As the Germans ate, they did not realize what torture they had designed for me. After this incident I decided to be more careful because I may not be as lucky next time. I divided the length of the wing into meters and decided how many rivets each meter needed.

It had been six months since I had arrived at the camp. I was amazed how I could still make it, eating only the porridge they gave. That winter seemed much longer than usual. No one gave us any winter clothing. We had only underclothes, pants, and a jacket without padding--and that, too, was worn out. Our camp was on top of a hill, and it was exposed to heavy wind. Every night, all the prisoners from the camp were lined up for a general inspection that lasted about two hours. There were prisoners as far as the eye could see. They checked every single person, making sure no one had run away. They also checked the cross on our heads; because if a man shaved his cross off, that meant he was planning to run away. And so this went on from day to day. The summer was better. Even though there was no strength to stand, the cold did not bother us. Eventually, autumn came and it rained ceaselessly. Our meager camp clothing got soaked during the day and had to dry on us at night. Then winter arrived. Frost and wind chilled us down to the bone. We attempted to close our jackets and squeeze them tighter around us, but that did no good. Our very bones seemed frozen. Often, about five to six thousand of us had to stand out in the cold for inspection, without hats, heads down, so the Germans could check the crosses on our heads.

The inspection was very strict. Everyone lined up by “blocks.” The head of the barracks would account for his block to the Germans. He would tell them how many prisoners came out for inspection, how many died during work, and how many stayed in the building because they had no strength to move. Those prisoners who could not move would then be taken out by the sanitarians and cremated.

By the time the two hours were over, there was no more strength left in our legs. We had to walk to the barracks no matter what, helping the weaker ones; otherwise, he or they would be taken to the crematorium. Somehow, no one wanted to end his life this way, even though everyone knew that if he was not able to move, in a few days he would die naturally anyway. We wanted to die a natural death, not be burned like some log. Even our right to die was taken away from us.

So, cold came in addition to starvation. Even now after fifty years, I have not stopped feeling the cold. I think my bones have gotten cold forever because as soon as I get cold, I remember Buchenwald. My legs were completely swollen. I do not know what strength held me together; perhaps it was only my hope for freedom.

The spring of 1944 came. In addition to our struggle, air raids were becoming frequent. In the winter there were less air raids because of the cold. During bombings, we were taken outside so we would not die under fallen buildings. We fell down under the open skies. We were totally defenseless against the bombs. The Germans hid in bunkers not far away. These moments were the most frightening for us. We lay there, facing the earth and praying that God would end this soon. I wanted to be even

with the earth so that not only would the bomber be unable to see me, but neither would my neighbor. That spring it seemed that airplanes filled the skies. They flew very low, and the entire earth shook from their noise. They dropped their deadly cargo on a city and flew away. At times the destroyer planes came after the bombers, and a ray of hope would come to me that those could be our redeemers.

When everything had quieted down, we were ordered to go back to work. We would be happy that this time, everything had gone by, and we were still alive. On the radio they reported what cities had been bombed. Although we did not know where those cities were, it was a good sign for us Russians. We understood that the war zone had come to Germany and that we could be freed soon. People get used to everything, so we got used to the alarms. Once, the alarm sirens came on, and then again in ten minutes, and again in ten more. This meant that our location would be bombed. All the Germans ran to the bunkers while we fell on the ground. As we were doing that, the siren went on nonstop. Then we were ordered to go to the bunkers altogether. We sat in the bunker for four hours. All this time, we heard bombs being dropped nearby. When we came out of the bomb shelter, everything around was on fire. It was only three in the afternoon, but the smoke was so strong that it looked like midnight. It was clear that the bombing had been targeted at a certain location. There was nothing but ruins left of our plant.

We were taken to our barracks. To our surprise, the barracks remained undamaged. The night shift prisoners were there. During the bombing, they had been taken far away from the buildings and were placed under open skies. That day, we were not fed, and the next day we were transferred to another sector of Buchenwald. We no longer went to work. The plant had been completely destroyed. We rested, and even the guards relaxed and did not give strict orders. We walked freely around the camp, and we were even allowed in the restricted zone, the Russian zone.

Before, everyone had been allowed to talk to one another but not to the Russians. The zone where different nationalities lived was not isolated, but we Russians were prohibited from going there. Now, no one paid attention to that. Everyone became equal. Everyone dreamed of the hope that after the Americans had destroyed about ten more cities, the war would be over.

A week passed. We all waited to be returned to the main section of Buchenwald. Not knowing anything made us weary. All sorts of rumors went around the camp. Food rations decreased. Our small daily meal was now divided into two days. We were still fed twice a day, but the soup was now almost like water. We had almost no strength. Thankfully, we were not forced to go to work and could just lie on the plank beds and rest. The question of why we were not taken back to the main camp bothered us more and more as the days passed. We understood that such a mass of people was not easy to transfer, but here, we were sure to starve to death. What if they had forgotten about us?

To my misfortune, I started coughing. This was a good enough reason for a secret medical worker to tell the Germans about me. They would quickly conclude that I had tuberculosis. Then nothing would save me from going to the crematorium. The Germans were very afraid of TB. They considered it deadly. I tried to hold in my coughing as much as I could, but that did not work very well. I felt like my chest was about to be torn apart, and I could not sleep. Others around me could not sleep, either. Once, in the morning, a man around forty years old came up to me. He suggested we go outside for some fresh air. He started talking about my health. I could not see myself, but he said my face had totally changed and became grey. He suggested I wash my face with cold water several times a day and not stay inside

where I was exposed to drafts. He thought I should stay outside and get some fresh air. "It looks like you have pneumonia, and that is not surprising after such a winter."

To tell you the truth, I did not know what to say. Everyone in the camp was trying to make it and did not think much about others; but we went on, "Coughing will only get you to the crematorium sooner. There will be someone in the building who will tell on you just for an extra bowl of porridge. Be very careful around medical workers. After we receive our porridge, they clean the bathrooms and the buildings. Their main focus is to find ones who have an upset stomach and who look like they have tuberculosis. These medical workers will help you give your soul to God faster. When you receive the food from them, try to smile and thank them. Try to prevent coughing any way you can; otherwise, they'll cook you quickly."

"Is it possible that they might throw one into the oven while one is still alive?" I asked.

He gave me a surprised look. "What difference does it make to you? After they throw you in, you won't live much longer."

That morning we received a vegetable meal. I swallowed it, drank some water, and then went outside for a walk on foreigners' territory. How surprised I was when I saw greens that had been abandoned in a trash can! I picked up the greens and took them to my new friend. He became interested when I gave him the greens that had probably been more than three times the breakfast portion.

"Did you leave any for yourself?" he asked, and I told him that I had left the other half for myself.

"I listened to your advice to spend more time outside, so I went to the French side. There was so much of this in the trash can that I took some."

"We need to wash these greens very well," he said.

We went to the sink, washed the greens, and he started eating them with a greedy look in his eyes. After awhile, he looked up at me with tears in his eyes. What he was thinking, I will never know. Perhaps I had reminded him of his son. I took him to the trash can to eat. When he saw how much had been thrown out, he began to give new advice. He must have liked to do that in the past.

"Don't eat too much!" he warned. "It's even worse than not eating enough. Don't eat everything you see. Take these greens; they look like Russian sorrel! And this is spinach; it is very healthy! Also, take the greens from carrots. But watch out. Don't be greedy."

Every day, our green breakfast portions decreased, but we could still find something in the garbage can. Surprisingly, my coughing decreased, and I began to feel better. My will to live came back. My new friend, Stepan, looked at me with a smile and joked. He said my face had gotten bright like a carrot. I could not see my face, but I looked at my hands, and they were as thin as a skeleton's.

Later on, Stepan told me that I had saved his life.

"I don't understand. Where? When?" I asked.

"When you brought those greens to me," he said. "I had considered myself dying, and then suddenly and unexpectedly, you brought me some help. The night when you went through cold fever, I thought that your end had come. I felt sorry for you. You are such a young boy; how did you end up here? I am so surprised you got out of such a bad situation. You must have been born under a lucky sign! Look what's happening in our block, and to the other ones, too. In each room there are sixty people; that means there are 240 in a building, but where are they? It's been almost a month since we stopped working. People don't come outside; they just lie on the plank beds. They don't look too emaciated because they are swollen. Infectious diseases have come around. The Germans will not only burn you but level the entire camp to the ground so the infection does not spread."

I felt goose bumps all over my body from what he said, but then I remembered the dream and asked, "Stepan, do you know anything about dreams? Are there prophetic dreams?"

He thought for a bit; then he said, "Well, there are all sorts of dreams. When a person really worries about something, he dreams about it; but those dreams go just as they come."

I became concerned. Maybe my dream had happened because I was worried. I wanted my dream to be special. I had already gone through one obstacle.

"There are also dreams that tell you your future," he went on. "Why are you talking about dreams? Have you had one?"

"No," I answered, "not today, but a while ago."

I became a little worried. My dream may have come to me because I was worried about being chased, but I had passed one obstacle already. Stepan looked at me carefully and said, "Grisha, you are very lucky. Death follows in your footsteps, but somehow, you avoid it. This must be your real fate. Perhaps you will be lucky enough to get out of this mess. I am almost sure you will somehow escape the death that is hanging over us now."

"What are you talking about, Stepan?" I said. "Why do you say death is hanging over us?"

"Grisha," he continued, "I have not told you anything. I felt sorry for you. Just observe what is happening in the camp. They take the weak prisoners out at night and bake them! Slowly and in complete silence they lead them outside the camp. Secretly, I watch this picture every night. It could be true that you will survive and tell this story about the innocent death of men. "At first I thought they were being taken to a stage, but I could not hear any car noise. Before, they would take them to the stage during the day. But they don't take these prisoners to the stage; they take them to the trenches that we dig during the day. They cover them up alive. You can hear the tractor running and covering the trenches up."

"What are you talking about, Stepan?" I exclaimed. "This cannot be possible. They bury them alive? That's absolutely inhumane!"

"It's possible, Grisha," he said. "Anything's possible. I've listened for more than one night and have never heard a gunshot. Our very existence here is inhumane."

When I was put on the team that dug trenches, I went aside on purpose to have a look and see if I could find anything to prove what Stefan had told me. The guard yelled at me, but I let him know that I

was doing that because of a “manly need”, and he cooled off. You know what I saw there? They had not even attempted to cover the tracks of their crime. Perhaps later they would level everything out, but now it was probably just too much work. I saw a human wrist sticking out of a trench. It must have been someone who had tried to get out...and could not.

They were saying we had been forgotten, but at that point, I only wished we had! Look at all the German guards that had been added to the camp! They had not forgotten about us but were in a hurry to destroy us. I had hoped to get out of this camp, but, “Oh God!” I thought, “this is the end!”

In the camp rumors spread that they planned to take us out of there because many had been infected with cholera, and the camp was to be quarantined. Daily, people from the Russian block were taken out to work. They were even given an additional serving of bread to do this. The work was strange: men had to dig trenches. The trenches looked like bomb shelters or war traps. But who needed war traps so far from the front?

Foreigners were anyone who were not Russians. They were strongly affected by cholera. The Polish were hit by diarrhea. It felt like we were all doomed. The greatest thing I feared was my health condition being noticed by the guards. Then, I knew my end would come quickly.

There was no way everyone could be buried. Someone needed to dig the trenches. I do not know what happened with the Germans, but no one was being taken out of the camp. Then they gathered a few hundred Russians and took them to another section of Buchenwald. I was one of them. It must be true that I was born under a lucky sign. Death had shown me its teeth so many times during the past two years, but at the last minute, some unseen force had taken charge of my fate. This time, the business of Germans saved me.

New prisoners from different camps arrived all the time. The crematoriums burned nonstop day and night to burn their remains. Among the prisoners there was an imprisoned French doctor who made it his job to check me. He made me turn in different directions for a long time. Then, in his broken German, said that I should eat better. By this time I knew German quite well, but this particular time I was not sure whether I understood him correctly. He continued, “There is nothing too frightening. The war will end soon, and everyone will be freed. Freedom is the most effective medicine.”

I noticed that he did not believe I would get well. At that time in particular, I could strongly feel how much I did not want to leave this life. I used to think that life and death were in the hands of a man; but during the course of my nineteen years, I had seen many deaths. Many took their lives themselves, but others had strength and were taken to the crematorium only as the last choice. I had hardly any life left in my body; but for some unknown reason, I escaped the most difficult situations.

What was it? Fate? God? Who could explain such a thing? Now many were being buried alive in the graves they dug themselves, but I was placed in the quarantine camp again.

The French man helped me. There was some type of hospital there. Although you could hardly call the place a hospital, it was almost impossible to be admitted. The French man helped me get in. This was another postponement for me. He said I had a lung disease: dry pleurisy. I do not know why he wanted to help me so much. I could not stay in the hospital forever, so at one of his check-ups he said, “Even with all of my desire, I can not keep you in the hospital. They can come and check the condition of the sick. The ones who are not able to work will be written up. If they see you, you will be sent to the

crematorium immediately. I feel sorry for you. You are so young but have so little strength. I will give you some advice. If you can follow it, you will make it. If you get caught, then you go straight to the crematorium.

"I will sign you out of the hospital. You will not be counted as part of any work team in the camp, and that will help. There are two inspections here daily, one in the morning and one in the evening. Every single person comes out to the evening one, and you must be there. The morning inspection is only for those who are going to work. From there the men are immediately escorted to work with music. Never go out to the morning inspection. Hide under the planks. When you hear the band stop, then you can come out freely. During the day you can even walk around the camp because the night shift people are on the camp grounds. Don't take any risks. If no one finds you, no one will know that you are not working. Only in this way you can make it."

That is how I became a resident of the Russian pavilion #47. I was very much afraid in the beginning. I could be reported by the guards and the prisoners. I did not tell anyone my secret. Later I became more bold and started going outside. I tried not to be seen by the guards. After some time, I became so bold that I began to get acquainted with the foreign prisoners. I noticed that the Czechs and the French prisoners lived the best. They received food through "Red Cross" from their government. They even allowed me to come into their barrack, although they did not allow any other Russians to come in. Often I wondered why this unknown help came to me. Once a German helped me, then the French doctor, and now the Czechs. If it had not been for them, I would have died a long time ago. Perhaps it was my young age.

So I lived this way and began to feel better. At times, they gave me some food. When they began to trust me, I started to listen in on their conversations. Once they asked me, "How old are you? Do you remember anything about 1933?"

I told them what I could remember and how I had remained alive. Then I heard their discussion about the famine in Ukraine. I listened intently. I did not understand how they knew the information that Uncle Tim had told me in secret. These people had never lived in Ukraine and had never seen our hardships. That means Uncle Tim told me the truth about the government secret. The men here were political prisoners. Although I did not need their politics, I understood that they knew more about us than we knew about ourselves.

As they say, no matter how long a rope is wound up, its end does come. One evening, the inspection was greatly delayed. We were counted many times and only released at midnight. They warned everyone to come to the morning inspection. People started saying that someone had run away from the camp. The entire summer of 1944, I had not been to the morning inspection and had not gone to work. This time, I was forced to go.

An inspection did not take place since they found the ones who had run away, but I was too chicken to go back inside any forbidden areas and decided to go to work. I joined one of the teams. I work that day, and in the evening I was registered as a newcomer to the camp.

There was much talk about the three that had attempted to escape. We were amazed how they could have climbed over the ten meter wall because the guards were always on post with machine guns. Besides, there were power lines that were almost impossible to pass. It turned out that they had found a

way out of the camp. The camps had public toilets. They had deep cement drains that had little gateways put in between them. Periodically, high pressured water would flush the drains and go through pipes that came out somewhere outside the camp. This was done every half hour. These three climbed through the pipes when the water was not flushing. They took a great risk since they did not know where the pipes came out. Or perhaps they did know? No one was sure. One of them got caught. Every one of us was ordered to come to the square after work. A gallows was put up, and the man who attempted to escape was under it. I was surprised how this man could have climbed down the pipes when he could hardly move. He must have gone for it since he knew he would not live long. He had been beaten so badly that his flesh hung off of him. His sentence was read.

“For escape from the camp,” said a guard, “we will hereby carry out the death penalty. Said prisoner is assigned death by hanging.”

The next day, I was kept in from work and was called into the department. Again, for the countless time where others were guaranteed to be listed as dead, I was protected by the unseen hand of fate. Usually, interrogation was done by Germans, and they showed no mercy to those who had disobeyed. For the smallest violation, prisoners were sent to death without any trial or investigation. This time the questioning was done by a Czech man who spoke Russian pretty well. How he managed to get into such a position, I could not imagine. Perhaps he was just a translator, but there were no Germans around. He questioned me in Russian.

“How long have you been in the camp?” he asked.

“For six months,” I answered. “Two weeks of that time I was in the hospital.”

“What team do you work on?”

I could not say anything since I was not working anywhere. He showed me the card that said what work team I was in. Right then and there, I thought my last day was marked.

“I cannot help you with anything,” he said. “If the authorities find out about this today, you will be taken to the crematorium immediately. Tomorrow, a special section is going away to another place; I will try to send you with them. That's the only thing I can do for you. They find out about you any earlier, you are dead. You will go with that sector, but no one has ever returned to Buchenwald from there. You will go with them, and then...God only knows.”

This was in the fall of 1944.

The Second Stage

After the evening inspection, I told my block mates that I was being transferred to another sector to work. We began to say good-bye. Some thought I was lucky, and others warned me that the sector I was headed to was dangerous. It was secretly called “the stage of dead men.” No one knew the type of work that awaited me because no one had ever returned from that sector to tell about it. Even the crematorium workers never saw anyone from that section. It turned out that the place had its own crematorium. I was frightened but no matter what, I was to be sent there early the next day.

In the morning I was again forced into a train car along with other prisoners. We were taken to the Weimar station where a train stood, its engine ready to carry us to our fate. The windows had been painted over, and I remember very well how dark the train car was. We had no idea what direction we were traveling; but eventually the train stopped, and our car was unhooked from the rest of the train. We had to sit in the train car until the next morning when we were loaded into yet another car with no windows at all.

After a long ride, we were finally brought to a very large camp. It was located in a valley, completely surrounded by mountains. Far away on a mountaintop, I could see nothing but forest.

The first two days, we went through all sorts of admission procedures. They took our fingerprints again and re-shaved the crosses on our heads. In the future, they would order us to go to the barbershop to keep the cross in good shape. One would be severely punished if his hair got any longer than allowed. The order here was even more strict than in the old camp; and perhaps even more important, this camp had its own crematorium.

There were very few Russians here; most of the entrapped were political prisoners that were brought over from *Auschwitz*.⁴² Before I met its former inhabitants, I had not even known that a camp like that existed. All of the prisoners from Auschwitz had their camp numbers tattooed on their arms. In Buchenwald, people only had to wear clothes bearing their camp number.

It was only at Buchenwald that I truly understood that these two camps were forges of death. I heard endless unimaginable horror stories about Auschwitz from the prisoners. They said in the years of 1942 and 1943, a steady stream of Russian prisoners of war were brought there and immediately burned in the crematorium. In addition, the supply of prisoners at Auschwitz was replenished periodically; that is, to clear out the old they, too, were burned in cremation ovens, and new workers were put in their place.

I learned that many Jews died in the Auschwitz camp. They were brought from many European countries. In Ukraine, Jews were killed on site; but Polish, Bulgarian, and Czech Jews were taken to Auschwitz under the alleged premise they were “going to Germany to work.” I was told how the Jewish men and women had been ordered to bring food staples, and only food staples with them. However, when they got to the camp, I learned they were forced to give everything they brought with them to the Germans and were taken to the “bath house” immediately afterward. I also learned what the “bath houses” were like: a huge hall with pipes along the ceiling and shower heads extending from the pipes. I was told how the frightened prisoners were driven into such “bath houses” by hundreds on end. When the first drops came out, people would start to wash with relief, not knowing what was to come next.

⁴² A concentration camp in the city of Auschwitz, east of Krakow in what is now Poland.

Suddenly, the water would cease, and gas would come out of the pipes. Everyone was asphyxiated. The bodies were then loaded onto wagons and hauled to the crematorium.

Children were treated differently. They sat them down in rows and rubbed something under their noses. When the children fell asleep, they took them to the crematorium in a wagon, just as they had the parents. All of this was done secretly; but nevertheless, eventually the truth reached the prisoners. You want to know how? All of the food that the Jews brought with them was given to the kitchen, and meals were made out of it. When the food was poured into bowls, the last ones to receive their portion found they had lots of metal in their bowls. For the most part, they ate what was liquid and threw the metal away. But some looked closer and discovered that the metal was gold. In the camp it was worthless; the prisoners told me you could even see it lying out on the street! But the SS troops found out about it. The cooks told the prisoners that once quite a few SS men ran into the kitchen and began to conduct a search. They noticed bread that had been taken away from Jews on the table and immediately gave the cook an order to cut the bread into four pieces. It turned out that many loaves of bread had gold baked in them.

So the gold exposed the secrets of thousands of Jews. It was no longer a secret for the prisoners. Today many people still do not know what fate came upon their friends and loved ones or where their relatives were taken when they were "sent to Germany to work." But their gold was baked in the bread eaten by Auschwitz prisoners.

At Buchenwald there were also Jews, but they were mostly scholars. They worked in a special section where entry was prohibited to everyone but them. These scholarly Jews wore clothing just like ours, except they had a huge six-point star sown next to their numbers to distinguish them from the rest. They lived in separate barracks that were completely isolated from the rest of us. People said that these Jews were forced to work on developing new weapons for Hitler. In the end, the crematorium awaited them.

Among all the horror stories from the Auschwitz prisoners, we heard good news, too. We heard a rumor that the Germans were withdrawing from many fronts. We learned that Ukraine had almost been freed, and the front was moving west to Poland. The first victory for Ukraine was at the Kursk arch, about a year before the second front was set up. For the opening of the second front, the Germans took many troops from the west. This made their defenses even weaker. Hitler still had hope in the weapons he was developing, so he attempted to extend the war at any price. If the Germans had not depended on such high hopes, they would have surrendered a long time before they did and begged for mercy. But during that time, they were withdrawing rapidly; and it was clear that they were going to lose the war. When I found this news out, I was very happy. We had been completely cut off from the rest of the world and had no idea what was happening on the front. With new hope, I remembered my dream and its words: "If you manage to pass the obstacle, you will live." I thought that I had crossed the obstacle when I escaped from the labor camp and now had a wide, bright road ahead.

Well, it was not so. The Germans rejoiced at our coming to the camp. New labor had come, and a lot of it. We were replacements for those who could no longer work. Now they would be sent to the central camp. The people I saw were so emaciated that they could not work, and they looked like living skeletons. Many had worked there for more than a year. At least two hundred people were brought to the camp every month, and the same amount taken away to what everyone thought was the quarantine camp in Buchenwald.

Lately, people had begun to arrive from the main camp of Buchenwald as well as from Auschwitz. The weak ones were taken away. As soon as the flow of arriving prisoners increased, the amount of men who did not want to work also increased. During the evening inspections, the weakest were given a special number that authorized them not to work.

After the local prisoners met the newcomers and got to know us, they began to ask about their friends who had been sent to the quarantine camp to regain their health about six to twelve months ago. Not one of us knew anyone they asked about. We told them that no one had ever heard of anyone coming back to the main camp from this sector. This came as an unpleasant surprise to them. It became clear that no one from this sector would ever go back to Buchenwald. Later that night I told the men in my cell how I made it to this camp.

“...So after revealing that he knew of my crime, the Czech man wanted me to avoid immediate cremation and sent me here instead. But he warned me that no one ever comes back from this camp. He was right, even though he did not know anything about this camp.”

My story was told from prisoner to prisoner, and people got worried. Everyone was puzzled by one question: “Where had everyone gone?” Before they only thought they had simply been taken to regain their health; but now, they knew for sure that there was a crematorium here, too. The prisoners figured out what the smoke stack in the distance was. They had seen it before but had always assumed that it was a factory. The prisoners from Auschwitz told us that there had been eight crematoriums there, and that during the day, only smoke came out of the towering stacks of the crematoriums, but at night, fire rose up from them continuously. We decided to find out if we had come to the right conclusion about the stacks in our midst. Once during the night, we managed to wake up to an alarm we had made ourselves. We immediately drew our attention to the smokestack and saw it had fire, rather than smoke, climbing high out of its mouth.

The next day we decided to monitor the stack, hoping that the night before there had just been a fire at the “factory.” During the day the stacks stood dormant. In the evening smoke began to come out of it, and sure enough, at night the fire rose so high out of the stack that it lit up the surrounding area! Now we understood everything. There were so many weak prisoners and prisoners unable to work across all the different sections of the camp. We worked in a secret factory and knew that we would not be allowed to leave alive. We had figured out German tactics. They would never leave a trace of their actions even if they lost the war.

No one knew what was being built at Buchenwald. The place where we worked was located on the shore of either a lake or a river; one could not see the other shore, so it was hard to tell what this body of water was. The camp was surrounded by mountains, and under these mountains were coal mines. Along the shore as far as the eye could see, prisoners worked all day like ants. We cut rocks from the mountain, took them out on wagons, and washed them in water. Some loaded the wagons, and some unloaded them. The entire day, prisoners chiseled at that mountain. The entrance into the mine was small, about three meters high, but inside, there were large hollowed-out rooms. Walls separated the workers from each other, so we did not even know what the others were doing; we were never transferred from one worksite to another. I think that most Germans, even the military, did not know what it was they were building at Buchenwald.

There was no hope of getting out of this predicament. How would we ever find out if the war was over? Even if we did, who would free us from this place? Now, no one was happy to see prisoners added to the camp. The one thing that interested people was news about the front and its location. While a man is still alive, he hopes for something no matter what the circumstances. No matter how hopeless it was, nothing could convince us that this was the end. We knew that in the beginning of the winter, Ukraine had been totally freed and that the American troops had united and were now fighting on German territory.

At times someone would say, "What's it to us, all this news of the war? We are hostages and have only death to wait for! What difference does it make whether we get to live for three months or four? Even if there are no more prisoners added to the camp, we will be squeezed out like lemons and then sent to the crematorium."

Many agreed.

"We won't live anyway," people said. "Why prolong our suffering? Why build secret weapons for the Germans? So they can start another war and torture more people? We can all organize and jump into the water at once!"

"So what?" said another. "You'll swim in cold water and come out with pneumonia! It's better to wait for your turn for the crematorium; maybe your turn won't come."

"Then there is another way," said someone else. "There are a few thousand of us here in this camp. Every one of us should quit work and announce a hunger strike."

"Ha!" someone responded. "If you quit work, you don't need to announce a strike. You won't get any food anyway! Yet they will force you to work. They don't walk around with guard dogs to get scared of our hunger strike!"

Once even I spoke up. "Friends," I said, "I do not doubt that we are all here to die, but I still think that we need to fight against death."

"You talk like a young man!" a fellow worker replied. "Tell me, how are you planning to fight death?"

"Well," I said, "a good friend of mine once told me never to give up. You are all suggesting ways that we can die. Why don't we start thinking of ways we can live? Everyone has started that fight already. Remember, before they used to give you a number 'relieving you from work' during the evening inspection. When no one knew what those numbers were for, there were many who wanted a number. Now, when we all understand that we sign a contract for our death by taking that number, no one takes it anymore. This proves we are fighting to live! So why should we look for a way to die? We just need to be patient to the end."

"I have faced death more than once in the last three years, but I still hope to get out of here. I assure you that I will live! More than a year has passed since I had a dream in which I heard a voice that told me that if I pass an obstacle, I will live. I have passed the obstacle, and believe that my dream will come true. I don't know whether or not there is a God, but I believe in the words I was told; so on this subject, I am a believer."

"None of us knows where we are. It is entirely possible that beyond those mountains, the Russians or the Americans are at war and one morning, they will announce, 'You are free!' In my life I had an incident where I fell into a deep despair and wanted to commit suicide by hanging myself so I would not have to go to jail. Then just at the moment I was writing a note explaining my reason for committing suicide, my friends ran into the room and joyfully announced that I was being rewarded with a bonus! And for what? For the same thing I was going to kill myself for! From then on, my goal has been to never give up."

"Good job, young man," someone said. "It will be easier for you to die."

"But not too long ago, I saw a dream, too," said another. "I saw all of us lying down as though we were dead, but I knew we were alive. Suddenly, I saw a cloud of crows flying over us. Then the crows turned into airplanes and began to throw food to us. What do you think about this dream?" he asked.

"I don't have the ability to interpret dreams," I said, "but that could happen, too."

Now I had hope to live. The year 1945 arrived, but nothing changed in our lives. Bit by bit, prisoners began running away from the camp, but they were all caught by dogs. These escapees were taken out in front of everyone, their punishment was announced, and they were taken away from the camp. For some unknown reason, toward the end of the winter, the SS troops became easier on us and paid less attention to us. They no longer killed the ones who fell on their way to work, and they allowed us to give the fallen a hand.

Our work team consisted of fifty people. We worked on the road that led up to the bottom of the mountain. There was an older SS man supervising us. Many times I watched him as he sat on a stone a few hundred meters away and kept his eye on everyone. Sometimes it even seemed that he was taking a nap, and the thought of escape came to me more than once. Not at night like the other ones did, but during the day-right from work. A Polish guard watched over us also with the SS men. He was the one who decided who should no longer go to work and instead be sent to the crematorium.

The thought of escaping bothered me day and night. I thought about many different methods of escape, and at the same time let those thoughts go. Yet time did its work. Every day, my chances of going into the crematorium increased. So I decided to escape. "It would be best to escape after lunch," I thought, "when they bring the coffee. We get an entire hour to rest." Before, this would have been impossible, but now the Germans had probably figured that soon they would have to work, so they allowed time for rest. When we went down to have lunch, the guard always went first. We followed him, with the overseer walking last. At times, the guard never left his post and just sat in one place. The mountains were covered with a young pine forest. "Could I make it to the forest?" I asked myself. It was clear that I needed to get as far away from the guard as possible. I started to think. After the break, he often took a nap on the stone. What if he would see me? He sat a few hundred meters away from us. We could go off about fifty meters to the side when we were really working, but in those cases, he would usually yell, "Don't go any further!" We could leave the overseer when we were going up hill, though he was always the last one in line. By the time he made it to the place that we worked, I would have needed to have run away. It would be good if he could be distracted by someone on the other side. I needed to find a co-worker who could be trusted so he would not tell this to anyone. What should I do about the cross on my head? I decided to shave my head on my last night. If I made it safely into the forest, the guard would not leave his post just for me. "While he gets the dogs," I started to think, "I'll

try to make it to the river and wash away any trace of my scent. Then I will continue walking through the forest.” Risk as a rewarding job. So I made that choice.

By that time, not only my legs, but my entire body was swollen from starvation. “If I stay here,” I thought, “surely I will not avoid the crematorium.” Of course I faced a tremendous danger: to be killed by the guard. “Even if I am lucky enough to run away,” I thought, “I am facing the unknown.” I did not even know if there was a way out of that valley.

Escape from Buchenwald

On the night of March 4 1945, I revealed my secret to a friend and asked him for help.

"After the evening inspection and the daily *Mütse ab*,⁴³ I said, "please shave my head with a razor. I have decided to run away tomorrow after lunch, and I suggest that you join me. As soon as they give the signal to work, we will be the first ones to go up to the mountain. I will walk to the right of the road and you to the left. It is possible that one of us may get killed, but it's also possible that we will both survive. If we are lucky, we will meet on the top of the mountain the next morning."

That night, he shaved off the cross on my head, but when I offered to shave his cross, he refused. He was afraid that if he would not escape successfully and get caught, he would get the death penalty because his head was shaved. Seeing his worry, I became worried myself, but I could not go back. My head was already shaved.

March 5 arrived. It was lunchtime. I had some coffee and then rested. The work siren went off. I quickened my pace up the road. I put the pick over my shoulder and began to move as far away from the guard as I could. By that time, I figured that the most of the workers were already well on their way up the hill.

"In three minutes," I thought, "everyone will make it up the hill, and the guard will start to scream." I do not remember how, but I threw my pick down and began to run. I had prepared my shoes in advance; instead of a wooden sole attached to an upper with laces, I had made myself slippers. So I ran with all my strength and listened intently whether they had begun to shoot.

For some reason, I did not hear any gun shooting, any screaming, nor anyone chasing after me. My strength was leaving me. The forest was not far away, but I was beginning to lose consciousness. "Oh, how I want to fall down and just rest for a minute!" I thought. The forest was so close; there were only about ten meters left to run, but my legs would not move. I stopped to catch my breath, but I could not stand on my feet and fell to the ground. The first thought that came to my mind was that I had been shot. "If only I can make it into the woods and bandage my legs," I thought. I could not feel any pain, but my legs were not cooperating. I tried to get on my knees, but nothing came of that either. I tried to crawl and worked at it with all the strength in my hands. During my childhood, I had been very good at crawling on my elbows, but now, I could barely move.

Finally, I did make it into the woods. I lay down under a pine tree, and then, using my elbows, raised myself a bit to see whether I was being chased. From where I was lying, I could not see much. I saw a hilltop close by and decided to crawl up on it. I looked around and again saw that no one was chasing after me. I decided to bandage my wounds, so I sat down and inspected my legs. "I don't see any blood," I thought, "so I must not be wounded! Maybe my legs gave in from fear?" I quickly calmed down. I was not injured, and I could not see anyone chasing after me. I crawled under the tree again.

"I need to get to the water faster so I can erase any scent of myself," I thought, "because in half an hour, the Germans will surely be here with the dogs!" I had lain down under the sun and relaxed a bit. I began to think what I needed to do next. Horrifying thoughts came to me; thoughts that I would be

⁴³ This means literally *take off your head gear*, so that the crosses shaved into prisoners heads could be checked. When said in the concentration camps, this was an absolute order, punishable by death if disobeyed.

bitten by dogs, and my body would be torn apart. My legs did not gain any strength. My knees begin to hurt as if they were broken. I checked my knees again, but everything was fine. I became very indifferent to my surroundings. My body felt heavy, as though it was filled with mercury, and then a sudden fever overcame me. I do not know for how long, but I fell totally unconscious. The fever eventually passed, but I could not figure out how long I had been lying there. I did not hear any dogs. I decided to get up and slowly go down to the water, but something weird happened. In my thoughts, I had gotten up; but in reality, I was still lying down. I wanted to raise my hands, but they did not obey.

"That's it," I thought, "my life will end at this moment. I will die, but at least I will be free."

I lay there for a long time listening for the dogs, but it was quiet everywhere. I tried to get up a few times, but it was useless. The fever was completely gone, but I could not open my eyes and felt very sleepy. I began to fight the sleepiness. Then I heard the siren. That meant it was the end of the work day and about five o'clock in the evening. I had been lying here free for four hours, and there were still no dogs. "What if the guard did not notice when I ran away?" I thought. "Maybe he noticed my friend instead." To be honest, I was not sure if my friend wanted to escape. He probably just stepped aside somewhat but did not run. He must have gone back when the guard screamed at him. The entire team must have noticed him and did not see that I was missing. "Now," I thought, "my escape will be discovered at ten in the evening during the inspection, so I still have some time."

I calmed down so much that I fell asleep. I do not know how long I slept, but when I awoke, it was already dark. I was very cold, but at first I could not figure out where I was. Slowly, my thoughts began to clear. I had escaped and had fallen asleep under a tree. I remembered that my hands and feet were immobile before, but what about now? I began to raise one hand and then another. I sat up, grabbed a branch so I could get up, and was on my feet once more. I took a few steps.

"I am no longer in pain," I thought. "So where do I go now?" I needed to go to the water to wash away any trace of my presence. For that, I needed to go down to the stream and then up again. "No," I thought, "I will waste too much time and energy." I had become very hungry, but what could I eat? Before I had not thought about food. I wondered if there was a village nearby. "There must be one," I thought. "The Germans could not have come to the camp from too far away. They must live somewhere nearby. I need to go to the top of the mountain to look. I won't survive if I don't find a village."

It was easy to walk, and I did not even feel hungry. When I made it to the top, it was almost dawn already. I could determine where east was by the direction of the sun. I saw a village in that direction. The woods came right up to it. On the other side of the village, there was an open field. While it was not very bright outside, I decided to walk through the field to the village. I knew German buildings quite well. They either had something built all around the house, or a stone wall surrounding it. The main thing was to get inside the yard because they did not have any lock on their barns nor their cellars, so it would be easy to get in.

It was good that the main street was on the other side. The field led me right up to the back wall of someone's house. I came up to the fence and tried to open the gate, but it was locked. Then I climbed over the fence and opened the gate. Everything was silent. I went around the different sheds, and in one, I heard chickens respond to my skulking. Cautiously, I opened the door. I decided to take two chickens. The owners would not become poor if they lost only two, I thought, and they had many more

for themselves; but these two chickens would be a great help to me. I knew how to handle chickens. If one squeezes a chicken under its wing, the chicken will not make any noise.

I made it back to the forest before sunrise. As I remember, the forest had a beautiful variety of trees. Now I needed to go as deep into the woods as possible. I remembered how we had looked for acorns during the famine; now I wanted to find an oak tree and rest under it. I soon found one and went toward it. When I came up to the oak tree, I saw so many of the past year's acorns that I calmed down a lot. I had eaten acorns during the famine, and even though they were bitter, they were still edible.

I made breakfast under the oak tree. I went for the chickens first. I stepped on one's head and pulled on it. The head fell away, and I began to drink its blood greedily. I did the same with the second chicken. Seeing me then, you would have thought that I was an animal tearing the chicken apart. No matter how careful I tried to be, I still got blood all over me. When I was finished with the process, I was not any less hungry, but even more starved. I could have swallowed the chickens whole with their feathers. I remembered the famine of 1933 when the starving people ate too much if they had the chance to, and died from it. "Now," I thought, "I mustn't eat too much."

I peeled a few acorns. I did not have enough patience to take the feathers off the chicken. I ripped it to pieces and took out the insides. I squeezed the guts a bit and began to eat them with the acorns. The more I ate, the more hungry I felt. I could not figure out what was happening to me. I wiped my hands, got up, and walked around the chickens. My conscience told me not to eat anymore, but I did not have enough patience. I allowed myself to have two more acorns so my body would gradually calm down, and my hunger would wane. The sun was already high, but I kept walking around the tree. Then I took the chickens and plucked their feathers out. Even though there were many acorns around me, I did not allow myself to have many. I only had some every once in a while. I was free now, but my struggle for life continued even though I had food to eat. In the afternoon I allowed myself to start on the other chicken. What a pleasant smell it had! I had not even noticed the smell when I ripped open the first chicken. Now I ate slowly, chewing the meat and the acorns. What a pleasure it was to swallow! I am sure that a man who has lived all his life in luxury has never taken such pleasure in his dinner as I did that very minute.

In the evening I gathered leaves and made some bedding. Before I went to bed, I decided to have a little more meat with acorns. As I took the first bite, I felt like I was turning into an animal again and could have swallowed the chicken whole--bones and all! With great difficulty, I took hold of myself and began to eat the acorns and pinch little pieces of meat off the chicken with my fingernails. Luckily, I had enough self control, even in my struggle to live. I let the chickens for the next day. I hung them on a tree and went to bed. I remember only that the leaves were soft and warm.

I woke up when the sun was already over my head. I looked at the chickens hanging over me, but I did not feel hungry. I felt very thirsty, but I did not know what to do. The village was almost two kilometers from me, but I could not show up there during the day! During my first escape, I had gone into a village like that and was caught right away. Now, I was wearing striped clothing, and everyone would know that I was a fugitive from Buchenwald. I needed to wait until the evening. I walked back and forth around my den. My thirst had lessened, and I decided to eat. I began to tear off little pieces of meat again. As much as I could tear would go into my mouth with acorns. With great difficulty, I managed to limit everything I ate.

Then what a miracle happened! The sky became covered with clouds, and around noon it began to rain. Quickly, I gathered my bedding under the tree. I started collecting rain drops and was shocked when I saw my hands. They were covered with blood, and I had not even noticed it before! I tried to rinse my hands with the water I gathered in my palms, but the water was still red. I figured my face was probably bloody, too. If I went into the village looking like that, not only the people, but also the dogs would run away from me! I looked at my jacket and saw that it was stained with blood, too. I stood out in the rain and managed to wash and get myself in order. "Now," I thought, "I can go to the village just fine." I left the jacket in the rain and lay down again under my tree. The rain was not heavy, but my jacket was soon soaked so much that I had to wring it out. As I wrung it, a thought came to me. "What if I get a drink of water this way?" I began to wring the jacket and drink the water from it. I did that a few times and drank a good amount of water. Things became more joyful. As I was eating, the jacket collected water. When the rain stopped, I would drink what I could wring out. This worked quite well, but it was clear that I could not make it without water. I decided to go into the village at night to get a container so I could store the water. Then I could regain my health and continue my journey.

The sun came out again. I hung my clothing out to dry and lay down to gain strength. In the evening I went to the edge of the woods so I would not have to walk so much during the night. I made sure I remembered where my bedding was, and waited till midnight. When it got dark, I went into the village.

I found the village as if I was going home, although I had only been there once. I made it into a barn without any trouble. I found a bucket, put some potatoes in it, and headed back to the forest. Before too long, the bucket became too heavy to carry. I decided to unload some potatoes, and then I went on. At first I could not find my place in the forest, so I sat by a tree till morning. As soon as it got light, I saw my "home" since my tree was higher than others. I felt victorious. Now I had a good amount of food stored up! I decided to live here until I got stronger, and then I would head out.

To live in the woods for a day is like living there for a year. I lost track of the days I stayed there. The meat was now gone, but there were lots of acorns, and I had potatoes. I ate them raw, but even that was better than the liquid we drank at the camp. In March it rains a lot in Germany, so I was not concerned about finding water; after it rained, water collected in puddles, and after the water stood there for some time, it was drinkable.

I knew that the forest life could not go on forever; I needed to go on. But before I went, I needed to make another trip to the village and get some food for my journey. This time, I went down to a cellar and got some potatoes. I put the potatoes in my pockets and began to look for a container that I could drink from. I felt a bottle filled with something. When I began to pull it out, I knocked something over, and it clattered to the floor. A dog began to bark. I headed for the exit. As I listened, I heard that the dog was barking in a neighbor's yard, so I hurried to leave. With the bottle in my hands, I ran across the field, but the dog just went on barking. When I was far away, I heard a man's voice. Afterwards the dog stopped barking. For the first time during my freedom, I became horrified at the sound of a man's voice. "That's it," I decided. I was going to leave that same day. I had a dinner of potatoes and acorns, and drank the juice I had found in the bottle. Then, I filled the bottle with rainwater and continued on my journey.

I had already learned this village's rhythm. Cars came and went in the morning and the evening. They brought some military men here and took others away. I figured this was a military city, and I

needed to get far away from it. As I headed out, I discovered a new problem. The forest I was in was fenced off, and far away I could see guard posts. Suddenly I realized that all this time, I had been on camp territory. After my escape, I had often wondered why they did not send any dogs after me. Only after a number of years passed did I figure out that it had not occurred to anyone to search for the fugitive in their own back yard.

There was only one way out: to cross the village at night and leave through the field. The village was positioned in a straight line of houses, but every house had an exit from it to the street. It was dangerous to stay in the forest, so I decided to leave the camp any way possible. I realized that my tracks could be discovered any time in this small forest. In fact, the place was so small that you could not even call it a forest.

When it was very late and dark, I started to walk. I came to the last house on the street so cautiously that I was afraid to breathe. I threw a stone in the yard to see whether there was a dog. Complete silence. I threw in another and still, no response. I went in through the yard and left the back gate cracked open in case I had to run back suddenly. I came up to the front gates and found they were locked. I tried the small gate on the side. This one had a lock I could open. I opened it very slowly and stood at the threshold; I was afraid to go out. Freedom lay beyond that tiny gate, but with that freedom, danger; there could be guards on the street.

Ever so quietly, I edged my way out and turned all my attention to listening. I felt that if I stepped away from the wall I would immediately hear that cursed "Halt!" "Why am I so frightened?" I thought. I made one step, then another, and noiselessly crossed the street. From there, only the field lay before me. I ran without hearing my own steps and did not look back. When I did look back, I was already far away from the village. Some windows were lit. Far ahead of me, I saw some lights also, and decided to go as far away from them as I could.

Soon it was dawn, and my strength was almost entirely gone. On the horizon, I could see the forest; oh, if I could only make it there! I decided to sit down and rest for a bit. I estimated that I had walked about five kilometers during the night, and there was one left before the forest. I drank some juice-residue flavored water from the bottle I had taken and continued on. When the sun rose, I was already in the forest. Finally, I sat down to rest. A paved road was right next to the forest. As soon as I sat down, I heard a car coming. I did not have enough strength to move deeper into the woods, so it decided to lie down in order not to be noticed. This could be SS men going to the camp to change their shift, and they could have dogs. A few cars passed, and it became quiet again. I needed to go deep into the forest since it was dangerous to stay at the edge here where the road was so near. That was my first real day of freedom. I rejoiced and began to try to decide what direction to go next. I decided to go toward Czechoslovakia. I was guided by the sun during the day and by the stars at night. The main thing was, I knew that I had to head south.

Life In the Forest

I had lost track of the days a long time ago. I only knew that my birthday was the twenty-fourth of March, and I would be twenty years old. I did not know whether that day had passed or not, but I decided to celebrate it anyway. One night I went into a village to exchange my striped camp clothing for civilian wear. I went into a horse stable and began to look for work clothing. There was much clothing there, so I took off mine and started to try on all the clothing I could find. I found a jacket that was a little too large and then looked for the smallest pants. I dressed hastily and went away. As I neared the forest, I remembered that I had left my camp clothes in the barn! "Should I go back and get them?" I wondered. "No," I thought, "it is too dangerous. Let them stay. There are many clouds in the sky, and it will rain soon, so my tracks will be washed away anyhow." I did not find anything eat in the village. At that time I was living only on acorns. "Having them with potatoes would be better," I thought. It was like having them with bread.

I did not have to go to the village anymore because the Germans kept their potatoes in sheds right on their fields. That made my life easier. During the day I would look for a place to hide, and at night I would come out and take food from these sheds. I could not carry much, but what I could carry lasted for two or three days.

Once when I went to look for a shed to get potatoes from, I heard someone singing. I began to listen to the voice and went in that direction. I peeked out from the woods and saw a man plowing a field. He came up to the end of the field and turned his horse in my direction. Then he continued to sing a Ukrainian song, "Let your horses loose, boys." I felt like ants were crawling down my back.

"What should I do?" I thought. I was going mad with anticipation. "Should I go out?" I wondered. "Should I go and ask for matches from this man from my homeland so I can bake some potatoes? Baked potatoes are better than raw ones, and I could find out where the war front is. Maybe he won't realize that I have escaped from a camp because I am wearing civilian clothing. Nevertheless, my appearance will give me away immediately." I looked at my hand. It was so thin that I immediately changed my mind about showing myself. He may even turn me into the police! The closer he got to the forest, the deeper in I went. Finally, he turned around again. When he was not looking, I scurried out, took his lunch very fast, and went back into the woods. "You won't get any poorer," I thought, "but I will celebrate my birthday!"

So many events at once! First, I got some clothing, and now, I even had a real lunch! Now I could celebrate my birthday. For the first time in three years, I ate well and drank milk. I felt at home in the woods. I was not afraid of animals--only people.

I wanted to leave the danger spot fast, so I kept walking with all my strength. I stopped only to rest and to eat some acorns. I came across deer feeders often, and that meant I could run into people--the incident that I feared the most. One night I stumbled over a fallen pine tree. The skies were covered with rain clouds, and it was very dark. I walked on, and then I thought, "Where are you going in such a hurry? You can run into a branch, and it can knock your eye out!" I stopped. It was too dangerous to continue when I was in a hurry and could not even see where I was going. I lay down at that very moment and slept the rest of the night.

When I woke up in the morning, I could feel that my legs were resting on an incline. I sat up, and, wow! I saw I was sitting on the edge of a cliff! If I had made one wrong move, I would have dropped down over the edge below. Slowly, I crawled away on all fours from the abyss and began to compliment myself. "I am so good! I am so good!" I said. "If I had not thought about a tree branch knocking my eye out, and made one more step, I would have sailed right off the cliff. I'm so glad I stopped in time!" I cautiously skirted the cliff and went down the hill. What a beautiful place it was! New grass had just come up in the shade. A narrow stream flowed down off the cliff. I became thirsty right away. I walked further and discovered a cave in the cliff. It was so good there that I did not want to continue walking. I immediately felt exhausted. I had a few acorns and potatoes in my pockets, so I decided to have breakfast in the cave.

I continued to look around the place after breakfast. Up on the sloping hill, there was a forest; and down below, it looked like there was a village. "I can live in this place for some time!" I thought. I gathered some leaves in the cave and lay down to rest. I became very warm in the leaves. Oh, how I wanted to be warm! I fell asleep right away and woke up when it was already dark. I knew that I needed to go and get food. When I came down to the edge of the forest, I saw a huge field, and sheds that no doubt had potatoes. It was hard to walk for the field had been plowed for the winter. I found potatoes in the first shed I looked in, but I wanted to see what was in the other smaller sheds that I saw in the distance. I approached and found carrots and beets inside. I was so happy when I saw all of that! I threw the potatoes out of my pockets and took carrots instead. By the time I made it to my cave, I had been forced to throw out several loads of carrots to lessen the weight. In the end I brought in very few carrots because I could not carry much. I ate some and went back to get some more. Before daylight, I had brought in three more loads. Then I figured that it was too far for me to go from the sheds to the cave, and I made myself a storage place on the edge of the forest. I brought in a lot of carrots and potatoes and left a lot of tracks, too. I made a foot path from the forest to the sheds. I hope that now in the early spring the owners would not come to their sheds so that by the time they did come, the rain would have washed away my tracks. "Now," I thought, "I can stay in the cave till the war is over."

The carrots strengthened me, but after a while, I started to throw up after eating potatoes. "Who would tell me when the war is over?" I thought. "Then again, perhaps it's already over? I will live here for a bit longer until I become more strong, and then I'll go to the village. My hair has grown back, and I have civilian clothing on. If I get stopped by a policeman, I will give my old friend's name and my old camp's address. I will say that when our unit was being evacuated, I escaped." That was my plan for the future, but for now, I would live in the cave.

Once, I had an incredible incident. I do not think I will ever forget it, even if I live to be a hundred years old. I made it up to the mountaintop when spring was in full swing. Everything around had turned green and come alive. From the top of the mountain, I had a beautiful panoramic view. Interesting thoughts began to come to my head. "Where did all this green life come from?" I wondered. Even the trees were turning green then. During the course of being alone, I had gone used to having discussions with myself.

"Who created this beauty?" I asked, and remembered for the hundredth time the dreams I had had. "Where did my dreams come from? There must be a subconscious. Who knew I would survive and how? Maybe there is a God? It seems to me if there is one, someone would have seen Him by now. If God exists, perhaps God can come to me during the night and explain that He exists, just as the voice in

my dream explained I will live. Then I would know He exists. Why during the night and not during the day? Scholars may not know everything, but God knows everything. What if I ask whether God exists or not?" I thought to myself. "If God exists, He will answer me, and if He doesn't, there would be no one to answer. People get on their knees before Him, probably because He sees everything; doesn't He? There is no one here, and I am on a mountaintop. No one will see me and laugh that I am on my knees and asking Someone whether or not He exists. Why not try?" I got down on my knees and stayed there, not knowing what to say or what to ask. I stayed on my knees and waited for something to happen, but I did not know what. I began to shake as though I had come into a high official's office, so I started to speak, "God, if You exist in heaven, You see I don't have a knife to peel the potatoes. I eat them raw and can't even peel them."

This was my prayer. I did not ask for anything. I did not even ask for a knife. I did not know what to say, so I told Him about my most urgent, current need. I was so starved....

Suddenly, some force lifted me up and turned me around 180 degrees. The first thought that came to me was: "That's it; I've been caught." I was afraid to even open my eyes. It was still quiet. I opened my eyes, and there was no one there. Who had turned me around? I pressed my hands against the ground and began to get up from my knees. Just then, I saw a small penknife on the ground in front of me. I began to shake like I was having a seizure. If police were standing in front of me, I would not have been as surprised as seeing this little knife. I crouched there, on all fours, not knowing what to do. I felt like I was not alone, but like someone was watching me. I took the knife and started to get up. Could this be a coincidence? The knife was not even rusty. Could someone have dropped it as they walked in this area? What an improbable coincidence! The forest was large, and who could lose a knife when spring was just coming, especially here on the mountain? How could I come exactly to this place and get on my knees and say, "I don't have a knife," and then one suddenly appeared? Someone turned me around because the knife was lying behind me. This was not a coincidence; it was an answer to my question, "God, do you exist?"

"God does exist! God exists! Could it be God Who talked to me in my dream and said, 'You will live?' Then it is easy to understand why my dreams have come true. Maybe there *are* no coincidences because God knows everything that is and that will be. Yes, there *are* no coincidences. God just plans everything ahead, and now I know for sure that I will live. I don't understand one thing, though. Why was there a condition? Why did he say, 'If you pass the obstacle, then you will live'? Oh... I think I understand; this is the way God wanted to show me the end of my suffering. Otherwise, how would I know that I would make it in the end? Now, I know because I have passed the obstacle! God did not remove the obstacle, but I had to go through it myself."

I did not understand many things then, but now I knew for sure that God existed. "People pray somehow," I thought, "but I don't know how to pray. Once I will be among people again," I resolved, "I will buy a book of prayers and will learn the prayers. Then I will know how to pray."

I do not know how long I lived in the forest. The continuous struggle to survive took the last strength out of me. During the day I could make it, but at night the cold and the dampness got down to my bones. I tried to get warm by putting more leaves on myself. This had helped before, but somehow it did not now. At night, I would get feverish, and my chest felt like it was going to rip open from coughing. I must have had pneumonia again. Being half-conscious, I imagined I was back home in Ukraine. At times, I would see my mother's worried face or hear my sister Olya saying, "Gritsko, get up; don't just lie

there or you'll die!" When I came back to myself, I saw the grey stone ceiling of my cave up above. I could not even eat anything at the end. What could I eat? I only had potatoes left, but I could not look at them anymore because I threw up from them. Somehow, I managed to stuff acorns into my mouth every once in a while. "No," I thought, "I cannot make it without people's help. Olya was probably right when she told me to get up, when I was half-conscious, or I'll die. I need to get out of here."

How many times had I, in my long-suffering body, escaped death when it was so close? Only this time, I was sure God would help me. Although I did not understand then that I *could* pray, I was sure God would save me. I got up. Where should I go? To look for Czechoslovakia became just a dream. Now, I knew I would be lucky if I just made it to the nearest village. "What if I am caught?" I thought. "No, I still need to go. What if Germans will help me?" I made a conclusion that God had sent nice people to help me before, and perhaps He would do it again. I could not defeat myself just because I was afraid of people.

I went down to someone's cellar to take something edible besides potatoes. My first try was unsuccessful. The dogs started to bark, and I ran away. I saw a church in the village. I thought that if I sat next to the church, it would be all right if the priest took me in, as long as it was not police. Then, "No," I thought, "I'd better not risk it. The priest might turn me over to the police."

So I went back into the woods. It started to rain in the morning and became damp and cold. I had reached a point where I could not even eat acorns anymore. A countless number of times, I decided to go to the village to find something to eat; otherwise, I knew I would not be able to get out of there. "Even if all the dogs bark," I thought, "I must find some food." Accidentally, I came across a road, and followed it along the edge of the forest. I looked around and saw a train station nearby. I began to watch it and saw trains. New plans burst into my head. "At night," I concluded, "I will get some food and get on a cargo train that will take me up to Czechoslovakia. Then I will walk to my native Ukraine!"

Freedom

I was starving, and ready to go to any house to ask for something to eat. At long last, I came out of the woods and headed toward the village. I had developed a habit of remembering village names, just in case I would need them someday. I would read the name of any village I passed and repeat it several times in my mind. When I emerged from my seclusion in the forest, I noticed a train station nearby and started to walk toward it. It began to rain again, and I ended up hiding under a tree. The sky got dark. "Now," I started to think, "I can go to the village to look for food." My intuition, however, quickly protested such thoughts, telling me that it was still too light out, and I should not dare to go. I sat under a tree and began to wait for nightfall.

In the distance, I noticed a tunnel running under a railroad bridge. It was close to dusk and still raining, so I decided to head for the tunnel in order to stay dry as I waited. By the time I reached it, however, I was completely soaked. Cautiously, I crept into the tunnel and found that it was so dark I could not see a thing. A bit weary from the walk, I leaned against the wall to rest. It was very quiet for a few moments; but suddenly, a beam of light appeared out of nowhere and I realized that I was not alone. Without warning, my entire body was overtaken by fear. "So this is it," I thought; "I've been caught, and all of my plans have failed!" A policeman stood in front of me, pointing a flashlight in my face.

"Where are you coming from?" he asked.

"From work," I answered.

"Where do you live?"

I told him the name of the village that I had learned that day.

"Who do you work for?" he demanded.

At this, I fell silent. I could not give an answer. The policeman ordered me to put my hands behind my head and walk. I was led to the train station. He began to ask me questions, and I could only nod my head in reply because I could hardly understand what he was saying.

"What's your nationality," he barked. "Russian?"

"Russian," I answered.

He searched me and found my tiny knife in one pocket. He looked at it and with surprise said, "Why, you can't even kill a chick with such a knife!"

Then he put his hand into another pocket and took out a handful of acorns. At this, he seemed even more amazed.

"Why do you need acorns?" he asked, astonished.

"To eat them," I said. I took an acorn from my pocket, peeled it, and began to eat it. This scene caught the attention of others standing at the station, who stared at me in amazement. They must have thought I was mad. I was taken away. I was no longer forced to hold my hands behind my head, and walked down the street, hardly moving my legs, and scolding myself for being caught so easily. Although

I could barely walk from starvation, I still looked around to remember the way back in case I would need to escape.

We came to a house, and the policeman began to ask a German woman where her workers were. A young lady came down from upstairs, and a young man walked in. They were both Ukrainian. Realizing this, the policeman took out a pad of paper and decided to question me with their help. Before he could start, I lifted my head and said, "I have not eaten for two days, and if I am not fed, I will not answer any questions."

I then bowed my head stubbornly and kept quiet. I had nothing to lose and no way out anyway, so I figured such a tactic was worth a try. "Who knows," I thought, "they might even feed me. Surprisingly enough, they gave me bread with butter and milk.

As soon as I had eaten, my spirits lifted. "Maybe not all had been lost," I thought to myself. I had at least gotten a meal. I answered the policeman's questions through an interpreter, and listened myself to see whether the interpreter was translating correctly. I decided not to say where I was from and named the city of Sumy. A bit of confusion followed.

"Where did you live before the war?" the young Ukrainian woman asked.

"In Sumy," I answered.

At this, she lit up and said, "I'm from Sumy, too! What street did you live on?"

I said the first word that came to my mind: "Vigon."

"Vigon?" she answered, "but that's impossible! I lived on a neighboring street, but somehow I don't know you, and your last name is not familiar."

"Why is she doing this?" I thought and then answered, "Soon after I arrived, I was taken to Germany."

To the question of how I got to this station, I answered, "I was driven here. I had made a deal with my friend that I would jump out of the car once we reached the station, and he would throw my bags out right behind me. However, when I jumped out, my friend did not keep his promise. So now here I am, without any of my things, and I have not eaten for two days!"

This questioning concluded successfully, and I was put in a basement. There I saw something I had not seen in a long, long time: a bed. "When was the last time I slept on a real bed?" I wondered. It must have been back home, long before I went to Germany. I lay down on the bed with the hope of getting warm and resting a little. I had no idea what was going to happen, but at that moment, the bed was my salvation.

I stayed in that basement for three days. They brought me food three times a day, and at last my hunger was satisfied.

On the fourth day, no one brought me any breakfast. I waited for lunch, and that, too, did not come. "What could have happened?" I wondered. I did not think long. I moved my bed to a tiny window near the ceiling to see what was happening outside. I saw a few children playing and began to knock on the window to get someone's attention. The children crowded around the window and looked at me as

if I was a wild animal. Then someone called an adult. I began to ask them to give me something to eat. They talked amongst themselves and began to knock the door down. They opened the basement and let me out. I looked around. All the houses had white flags on them. "Today they must have some holiday," I thought. "That's why they forgot about me." I did not see any police; only citizens who explained that there were no longer authorities. I was very hungry and began to ask for food. One German man looked at me and told me to come with him. Germany had surrendered.

When we arrived at his house, I saw people bustling about and getting ready for their second lunch. "That means it's four o'clock," I thought, for the Germans had exact timing in that area. The kitchen door opened. The aroma that emanated from this phenomenon was so good that I became dizzy and had to lean up against the door post. I saw two girls sitting at the table, and two men about thirty years old came in through the side door. A woman who seemed to be the lady of the house started serving everyone lunch and then finished and sat down with them. Our host announced, "We have a guest today. I decided to take him in."

The host came up to me and invited me to sit down. While looking at me, he noticed my dirty face and took me to the washroom to wash my face. Everyone waited for us before they began. Their custom was not to begin without the host. Perhaps it was also a custom for all the other Germans as well, but I am not sure.

Before me, I saw a large bowl of food in the middle of the table, and everyone put as much as they wished into their bowls. I noticed my German host watching me carefully, as if he was studying me. Everyone ladled the soup into their bowls, and I noticed a lot of grease left in the bowl. I wanted to take that grease, but the host took the serving spoon from my hands and ladled some lean liquid into my bowl. I swallowed it fast and watched to see what the others would do. The men finished and went for seconds. I took the serving spoon again and wanted to eat a few more servings, but the host again took the spoon out of my hands and did not allow me to have any more. He poured some coffee with milk and gave it to me with a piece of buttered bread. That is how my first dinner with people ended. I sat down at the table hungry and got up not fully fed. I went outside and started to wonder where I could go now. "The German man turned out to be stingy!" I thought. "He didn't even feed me well!"

A moment later, the host came up to me, suggested I sit down on a nearby bench, and left. I did not know what he was going to do with me and why he left so quickly. I started to worry. "I need to hit the road before it is too late," I thought, "but where should I go?" As I was thinking, my German hostess came out of the house and called me into the bath house. I noticed a pair of pants, a shirt, and a pair of underclothes lying down on a bench in the bathroom. The hostess pointed to a bin where I could throw my dirty laundry, and left. I could not understand why these people were treating me this way! They did not feed me well, but they brought me into such a beautiful bathroom! I had never seen such a marvelous bathroom in all my life. The ceiling was painted white, and the walls were covered with colored tiles. There was a lot of soap.

"He must have made a mistake when he invited me in," I thought. "During dinner, he probably took a closer look at me and has gone to tell the authorities he is harboring a fugitive. They no doubt suggested I wash up just to stall me. I wonder why he took me in. Could it be that he has seen me somewhere before?" Thoughts raced through my head as I passed soap over my filthy body again and again. "While they are trying to figure out where I am from," I thought, "I will have enough time to wash up well and then run away. It could also be that the man is not even thinking of turning me in, but of

keeping me as his employee. I need to wash my underclothes myself because they have the stamp "Buchenwald" all over them. If they see this, my hosts will immediately figure out where I am from!"

I washed up quickly, put on the clean clothes they had given me, washed my underclothes, and hung them to dry on a tree behind the barn where no one could see them. When I was finished, I sat down under a tree and suddenly fell asleep.

After some time, one of the servants came up to me and quietly put his hand on my shoulder. From unexpected fear, I screamed, "Mama!" He did not expect that either, and jumped away. So we stood there for a while, staring at one another. As soon as I came back to myself, I thought, "Why am I screaming? This way I will get caught easily. It is obvious that I am afraid of something, even when no one is chasing after me." The host and another nicely dressed old man with a briefcase in his hands stood in the yard. It seemed that this house was very hospitable, and guests were common. From their kind faces, it was clear that they would not do anything harmful to me. We went back in the house. Supper had already been served, and we sat down at the table. The man began to talk and asked a question with his broken Russian.

"What...is...my...calling?" he asked.

I understood that he was asking my name, and answered, "Grigoriy."

Everyone began to repeat my name. One of the host's workers was Polish, and he had no trouble pronouncing my name; but the host and hostess had difficulty, and it came out so funny that the entire group at the table started laughing.

"You can say it an easier way," I told them, "Grisha."

Of course, Grisha came out much easier, and everyone did much better with that version. Everyone was saying my name except the two girls who were sitting silently at the table, just as they had during lunch. The same thing that had happened at lunch was repeated during dinner; the host did not allow me to eat much. As soon as dinner was over, the host suggested that his guest and I follow him upstairs. We walked down the long hallway that connected to rooms on both sides. Finally, he opened a door and announced that this was going to be my bedroom. He then escorted me to his study. The old man who was most likely not an accidental guest in this house knew the Russian language but formed very poor sentences.

"Do...you have...documents?" he asked.

"No," I answered. "I don't."

He asked my last name and where I was from originally. Suddenly, he asked a very unexpected question. One I had never been asked before.

"Do you believe in God?" he said.

"Yes, I do," I answered.

"What faith...do you...confess?"

"I don't know."

"Have you been...a...believer for a...long time?"

"Nine days already."

His eyes open wide. "How old are you?"

"Twenty."

His eyes opened again. "You are twenty years old and have been a believer for only nine days? Tell us, what church were you at, and what sermon touched your heart to believe?"

"I have not been to any church anywhere," I answered. "And no sermon has touched me."

"Then tell us," he said again, looking concerned, "why do you believe in God?"

"Because I asked God a question, and He answered me," I replied.

"Do you pray to God?" he asked.

"No, I have never learned to pray."

"Do you know Christ?"

"No, I have never met Him."

"Have you met God?"

"No, it was not me who met Him, but He who met me and turned my face to Him so I would see Him; because I was standing with my back to Him and could not see Him. I was on my knees, and when I got up on my feet, He had already left; so I did not see Him."

I listened to how this old man was interpreting my story to my German host. I heard that he was explaining something totally different from what I told him and at the end added, "It looks like this boy has gone out of his mind."

This got me upset, so I turned to the host and began to explain as best I could in my German how I knew that there is a God. I told him the story about my knife.

"... And so the policeman took this knife away from me at the station and gave it to the guard. That was three days ago, and it has now been nine days since I asked God whether He exists or not. Since then, I have believed that He exists, and that's why I told you that I have been a believer for nine days."

My host listened intently, and although my German was limited, I felt that he understood. When I had finished, he broke into a great smile. Then he got up, took my hand, and began to shake it vigorously. "Brother!" he said.

I thought he had made a mistake and mixed me up with his brother. Now I realized why he had been looking at my face during lunch. I decided to tell him the truth.

"No, sir. You have made a mistake. I have two brothers, but they are both younger than me."

But the host just addressed the old man and said, "Doctor, check his health. He may need medical attention at once."

The doctor asked me to disrobe and began to listen to my back and chest. He checked my pulse and temperature and concluded, "He is very much emaciated from starvation. Don't give him greasy foods, only boiled milk and coffee, also soup and some bread. This will help stabilize his health."

Then the doctor turned to me and asked, "What have you been eating lately?"

"Acorns," I answered, and smiled, imagining what reaction it would bring.

"What? Acorns?" he asked. "Did you just pick them off trees and eat them?"

"No," I answered. "I did not pick them off trees. I gather those that had fallen and ate them with raw potatoes."

The doctor at once suggested that the host check my weight daily. He said I needed to gain no less than two hundred grams a day.

So this was my first day in a German "host family." Evening came, and my hosts wished me a good night and showed me back to my bedroom. I was left alone in my room and began to look around. It was not a big room, but it was very cozy. The bed was very high and nicely made. I imagined how comfortable I would be in it, and I wanted to get in it right away. I was all ready to fulfill my desire when I noticed a mirror sitting on a small table. I had not seen myself in a mirror in more than three years, and I began to wander, "How do I look?" I took the mirror in my hands and looked into it. I was so shocked at what I saw that I almost dropped the mirror right on the floor. The mirror was small, and all I could see in it was a skull with dark, dirty skin tightly wrapped around it, black eyes, and black hair. "Can this be me?!" I exclaimed. I could not come back to myself after this shock. I lay down on the bed but could not fall asleep for a long time. The bed was too soft, and I was not used to sleeping under a white sheet. My nerves were on edge. I could not stop wondering why these people had taken me in. "If they find out where I am from," I thought, "they will surely hand me straight over to the authorities." It was then that I remembered the underclothes I had hung on a tree to dry. I panicked. "What if someone sees them? They are covered in Buchenwald stamps! What will happen then?" I needed to retrieve them immediately. "Perhaps," I thought, "I could slip out and do it when everyone falls asleep. But how can I go out unnoticed? What if they think I am stealing and kick me out?" I decided not to risk it.

Before falling asleep, I remembered Nikolai Ivanovich. I recalled how he had come to our house during the war and confessed that he was a Jew. I remembered how he had asked my father, "What will you do with me now?" And how my father answered, "Why, I'll warm you up, feed you, and give you shelter for the night. In the morning, you will tell me what to do yourself." Poor Uncle Kolya! He had lost his family and had been looking for someone who would hide him. Of course, my father was his friend, but he had risked his own family when he hid Nikolai from the Germans.

People say, "You reap what you sow." Then perhaps God would pay me back with good for all the good my father had done. My father could have been shot if the Germans found out he was hiding a Jew! The Germans were so cruel, ... but what about my host? He was a German man, yet he had taken me in and fed me. My thoughts went back to the prophetic dream I had believed so much in. I had passed all the barriers it seemed--the Dresden jail, the Buchenwald camp, then the escape, and life in

the forest. The most surprising story by far, however, had been the knife. Now I knew that God existed. If God had given me good for the good my father did, then from today on, my motto would be: "To live for people."

"How can I live for people?" With this thought, I drifted into a deep slumber.

I woke up to a knock at the door. It was the French servant, calling me down for breakfast. I dressed quickly and went downstairs to the kitchen. The host of the house took me to a scale to check my weight. I stepped on the scale and could hardly believe my eyes. It read forty-one-and-a-half kilograms.⁴⁴ This was especially hard to believe because I was one meter and sixty-eight centimeters⁴⁵ tall. The host must have not believed his eyes, either, because he told me to step aside while he checked the scale. He put a five-kilogram weight on the scale, and sure enough, it showed that exact amount. He checked my weight again, shook his head, and recorded my weight in a notebook.

I was served coffee, bread, and butter for breakfast that day. After breakfast, I went to the barn, which held ten horses and five cows. I changed into work clothes, and my host showed me a wheelbarrow in the corner. The French servant began to fill the wheelbarrow; and when he had finished, I took the handles to push it out. When I had worked as a furnace stoker at the ceramic pipe factory, I had been quite handy with a wheelbarrow, but now I could not manage it, even though it was only half full. As I took hold of the wheelbarrow, it began to wobble uncontrollably. I could not stay on my feet and fell over with the wheelbarrow. My host was watching me and immediately ran to where I had fallen. I covered my head with my hands, expecting to be beaten. "Now he will count my ribs with his foot," I thought. "I hope he won't break any ribs." I did not expect what happened. My host and his servant picked me up and put me on my feet. My host ordered the French servant to put down some straw in the yard, and laid me down to rest.

And so it went. Every day, I ate with my family at their table, and when they went to work, I lay down to rest on my straw bed. I must have looked like a dog lying in the sun while his master worked. Each time the host measured my weight, I heard a happy announcement: "Goot." I gained half-a-kilo each day. When I went outside the gates of the yard, I could see that the houses still had white flags flying. Spring was in full bloom, and everything came back to life, just like me.

I was so happy to see such beauty: neat little houses with neat little flower beds and well-tended orchards. My "family" fed me and seemed genuine in their care. Yet all this was so foreign to me that my chest was being squeezed with sorrow. I wanted to go home to Ukraine, to see the white mud houses that were drowning in white orchards and to see the dear faces of those I had left behind. Would that ever be possible?

On the eleventh day of my stay, my host came to me after breakfast and said, "Put on your Sunday's best. The American troops are coming today!"

We all got dressed and went outside. There was no fighting, just many American tanks passing by, filling the streets. American soldiers sat on the tanks, and the local citizens waved to them as a sign of welcome. I saw heavy artillery passing by on large cars. This looked very much like a military parade,

⁴⁴ About 91.5 pounds

⁴⁵ 5 feet, 6 inches.

except in a parade, everyone wore a helmet; but here, everyone looked like he was going out! I decided it could not be a military parade at all.

In the evening, the entire parade had gone by, and we went in to have dinner. The table was set holiday style, and the host allowed me to pour food onto my own plate and eat as much as I wanted.

Even though I was allowed to eat more from then on, it was still not enough for me. Once I was caught stealing. After breakfast, my hosts took cooked potatoes out to the cows and allowed them to cool off for an hour before feeding them. I noticed this habit and went to the barn to have some. I sat down next to the bowl, peeled the potatoes, and ate them. Although I did not realize it, my host had come in while I was eating, stood behind me, and watched me. After I had eaten my fill, I got up and saw the host standing there staring at me. I almost fell straight down to the earth from the embarrassment I felt. My host asked, "Are you hungry?"

"Yes," I answered. "I didn't have breakfast. I only drank coffee."

He forbade me to eat in the barn. He took me to the kitchen and told my hostess that every time I showed up in the kitchen, that meant I was hungry and needed to be fed. Perhaps I was much pain to that generous hostess, but every two hours I showed up in the kitchen and received a serving of food. I began to feel strong and wanted to thank the host, so I took over the task of cleaning their barns.

May Ninth

It was morning. My host and the hostess were nicely dressed. Both of the girls, my host's daughters, came out in nice dresses and with their hair nicely done. Only now did I notice that those two were very dear creations. At breakfast, the joyful host announced, "Today, the war with Russia is over."

I immediately jumped up with joy and asked, "What's today's date?"

"May ninth."

"May ninth! How long have I been living with you?"

The host looked into his notebook and answered, "Twelve days. In twelve days, you have gained ten-and-a-kilograms."⁴⁶

In my mind I began to count the number of days I had lived in the woods. Forty-six days, I calculated. Somehow, when I had lived in the forest, I had thought that at least three months had passed. What days they were! I said something quietly.

"Forty-six days."

"What did you say?" asked the host.

"Forty-six", I answered in German.

"You lived in the forest for forty-six days?"

"How do you know that I lived in the forest?" I asked.

"I know everything," he said. "On the second day of your stay, I discovered your underclothes on the tree. Bring them here."

Now I understood that he knew everything about me, but now I was no longer afraid of him. Besides, the war was over. I brought the shirt and handed it over to the host.

"So now tell us; where are you from?"

I told him the same lie as before, but he stopped me. He opened the shirt up and held it out as though he had received it as a prize.

"Ella," he addressed his youngest daughter, "read the sign on this shirt."

Ella came up to the host, took a closer look, and said, "Buchenwald."

"Is this your shirt?" asked the host, "or did you steal it?"

"It's mine."

"Then tell us where you got it from, and don't be afraid; no one will harm you."

So I opened up to them. "My last name is Zinchenko, and my name is really Grisha."

⁴⁶ About twenty pounds.

I told them my life story in detail, starting when I had been taken to work in Germany. I told them of my first escape. Everyone was terrified by the stories about the torture and suffering of the Dresden jail and the underground “circus” where jail guards took pleasure in watching other humans suffer. My host interrupted me for a minute and said that he had heard about such “circuses.” He had heard that young officers were taught cruelty and had been forced to get used to seeing blood and human suffering. I continued my story about Buchenwald and how I was saved from the crematorium. When I was finished with my story, the host told what happened to Buchenwald.

“...The Americans were bombing the walls of Buchenwald so the prisoners could run away. However, it turned out that the forest was surrounded by German troops, and anyone who attempted to run was shot. It was even announced on the radio that if anyone saw a suspected man or woman, they should immediately tell the police. A prisoner could be distinguished by a cross shaved on his head. Grigoriy shaved his cross before he escaped.”

With the memories and stories of the past, the holiday supper came to an end. From that day on, I volunteered to feed the horses and the cows and took to cleaning the barns. For all my efforts, I was fed well, as much as I desired. Since we ate by ladling food into our bowls from a large dish, I always tried to put as much grease as possible into my bowl. If anyone ever got a fatty piece of meat, they gave it to me. I ate everything with a great appetite. When the field work had started, I was left at home all by myself and had the responsibilities of a houseowner. I continued checking my weight and was very happy to see myself gaining half-a-kilogram daily. At times, I went out into the city and walked around on the streets which were filled with military troops.

One Sunday, my host gave me a nice suit and suggested I go to the city with his daughter Ella for protection, since the city was filled with military men. I became a part of the family. My hostess was very kind to me, but the girls only talked to me when they needed to give me a message from their parents. Once, when Ella and I were walking around the city, I asked her, “Do you know the family where a young Russian couple works?”

“Yes, I do,” she answered.

“Could you possibly take me there? I want to thank them for the meal they once gave me,” I replied.

We went to their house. The lady of the house, along with the Ukrainian servant I had remembered so well, was sitting in the living room. Ella and the lady of the house greeted each other, and I bowed my head. The hostess began to ask Ella about me, but I answered myself.

“You have seen me before, but perhaps you have forgotten.”

She looked at me very carefully and said, “No, I have never seen you before.”

Then I asked the young Ukrainian woman in German whether she remembered me, but she also did not. I thanked the lady of the house for the evening meal that I had received from her when the policeman brought me in for questioning. At this, the young Ukrainian woman motioned to the young Ukrainian man to come closer.

“Vania, come here,” she said. “Are you sure you don't recognize this guy?”

"No," he said, "I have never seen him before."

"Remember the night the policeman brought a boy here, and we translated for him?"

"Well, hmm...actually, I do remember," he said.

I began speaking to them in Ukrainian, and they immediately recognized me.

I became a frequent guest in that house, as did other Ukrainians who lived in that town. We would gather together and share our news, talking over our hopes and what we had been through. Everyone had the same wish: to return home as soon as possible. After such contact with my fellow countrymen, my thoughts of home did not go away, even though I was having a very good time here.

On Sundays we went to church. After the service, my host told me about Jesus, but my German was very limited, so I guessed more often than I understood.

Once, after a Sunday service, I told my host that camps had opened which were gathering Russians to send them back to their homeland, and that I wished to go home. This news made him very sad. This surprised me. I had expected him to be happy because I was an extra mouth to feed, but he suggested I stay and begged me to live with them. He warned me that I could be blamed for betrayal of my homeland if I returned, and I almost decided to forget my thoughts of home because I felt very safe here.

I thought of Ella as a sister, but our frequent trips to the city drew us closer to one another. She told me about her father--how good he was, and that he was very proud of me, and that he told everyone how he saved me. He had always wished to have a son, and she told me that I was like a son to him. My soul was being torn in two. I wanted to stay in this house; but as soon as my thoughts wandered back to Ukraine, to my parents, brothers, and sisters, my soul longed for home. The topic of my staying came up very often at dinner, and I tried to change the subject and kept answering, "I'll think about it."

When I walked down the hallway to my bedroom, I thought about who was behind all the doors. The first door was my host's study. Then came Mary's bedroom, then Ella's. I would often pause by the last door, wishing to knock and say "good night", but I never did because I considered it inappropriate. I passed two more rooms which were already empty because the Polish and the French men had left. The last room was mine. In fact, I felt like the whole house was mine. I could do anything I wanted: read, rest, or whatever else I pleased. My generous and thoughtful family brought me many Russian books, and I had time to read. "Why not read?" I thought. Somehow, though, I just could not do it very often. I was not much interested in reading.

Although I went to bed, and often everything was good, I was bothered by sleeplessness. I wanted to go home. I began to dream how I would return home and what joy there would be when I returned. I had not seen my loved ones for three years. I had already faced the fact that some may no longer be living. After all, there *had* been a war. The thought that my parents may no longer be alive pained me greatly. However, when the thought would come to me, I would push it aside immediately. I wanted to believe that everything was well and that I would see my loved ones again; that the old times when the entire family gathered at our parents' table would return. Our dinners were not as elegant as

they were here at this German's house, but there was more joy at our table. Somehow, I only remembered the good things.

Often, I remembered the joyful, sparkling eyes of my father as he joked, and I could imagine them perfectly in my mind. Having had such memories, I was ready to suffer hardship once more, as long as I would make it home. I wanted to believe that my parents were still alive. "They said good-bye to me," I thought, "and now they are waiting for my return." No matter how much I weighed the decision in my mind, I always came to the same conclusion; I needed to return home.

One day my friends and I rode our bikes to the camp where the Russian people were waiting to go home. It was about twenty kilometers away. We observed the camp life. There were many people there, and they were being fed quite well. They said that employers came to the camp from Argentina and Brazil. They told us that those who did not wish to go back to Russia or Ukraine signed the waiting list to go to some other country. Those with families they especially tried to bring out to the camps for relocation. Those who wanted to emigrate needed to have medical exams done, so they were taken to another camp. Of course, there were many camps for this purpose, but even more people desired to stay in Europe. My decision to go back home, however, was final, and nothing could change it.

My good-bye evening was sad, yet it was understood why I was leaving. My host prayed for me, we exchanged addresses, and said good-bye. I did not know how to thank my host and only repeated, "God will pay you for me."

The next day I went to the camp. We had nothing to do there, so we organized a group of bikers who went around to the neighboring villages and asked for groceries for the common kitchen. I was happy with that job because time went by faster. When we went around, we found that the villagers were respectful, and we were happy with anything that was given to us. Another group of bikers also existed. That one was boisterous and was well known for its pirate-like behavior. They developed impudence and robbed people, bringing the stolen goods back to the camp for common use. They even had a motorcycle with a side car. I did not join them since I considered myself a believer in God, and had been rewarded too many times in my life; I would not begin to steal now.

Once, our group went out toward "my" village. I told them that my host lived close by. By that time they had heard much about him, and everyone wanted to go there. I agreed on one condition: that no one was to ask him for any food, not even eggs, because this man had been so kind to me. When we reached the house, my group was excited, and we stormed into the yard to meet this kind man. I headed toward the house just as if I had come home. The worried host came out on the porch, which was not surprising, because word of Russian robbers had reached him. I went up to the host and began to thank him again for saving my life. His face immediately changed, and the lady who had been my hostess came out on the porch, too. They invited us in, set the table, and brought out a case of wine. I was very surprised because the entire time I had lived with them, I had never seen any wine in this house. Four years had passed since I had had wine, and I remembered having a terrible headache afterwards. I drank only a little bit. I still got dizzy from the wine. I noticed that Ella was not at the table, and asked, "Where's Ella?"

"She is ill and is lying down in her room," my host answered.

I had not anticipated such an answer. I went up to the second floor, knocked once on Ella's door, and went in. She really was ill. I sat next to her for some time and talked to her. When it started getting late, I said good-bye to Ella for the last time. She only nodded her head in response. Soon after I left my host's house for the Russian camp. That was the last time I saw them.

In a few days we were sent back to our homeland. Train wagons came in, they loaded up our stuff, and it was good-bye to Germany!

This story is not a fairy tale, but the real life of Grigoriy Zinchenko.

The First Part

It was a hot August day. The ceremony of exchanging the prisoners of war was done in a celebration setting. A few hundred American soldiers had been lined up into three rows, as though they were in a parade. On the other side, in the same order, but in four rows, stood the Russian troops. Cars full of prisoners, myself included, sat on the neutral line. We sat in convertibles and waited for what would happen next. Then at some unnoticed signal, both sides began to move toward each other. To an outsider, it must have looked like two enemy regiments were approaching one another for battle. I felt like the Russians were suddenly going to break with the ranks and yell, "Hurrah for the homeland! Hurrah for Stalin!" and attack. What happened was totally different.

There they were, two united regiments going toward each other. When the two armies neared one another, the soldiers stopped, and the officers came to the front. There was a tense moment of silence. It seemed like we had stopped breathing while watching what was going to happen next. What happened was this: the soldiers shook each other's hands and then began to embrace. The ranks dissolved, and in a matter of minutes, the two regiments had completely mixed. The soldiers went toward each other with open arms, as though saying that they now had no weapons and were ready to welcome each other as friends. I watched, speechless, as the common soldiers of two powerful countries embraced each other with tears of joy in their eyes. We civilians who sat in the cars simply did not know what to do. We could not believe that we had made it to the time when we had been freed. Some people here, like myself, had been driven into Germany under the auspices of "voluntary labor," and had now expressed a desire to go back to their homeland. There were also ones who were lucky enough to escape from fascist war prisons and had miraculously survived. The women went toward the soldiers in tears. Everyone jumped out of cars and started kissing and hugging, even though no one knew each other. Joy united everyone.

At last everyone quieted down, but tears continued to flow. The soldiers gave one another whatever they could. Souls were at rest; it was the end of the suffering! We were free and going to be home very soon! What powerful joy it was to witness such happiness after enduring such trials and hardship.

As the American soldiers were leaving, I remember that they honked their horns for a long time in joyous farewell. We waved our hands in response until their cars could no longer be seen. For the night, it was suggested to us to find any place we wished under the open skies. A safeguard was installed so none would go astray. Some people had bags and some even had suitcases full of belongings. They began to make beds for the night. I had nothing but the suit my host father had given me and a shirt with "Buchenwald" stamped all over it, yet my soul sang with joy. The next day we were divided into groups. The women were taken to the women's camp from where they would be taken home.

The men were separated into two groups: one for the men under the age of twenty, and one for those over twenty. I later found out that the older group was sent to Siberia to cut the forest down. The boys in my group, myself included, were enlisted in the army. While still on German soil, I became a Soviet soldier.

When I had escaped and was living in the forest, I had wished to get to Czechoslovakia. Now it seemed my dream would come true. Where it seemed that we could walk the road in three days, we were made to walk for a month, using the same road--back and forth, north and south. Finally, we got

out of that haunted circle and arrived in Ukraine via Poland. On the eve of winter, we made it to the city of Koresten in the province of Zhitomir. My real army service started there.

I rose in the ranks very fast. I was immediately accepted into the *Komsomol*, and that was considered “a pass to life”. Then I was transferred into the writing unit of the battalion since I had nice handwriting. Soon I became an assistant to the head of political studies. He led lessons on Mondays, so I spent all of my free time preparing for lectures. I was given ancillary materials at headquarters and was assigned a topic for each of my reports. After some time I was entrusted with leading the political studies independently.

In the beginning they trusted me with company, and later allowed me to instruct the entire battalion. Talk about my being a prisoner at Buchenwald spread across the entire garrison, and once I was asked to tell about my life at the Buchenwald camp. The entire battalion came together. All sorts of questions were asked, and instead of the scheduled one-hour class, this lasted four hours. From that time, the *Partorg*⁴⁷ took patronage over me to prepare me to become a member of the Communist Party.

Half a year of army service passed by. I wrote letters home very often, but for some reason, I did not receive anything back. I remembered my father's words about not writing too much and realized that it must have been because I wrote too many details about army life. I wrote that I was serving in aviation and about the city where I was serving. In any case, for some reason or another, the letters did not go any further than the army censor.

I decided to write a letter to the village union administration with a request to inform me on the whereabouts of my relatives and whether they were still alive. So after four years without any contact with my relatives, I received the first piece of news from my family. My sister, Olya, wrote the letter. I could hardly make out the words, for the tear-stained letter had been on the road for a month and was now very wrinkled. I could hardly read from excitement. My hungry eyes fell over the paper, and I wanted to see it all in one look. After quite some time, though, I finally calmed down enough to read:

Grisha, we are orphans. Our parents have been killed. We are older already, but Raya is only seven years old and Vania is nine. Last year we had a poor harvest, and we are about to run out of potatoes. We are waiting for new ones to come. Volodia and Dusia are alive, so the five of us live together. We had not heard anything about you and could not even hope you had survived. We have the papers about our parents' deaths, but so far, we can't get any help as orphans. Maybe you can ask your authorities about this because Father died fighting the war.

My joy disappeared, and everything started to glide before my eyes. I had been so anxious to receive this news from home and had so much hope in seeing my family again, and now this! I imagined all my brothers and sisters going hungry. These were the children of parents who died in the war! “What is our party doing?” I thought. “The very party I am about to join?”

“Perhaps it's only like that in our village,” I told myself. So I decided to talk to the authorities the first chance I got.

⁴⁷ This is a combination of two words, *party* and *organizer*. A Partorg is the chief of the local Communist Party organization in charge of ideological work.

I wanted very badly to take time off and go home, but who would allow me to do so? The front line soldiers who had served in the war had not yet been demobilized, and many of them had families of their own. Their children may also be hungry and need their father's help, but how could their fathers help them now? Neither soldier nor high-ranking official was given any compensation of value--the "compensation" was only enough to buy a few packs of cigarettes per month. And this was compensation to the victorious soldiers of the most powerful army in the world?! "What are all my political studies for?" I thought to myself. "I tell the soldiers about our strong, rich, and indefatigable country, but they receive letters from home and discover that their families don't even have enough bread to eat! They might not even have clothing! Before the war, they wore hand-sewn clothing; but what about now?" I remembered how in Germany we had been lined up in regiments on a field before crossing the border. They announced that all the clothing we had carried on our backs for the last month must be piled up on the ground. Everyone obeyed the order. Then they ordered us to give all of our gold objects like rings, watches, necklaces, and other jewelry to the army officer-in-charge. Any chance of hiding it was impossible. We were then forced to take ten steps away from that huge pile of belongings. The pile was sprayed with gasoline and set on fire. That left me with only one shirt, and I put it on. This shirt was a memory of Buchenwald for me. I looked at our soldiers with pain, knowing that they would return home to their hungry families empty-handed.

That was the first time that I regretted that I did not stay in Germany, but by then it was already too late.

I started preparing for my political lectures once again. The next topic was, "The First Stage of Building Socialism." This topic consisted of three parts; two of them we had already covered—"The Period of Transition From Capitalism to Socialism: The New Economic Plan," and "Collectivization: The Gateway to Socialism." The third part we would cover on the topic of building socialism, the one I was preparing for, was called, "Without Heavy Industry, There Is No Socialism." The captain decided to lead the lesson himself since there were going to be some party commission people present, so I needed only to answer soldiers' questions. That meant I did not have a busy day ahead of me.

The captain gave the lecture in high spirits. He did not talk much about heavy industry; instead, he criticized every aspect of light industry. He explained that the "enemies of the nation" proposed nothing more than a *gradual* change from light industry to heavy--to develop the light industry first, and only from that point go on to develop heavy industry. This was ludicrous since without heavy industry, there is no socialism. So we must build heavy industry right away.

When he was finished with the lecture, the soldiers began to ask questions, and he answered many himself. Then when the question: "Why was it necessary to confiscate private banks in order to build heavy industry?" was asked, the captain looked at me and said, "Can you answer this question, Grigoriy?"

I agreed and began to explain, "The wealth of the nation was split up in three categories: one part of the wealth belonged to the private banks, the second to the church, and the third to the population."

While I talked about the first and the second parts of our nation's wealth, everything was going fine. The authorities were delighted. Then I began to explain about the third part. "The people also had gold--and no man will just give away his gold for nothing! So the gold or silver needed to be taken by

force, or through a trick. A plan was developed for this. Shops called *torgsins* were opened where high-demand items were sold only for gold. When a great famine began in the countryside, groceries were also sold for gold. This method worked well on the working class, but the peasants, who had a good harvest, did not need the bread from the *torgsins*. Therefore, all bread was taken away from the peasants, and they were told to buy bread only from the *torgsins*....”

As soon as I said that, the captain got up and announced that the lesson has been in session too long, and that we would continue the topic next time.

The First Questioning

After the evening break, I was awakened and told to gather my belongings and get ready to go on an official trip. What belongings did a soldier have? I put on my clothes and went with my escort. A car waited for us around the corner. I was put in and we drove off. When we were outside the city, the driver was told to stop, and I was led into the woods on a small footpath. I was told to hold my hands behind my back and walk straight ahead. Two military men escorted me from behind. After walking for some time, we heard someone call, "Stop! Who's there? Your password?"

They told him the password, and we were allowed to pass. A few minutes later, the same thing was asked. "Stop, whoever approaches--your password?" and again we were allowed to pass through.

Being taken deeper into the woods and ordered, "Keep your hands behind your back," I understood that this was not going to be good. "There must have been some mistake," I told myself. "I can't think of anything I could be guilty of. Why have I been taken to be executed without questioning? I am well-known at the regiment headquarters, and I have not noticed anything suspicious. If they suspect something, why haven't they talked to me? They did not even question me! Could this be because of my father? Maybe he was mixed up in something the party did not approve of. After all, he did go around to different POW camps and rescued prisoners with our village overseer." I had hundreds of questions in my mind but not a single answer. I was used to walking in the woods without any protection; only then, I could go as I pleased. With this kind of "protection," one cannot run away. They would shoot before I was a meter away.

We came to a large tent that was being guarded by two watchmen. My escorts directed me into the tent but stayed behind. In the first room sat a military man. He asked me my last name and waved me into the adjoining area. Here I saw three military men sitting at a large table. In the middle of the room stood a large chair, and I was told to sit in it. The questioning then started.

They warned me very gently: "Answer all questions clearly and directly. For the smallest lie, you will be subject to trial at a military tribunal." After this initiation, they told me to sign a paper stating I would speak only the truth. They asked me questions that had no meaning to them.

"Your last name?"

"Zinchenko. First and Patronymic: Grigoriy Vasilievich."

"Date of birth?"

"March twenty-fourth of nineteen twenty-five."

"That makes you twenty-one years old, then." They wrote this all down.

They started asking me about my grandfather and where he had lived and worked before, but I replied honestly that I did not remember him at all. Then they asked where my parents had worked and who their friends had been; what my father did during the occupation; and what, if any, secret activities were conducted in our house during the war. From utter fear, I told them everything I could, even about Nikolai Ivanovich, the Jew.

"What do your parents do now?" they asked.

This was the easiest question. I answered that three days ago I had received a letter from my sister, in which I had learned of my parents' deaths during the war. They began to look at my past, where I had studied, where I had worked before the war, what I had done during occupation, and asked me if I had gone to Germany. Here I got a bit upset and said, "I was sixteen years old when the Soviet army abandoned us. No one needed me, so the Germans picked me up."

They began to threaten and insult me. I heard them accusing me of being a "betrayal of the homeland" and a "German spy." The main accusation brought against me was "spreading anti-Soviet propaganda among the soldiers."

"Tell us the truth," they demanded. "Who do you have connections with, and where did you get your false data?"

"All of the materials for the lectures," I said, "I receive from the captain."

"All lecture materials in the headquarters were checked and re-checked; there are none of them that even come close to describing what you have said. Tell us, from whom did you get the assignment to slander the homeland and plant discontent among the soldiers?"

I began to deny that, saying, "I don't have any connections and only say what I have studied in school or learned from the additional literature that I receive from the captain!" Then the talk became more in-depth.

"Admit everything," they demanded. "We understand you were dragged into it because you are young and inexperienced, but if you reveal the whole band to us, we will have mercy on you. Tell us who they are! They are liars that tell you all sorts of foolishness."

I remembered Uncle Tim and how he had warned, "If you tell anyone, you will get into trouble. This is a government secret." What kind of a secret was it when the entire world knew? I had heard about it many times from the foreigners at Buchenwald. They loved to discuss political issues, and the year 1933 was no exception. "I am so unlucky for being there and hearing all this information!" I thought. "Of course they did not warn me that I should not tell it to anyone and that it was a governmental secret."

"I don't know their names," I replied.

"You are lying!" they yelled. "Tell us their names."

"They are not Russians, so I don't know their names. There were Czechs, Frenchmen, and a few Italians. I heard all this from them in Buchenwald...."

"You are lying!" they interrupted. "You fascist! You have been to Germany."

"Yes," I replied, "I have been to Germany. Buchenwald is a German concentration camp, and that is where I learned about this."

"All right," they said. "Tell us everything you heard."

I repeated my story about the artificial famine. They recorded my story very fast and at times asked additional questions. When I was finished with the story, one of the military officials said, "You

have not been to any camp, and you have no proof of that. Now admit to us where you heard all this foolishness.”

I sat for a moment in disbelief. Slowly I unbuttoned my uniform and showed them my shirt, bearing the telling stamp “Buchenwald.” They forced me to take off the shirt at once and took it for “analysis.”

“They will take a picture of it,” I was told, “check your fingerprints, and then you will tell us the real truth.”

At that point, they suggested I sign a document stating that in my entire life, “I will never and in no place tell anyone about this anti-Soviet propaganda, and slander the Soviet Union.”

I signed below those words and about another ten papers. I did not even care what they said, as long as I would be left alone. They warned me again, “Don't say a single word to the soldiers! Go now, and think hard about this. Next time, you will tell us the whole truth. If you are asked where you were taken to, you are to say you went on an official trip. We have not seen you and have not talked to you about anything. Is that clear?”

When I left there, it was already morning. The same two soldiers who had taken me there brought me back to headquarters, and in the evening I went back to my battalion. The nightmare was behind me. I was so lucky to be alive and found it so ironic that my camp shirt had helped me. It was a miracle that it had lasted all this time.

From that day on, this story was one of my deepest secrets, and I did not tell it to anyone at any place. Jumping ahead a bit, I want to say that when my oldest son, Victor, was twenty-five years old on August 7, 1975, I told him the whole truth about the incident in the forest for the first time and about how the famine of 1933 had been carried out. He listened to me very carefully and concluded, “Father, don't tell anyone of this foolishness. That's Baptist propaganda. I will keep quiet about it because I am your son. The first time you were imprisoned for your belief; but the second time you will be imprisoned for your foolish talk, and you will never see your family again! Don't worry, I am an honest person and propaganda does not affect me.”

The truth about those horrifying times was being hidden with such effort, that a son did not even believe his own father.

After that, twelve years passed. The same son who called himself honest brought me a newspaper and pointed to an article, saying, “Father, read this. Here is an article about the year 1933. It says here, ‘The enemies of the people organized the famine of 1933.’” However, no facts backing that statement were given. Who were these enemies? What planet were they from? Who had given them the power to destroy entire villages? The author did not have enough boldness to say their names. Perhaps because he had no right to?

As fast as I had risen in the ranks, I went down. They demoted me to “musketeer.”

I Am A Christian

One year of army service had passed. The soldiers from our regiment, including myself, were sent on an urgent official trip to Moscow to help build the *Sheremetev* airport. I was a writer in my regiment, so I became a writer there also. I did not work on construction because I had enough work to do in the barracks. Some work teams were coming and some were going. My job was to write out department cards and to sign newcomers in.

In January 1947, an order was issued to send all of the soldiers from VVS (The Air Force) back to their bases. Now, I had more work to do. The Supreme Soviet elections were fast approaching. All soldiers were to vote from where they were serving, but since we had to leave suddenly, we were to be given absentee ballots. So the night before our departure, I sat writing out those ballots all night long! In the morning the order was given to prepare for departure. I was in the middle of a huge mess of absentee ballots, and I delayed the head of the headquarters because I needed his stamp and signature on each of them. I brought him a huge pile of absentee ballots to sign, and there was very little time left. He said that I should give them out on the train. He started signing the papers, and I stamped them. I was a dedicated employee. I put a stack of paper on the table and hurriedly stamped sheets one after another. Some sheets were absentee ballots. However, there was not enough time to do them all, so some were just blank sheets of paper.

I did not take too great advantage of the realm of possibilities this presented. I stamped only five blank sheets. These blank sheets, however, represented the great blank check of their day, for a signature and stamp was the final word in authorization of any activity.

On the train I handed out the absentee ballots to the soldiers. But my best friends, only the ones from our regiment, I rewarded with "unused leave." For myself, I wrote:

For especially distinguished merit and accomplished military duties, you are rewarded with ten days leave, not counting travel time. The administration of the military division requests that said leave be granted at the location of service.

So in May, I received my "unused" leave. Six years had passed since the entire village was at the train station to bid me farewell. Now I was going home of my own free will. More precisely, perhaps, I was running, flying home the entire five kilometers from the station to my house. My soul was singing, *The rascal ran from Sakhalin, by the narrow animal path....* It was noon, and I felt like my heart was going to burst out of my chest from anxiety.

Finally the last hut appeared. From the address on the letters, I knew this was ours. My father's hut no longer existed. It had burned down during the war. This one, one could not even call a hut; it was simply a barn. I knocked on the door. Everything was quiet. Then a nine or ten-year-old girl ran up to the door, looked out, and then ran back somewhere. I sat down on the porch. A moment later I heard someone saying, "There is some man at our door."

"What kind of man? Who is he?" came the reply.

"I don't know; some stranger."

They came out to the yard. "There he is," a voice said.

Raya was holding her older brother Volodia's hand.

"Brother? Grisha? Is that you?"

"Who else?" I replied. "Did you think I was a robber..."

We had no more words, and just embraced. Our throats were clogged. We could not utter a word and just cried.

"Raya, he is one of ours."

The girl just stood there in the middle of the yard, looking confused.

"He is ours, our Grisha."

I came up to her and gave her a kiss.

"How could she know me?" I said. "When I left she was just three years old."

So we stood there in the yard and talked. It was lunchtime and the cows were being driven home by anxious shepherds.

"Grisha, now you will see my helper, Vanyusha. He is twelve already!"

Vania came in. He was so handsome, I could not take my eyes off him! His eyes were huge and black as coal, and pitch black curls hung like rings over his forehead. I began to feel pain in my chest. He looked just like our father. The boy did not react to me, and somehow I was so overcome I did not even dare to hug him.

"Where is Olya?" I asked.

"She will be home soon. She is weeding the beet patch and comes home for lunch to milk the cow."

Just then we heard girls talking, laughing, and making lots of noise.

"Oh, come now," said a voice. "You don't even have any troubles! You're full of laughter!"

"I have cried out all I could," answered Olya's voice. "I don't have any more tears. Now don't be late, girls! We will work late today so we can finish our plot first!"

Not even noticing me, Olya entered the yard and started giving orders right away.

"Volodia," she said quickly, looking down at him, "you will milk the cow yourself today; I will only eat and go back to work. Bring your friend in, and we can eat together; then you guys can talk."

"Olya, but it's ..." he started, but Olya interrupted him.

"Don't wait for me tonight, Volodia. Start all the chores yourself."

With that she looked up and froze. Our eyes met and she stammered. She wanted to say something but could not.

"Olya, this is Grisha!"

I ran up to her and hugged her.

"You ..." she began to weep, "Grisha," and she could not manage anything else. Her tears flowed like a river, and as we stood there, she could hardly whisper, "My dear Grisha..."

Raya and Vania who were standing aside watched us weeping and began to cry, too.

"Why are we standing in the middle of the yard?" she said at last. "Let's go into the house."

A portrait of our parents hung on the wall with a black ribbon around it. She caught my eye and began to cry again.

"Mommy, Daddy, look!" she said. "He has come home; look, Daddy! Your favorite son is alive!"

All five of us huddled together in the middle of the room and cried. Olya looked at my face and then hugged the children closer to herself; then she looked back at me, and started weeping all over again.

"My poor orphans!" she said to them. "Mean people took our mother and father away, but God is merciful and has given our brother back to us."

Girls came into the house and began to weep, too. I said, "Olya you have company."

Then she noticed her friends and went to them, weeping. Volodia and I stopped crying and began to calm everyone down. Everyone quieted down, and Olya started coming back to her senses.

"What am I doing?" she said. "You girls have already eaten, but I have not even fed Grisha. Sit down with us. We can eat together."

"Thank you," they answered, "but we have already eaten. You stay home, and we will finish the work ourselves."

Volodia went to milk the cow, and Olya began to serve lunch. It was a modest meal, consisting only of light *borscht* and millet porridge with milk that Volodia had brought in.

"So, Brother," said Volodia, "we have not seen each other for six years, but I will not have us drink anything in my house to celebrate. I am a believer in God. Let's stand up and ask a blessing for the food." I remember dinner beginning the same way when I was a child, except that my mother had served the meal, not Olya.

"Where is Dusia?" I asked, worried. "Why isn't she here?"

"Oh, Grisha, she has gotten married and no longer lives with us. We hear from her very rarely, but she lives near Kharkov, in Dergatchi. You can go visit her."

So this is how my leave started. I began to go to my friends' and relatives' houses to see them. Every place I went, they fed me and put something alcoholic on the table. Every time I picked up a glass, I could hear my brother Volodia's words, "I am a believer in God." I was also a believer. In the evening my head was killing me from drinking, and I could hardly walk.

Sunday arrived and everyone was getting ready to go to the house of prayer. I went with them. The speaker announced his topic, "Christ became poor for your sake (2 Cor. 8:9), and we have all been

bought at a high price.” He spoke in simple and understandable words. At the end he read aloud, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Christ laid down His life for us.”

After the sermon they announced that there would not be an evening service, but a meeting of the youth from two village denominations, the Baptists and the Pentecostals. So I decided to go. Their discussion was lively, and everyone referenced the New Testament and read from it. For me this was all as black as a forest, but in my head the following words rang out loud and clear: “Christ died for people.” These words were good, but who were those people He had died for?

The discussion eventually bored me. When this confusing argument (as I thought it was) ended, the Pentecostal youth invited us to go to a service with them. Volodia and I decided to go. When they started to pray, I got on my knees out of respect. They prayed fervently with closed eyes and did not pay attention to each other, but I stood there with my eyes open, looking at everyone. Then a young man came up to me and loudly announced, “Listen to the Word of God!”

Everyone fell silent. I began to listen very carefully, expecting to hear the voice that I had once heard in my dream. The boy began to say something incomprehensible. Among the confusing words that came out of his mouth, I heard him saying in German, “Those who are drunkards will not inherit the kingdom of God,” and then I could no longer understand. He spoke in German, “Why do you carry honor in your pocket?” he said. Again, more confusing words followed, mixed in with German. The last words were in Russian, “I need you, I need you; you are not your own. Amen.” Everyone got up and looked at me. If I had been sitting by the door, I would have gotten up and ran out of there at that very moment; but since the door was far away, I simply got up and wiped the sweat from my forehead. Everyone was looking at me.

“Grisha, did you hear what the Lord said? He needs you. Repent. God said that ‘you are not your own.’”

“And did you hear when God spoke?” I asked.

“Yes,” they answered, “we heard.”

“It was not God speaking,” I said, “but this boy, Petia. He was right next to me, and I could clearly hear that it was he who spoke. He spoke in some foreign language I don’t know, and in German. I did not realize that our village had such educated youth! Tell me, is it all right for believers to drink?”

“No,” someone answered. “It is written that no drunkard will inherit the kingdom of God.”

“Don’t make up stories,” I said. “Petia told you that. Petia, tell me, how old are you?”

“Fourteen,” he answered.

“Where did you study the German language?”

“I did not study it,” he said. “I did not go to school during the war.”

“Then how do you know if I drink? And why have you called me a drunkard?”

Then everyone began to defend the boy and say that he had not said anything like that.

"I clearly understood this boy's German, and he also said that I carry 'honor' in my pocket. That's not true, either. I have not been at the front and don't have any medal of honor."

"Petia, what pocket does he have the 'honor' in?"

"In his shirt, in the left pocket."

I took my Komsomol I.D. out of my army shirt.

"Look, I don't have anything in here but this I.D.," I said.

"Grisha, how did you come up with this idea of honor?" someone asked.

"Petia asked me in German why I carried 'honor' in my pocket," I answered.

Everyone seemed to understand perfectly what everything meant, but I was still confused. They opened the Scripture and began to read from different places about speaking in tongues.

"Tongues are a sign for the unsaved, and the part that you understood was a prophecy for your exposure. Look what is written here, 'If a stranger or an unsaved person comes in, he will be exposed by all, and judged by all.' You need to repent. It was not Petia speaking to you, but the Holy Spirit speaking through Petia, telling you that you are not your own and that God needs you."

I repented that night, asked for forgiveness of my sins, and became a Christian. Ten days flew by with lightning speed, and my leave ended. Now I had to go back to my base. The Christian youth, both Baptists and Pentecostals, came to say good-bye to me. As a going-away present, they gave me a copy of the New Testament. A prayer was said once more at the station, and I left for my base.

The Second Questioning

Everyone on base went to the movies. It was a good time for me to be alone. When they were at the movies, I stayed in my quarters so I could rest and think. I believed and knew that there was a God, but why He went to be crucified I did not understand. Now there was also one more mystery. God had a kingdom, but who lived there, and how could one get there? I understood that I did not know a lot. I read the small New Testament I had received from cover to cover and over again. When I read it the first time, everything seemed understandable; but the more I got into it, the more questions I had. I needed to find some Baptist believers to answer them for me. My brother and relatives were Baptists. Even Uncle Misha, the preacher, was a Baptist. He had written out all the Scriptures for me about the Holy Spirit. I lay down on my bed and began to read the Gospel. I was much concerned about the places that talked about God's power. As I read the Gospel, I fell asleep.

The next morning I woke up and realized I had fallen asleep while reading. I looked for the Gospel but could not find it. A soldier named Kolia Gluhin came up to me and whispered, "Grisha, when we returned from the movies last night, I noticed you sleeping with the Gospel in your hand. My mom is Baptist, too."

We eventually became friends. When Sunday arrived, we went to the city and found a Baptist house of prayer. After the service we were surrounded by many young people. They were all interested in whether we had been saved for long or not. Kolia was uncomfortable and said that he had been saved for a month. I told them how I met the youth in my village, how I had been saved, and how I had prayed. I also told them about God speaking to me, telling me that He needed me. We were very happy that we had found fellow believers. When we were leaving, one girl gave me a note. "This is the address of some believers. You can go to their house; it's right by your base."

So one evening Kolia and I decided to take the opportunity to find that house during our free time. We found the house easily. A widow named Klimsia, her daughter Sveta and Stasia, and her son Kazimir, lived there. Baptist believers gathered there for prayer, and Kolia and I became frequent guests in that house. By that time I could pray, and after everyone went to bed, I went down to the river and prayed to God there by myself next to the rock. Without any suspicion of being watched, I went down to Klimsia's house a lot.

One night everyone was awakened with an alarm, and it was announced that "soldier Zinchenko is missing." Those who had seen me after the incident with the New Testament volunteered to find me. I was easy to find; they knew all of my paths.

They organized a "disciplinary action" for me. They lined up the entire regiment into just two rows and told me to walk the entire length between these long rows. Anyone who has been in the army and has seen this even once knows what I am talking about. Starting from one end of the line, I walked through it, and every soldier was ordered to hit me. Mostly they hit me with their fists, but when I fell, they made me get up with their boots. The captain who was in charge of political education, my former friend, was in charge of this process. The next day I was called into a special department for questioning.

The captain, the commander of the regiment, and another military man who I did not know sat at a table which had my New Testament on it. I was brought to the table and the interrogation started.

"Is this your book?" asked one of them, pointing to the New Testament. "Sit down. Let's talk."

I noticed a notebook with a red line across and tried to remember where I had seen it before. Suddenly I remembered exactly where I had seen one like it. It was at the first interrogation in the forest where I had signed papers promising not to expose the “governmental secret.”

“This means they have begun a case on me, and I have not even suspected it! Now I need to be very careful.” All the questions that were asked, I answered simply “yes” or “no.” At first they threatened me, but soon they began trying to convince me that the Bible was a tale.

“It is written in the Bible,” said one interrogator, “that you cannot serve two gods at once, but you are serving in the army. Are you not preparing to quit your service?”

No, I would not serve two gods. Immediately the thought, “Why do you carry honor in your pocket?” came to me. I took my *Komsomol* I.D. out of my pocket and put it on the table. I wanted so badly to get rid of it, and now it came out of my pocket so easily.

“You can take your I.D. back,” they said. “The only thing we are interested in is if it's true that you pray.”

“It's true,” I said.

“What sect do you belong to?” my interrogators asked.

I remember the call, “I need you,” and I answered, “I belong to God.”

“No, no, what sect do you belong to?”

“I don't understand your question.”

“Do you believe in scientific discoveries?”

“True science does not go against the Bible.”

“Here it says that the water in the Red Sea became a wall. Water is a liquid. How can it be still?”

“That's right; water is a liquid, but God pushed it aside with powerful wind for the entire night. During one night you can push liquid away for over one hundred kilometers.”

“What can you answer to Joshua saying ‘sun and moon be still’? Can it be possible for the sun and the moon to stop suddenly? Scientists have proven that the sun does not go around the earth. What do you say to that?”

I had never heard about that incident in the Bible even though I guessed that something like that was written in the Bible. I was asked many questions, and I always gave the same answer, “I don't know about that yet.” At the end the captain said, “I suggest you repent.”

“I have already repented.”

They translated this answer in their own terms, and in this way my questioning came to an end.

Every morning the captain asked me the same question, “So, Grisha, what did God say to you last night?”

I knew that he was trying to make fun of me, so I always had an answer ready for him. "God said that I need to be obedient to authority ... or that I should not be rude ... or that I should not drink." The soldiers always listened in and waited for what I would say. Once I answered, "Today God told me not to throw that which is sacred before pigs."

Everyone began to laugh, and the captain became uncomfortable. After that he did not make fun of me, but I understood that he would repay me for that.

I did not have to wait long. One night the captain came in and read out an order, "For unauthorized departure from the base, you are hereby assigned five additional duties." To this he added, "Starting today, you will wash the floors on two levels." I washed the floors for the entire night, and during the day he sent me to collect wood. The other soldiers felt sorry for me, though, and gathered the wood themselves while I rested. Three days had passed, and I had no more strength to go on. I would not tell on the captain until the time of punishment passed.

I decided to ease my work. When everyone fell asleep, I brought the hose out into the hall and opened the faucet. The water flowed into the barracks while I lay down to rest for a bit. I was exhausted, however, and fell asleep immediately. When the morning reveille sounded, everyone awoke to find the rooms filled with water! No one could figure out where it had come from. The authorities gathered to figure out what had happened. It was not long before they found the guilty one.

I had to explain that I was guilty of everything, and that I was working for the fourth day and night and forgot to shut the faucet off before falling asleep. They forgave my carelessness and gave me a day to rest. I do not know what the captain received for this, but he was very angry at me; and when everyone had a day off, he did not allow me to have one. I still managed to escape of my own free will and received ten days in the detention house.

Through all these incidents, God was still with me. While in the detention cell, I had a dream. I was standing on a river bank all dressed in white, and people were waiting for me on the other side. I went into the water and walked out into it, deeper and deeper, until the water covered my head. I kept walking through, and eventually, I ended up on the other side. I kept wondering about the meaning of this dream because I could swim quite well. How could I go under the water and calmly end up on the other shore? "Something new must await me," I thought. "They will probably fake a case against me, and I will end up in jail." I did not know what was going to happen to me, but my soul felt so much at ease; I felt I could go through the river.

The dream came true that same day. The guard of my detention house happened to be my friend and a brother of Kolia Gluhin. The son of the widow at whose house we had prayed came to Kolia that day and said, "Mother is calling you over right away. If possible, bring Uncle Grisha also."

It was lunch break, and all the soldiers had gone to the river to swim because it was the middle of July, the hottest time of the year. There were no empty spots by the river; everyone was lying down sunbathing. Kolia let me out, locked the empty cell, and we ran away. I was not risking much, but if Kolia got caught, he would be taken to the military tribunal for "disciplinary action."

There were many guests at Klimsia's house. A pastor named Petia Gubenko had come from Kiev. They were getting ready to baptize all the new believers. They remembered us, but the question

whether we could come at night or not, immediately came up. Kolia said that he could slide by the guard, but I was under arrest, so we could not even talk about it.

“What if we do it during the day?” someone suggested.

Two people ran out to check out the river and returned disappointed.

“There are lots of people there; the entire city has gathered there to swim.”

I started telling them about my dream, in which I was dressed in white clothing and went into the water. Immediately there were dream interpretations.

“You will be baptized today,” they said.

We bowed our knees and asked God for help. Soon after, a strong wind started to blow, the skies filled with clouds, and a summer thunderstorm started. People started to cry out, “God has heard our prayer! No one will be at the river in such weather. Now we can have a baptism peacefully!”

We emerged from the house and set out. At the same time the vacationers were running up the steep hill to find refuge, we were going down to the river at the same speed. By the time we made it to the river, there was no one there. Kolia and I were given white robes, and we were baptized in the middle of the day.

The rain ended as suddenly as it had started. Five minutes after our baptism, the brightly shining sun came out. We sang a song on the shore that went like this, “The talking stream will not tell anyone of this holy secret.” Then we headed back. The soldiers were returning to the river to swim at the same time. The youth of our prayer house surrounded Kolia and I so we would not be seen, and we made it into the house safely. We prayed there one more time, and I returned to the detention house where Kolia continued to guard me so I would not run away without permission.

After our baptism, it seemed as if all the forces of evil stood up against us. Kolia told everyone about Christ with boldness. There were many who listened as well as those who opposed the idea of God altogether. “Religious propaganda” was prohibited in the Soviet Union. And all blame was put on me because Kolia had soon converted two other soldiers, and everyone thought that I had converted Kolia. For every saved man, I was given a sentence. The captain eventually became very upset and gave me an ultimatum, “Look, Grisha. Either you repent, or you will rot in jail.”

My health was weak. Under good conditions I could make it, but in the detention house I was given only bread and water. I became weak very fast. I compared the captain to Grimberg, and eventually did not see much difference between them. Every day the captain demanded that I renounce my faith and repent.

One day the entire battalion was lined up, and I was brought in. I could feel that things were not leading to anything good. The combat commander came out and began to talk about my past.

“Grigoriy used to be the best soldier, men. Unfortunately, he has recently fallen under the influence of religious propaganda and has gone downhill. He has thought about it well, though, come to his senses, and now wants to repent before you.”

They gave me the word to reply.

"I believe in God," I said, "and I am well aware that all of my past life I had God's Providence and now wish to repent. In the New Testament it says, 'Confess your sins,' and in my repentance, I wish to confess my sins. All of you know that I used to smoke before, but now I have repented. Earlier, I had been drinking, yet I now also refrain from that. I was a godless man, but now I am a Christian.

After such repentance, I was sent back to the detention house.

Once the captain came to me, all gentle and smiling, and said, "I have begged the authorities to free you, and you will be completely under my watchful eye. Come now; they want to speak to you."

I was taken out of the detention house. As I was walking I thought, "They will not let me out of their grip so easily."

He took me to the special department. The conversation was very polite, but I decided to be quiet. I was not facing anything good, anyway. They read me an entire lecture which went as follows: "Religion is delusion. It dies out with the elderly. These capitalist beliefs are tales of the exploiters. Science has proven that there is no God, and only the forgotten and uneducated people believe in Him. In your twenty-three years you've seen a lot and now know yourself who profits from religion. You were the first helper in political studies, and we would like to put you back in that position. We will not send you to work or give you any orders. Let your head rest a bit. What will you say to that, comrade captain?"

At this the captain answered, "I can understand Grigoriy. It is impossible to renounce everything right away; one needs time for that. We used to be good friends, and now I ask you to give me a period of one month. Let Zinchenko be under my control completely. I swear by my badge, that in a month's time, I will change him. If not, I will turn in my badge."

He spoke with such certainty that I did not miss a single word. We left. Soon after this incident, however, he became very ill and soon ended up in the hospital. The doctor said he had tuberculosis of the lungs, and one month later he was laid off as a reserve.

I am not saying that God punished him, but I am thankful to God and think it was better for the man. He had sworn with his badge that he would turn it in in a month, and because of his sickness, he really did give up his badge forever.

There are a lot of plans in a person's heart, but only what is ordained by God comes to be. The captain thought he would let me rot to death in jail, but I went home safely. Throughout all of the tests, I remained a Christian.

I thought that now I would live peacefully, but it was not so.

The spring of 1950 came. Eight years of wandering had passed, and now I was finally free. I had served in the army for five years, and had now fulfilled my obligation. They gave me enough dry food to last three days, some money for travel, and an old coat. That was my entire pay for five years.

I Am Free

Everything had changed at home. Olya was married now. Volodia also had gotten married and taken the young ones under his care. Those were tough years. After the war, everything had to be restored, and to top it all off, we were hit with a bad harvest.

I moved in with my brother's family. We reminisced for nights on end, and when I asked my brother how he was getting along overall, he answered, "Quite well. Raya and Vania have grown and are helping me."

"Do you have enough bread for the helpers?"

"We have bread and milk."

So I lived with them for a week. One night I heard Pasha, Volodia's wife, talking to him in the kitchen. "Volodia," she said, "I have used up the last of the flour today, and the potatoes are almost gone. What are we going to do? It's only April, and they still refuse to give us anything for the orphans."

"I will go to the authorities and ask for a loan I can pay off during the new harvest," my brother said.

"Volodia," his wife said again, "this isn't for a day or two. We need to live for an entire four months."

Pasha served us pancakes with milk for breakfast. Without hesitating, I said, "Volodia, you said you have bread, but I heard you talking to Pasha in the kitchen."

"When you asked me," he answered, "we still had bread, but a week has passed since then."

"Do you have money to buy bread?" I asked.

"What money? They don't pay us on the collective farm. We work the entire year for compensation days. Last year the pay only lasted till April. Now, I will ask them for a loan and pay it off after the next harvest."

We started discussing how to live in the future.

"You need to get married, Grisha," he said. "Look for a bride that is well-off. Go to the city. Our village only has poor brides, but it would be easier for me if you got married. We will divide what we have in half. I will keep our sister because she's only twelve. You can take Vania, though; he is already fourteen. He can find a job in the city."

"Thank you, Volodia!" I joked. "What a kind soul you are! Now all I have to do is find a wife. I already have a dowry!" Then I calmed down and talked seriously. "Please be patient for a little while longer," I said. "You have fed them for seven years and given them drink and clothing. Let my part of the 'agreement' stay with you for a few more months. I will go to the city and see what I can do."

We said good-bye, and I went to the city. I left Vania, my "dowry", at the village and took with me all of my other belongings: my army shirt, pants, and ripped boots. I was wearing everything I had. Pasha gave me the last pancake for the road, and in my heart I hoped that everything would turn out all right.

I kept praying. I found a job on the first day, rented a room in a dorm, and received my pay as a loan in advance. On Saturday I washed my clothing, and on Sunday went to a Baptist church. There were many Christians in the church, around two thousand. After the service, all of the young people of the church went to the park. There were very few boys. Most of the youth consisted of women because it was after the war. In the park they organized a picnic. Everyone had brought some food with them, except me, for I was a guest. I met many people that day. Afterwards, I went to the church a few more times and then stopped going. My clothing were completely ripped at that point, and I had nothing to wear to the service. I did not stop praying, though, and trusted God with my fate. It is easy to make a mistake when you choose a girl among many, but God knows everyone. I began to pray, "I don't need a rich wife like my brother, Volodia, suggested. Let her be poor, but a kind soul; one that has been through many troubles so she will love my 'dowry'." Today I can say that my wife has been given to me by God.

I do not know if all girls ask God for a husband, for a friend for life, but my wife did.

She lived in a very large poor family. Her father was a pastor and a very good Christian. He raised his children to obey their God and their parents. He taught them to love people, never to carry anger in their hearts, and to forgive others for their mistakes. Her parents lived in a village. She had worked in the District Consumption office as a calculator of production and then was promoted to be a manager of the Ration Card Bureau since at that time, groceries were distributed through ration cards.

When the persecution of believers began, she was laid off "of her own free will." At the same time, her father and older sister were also laid off. Unable to find a job in her district, she came to Kharkov with only three rubles in her pocket in hopes of finding a job. Here, she was fortunate enough to get a job in her field at the cafeteria. She attended Baptist services. She stood out from the youth with her quiet character. Like everyone else, she wished to have a friend for life; but looking at the lives of her friends who had married unsaved men, she called out to God. Many times she got on her knees and prayed, "God, you see my tears; I ask you, please give me a friend for life. A Christian friend, of course. Yet, if I am meant to be alone, then help me to stay faithful to You till the end."

Once she later told me, she had a dream. "It was a clear sunny day," she said as she described it. "I was standing on a large staircase, in the middle of which there was a waterfall with people strolling on either side of it. Someone told me, 'Here is your husband,' so I turned around and saw a young man walking toward me. He was tall and handsome with black hair--dressed in a military shirt. There was not a single soul around, only water rushing by below me, and I did not know where to go. I had no strength to run. I stood there and waited to see what would happen. He came up to me and asked with a calm voice, 'Who are you waiting for?'

"I have no one to wait for," I answered, "but I am waiting for something; that much I do know."

"If you have no one to wait for,' the man said, 'then why don't you come with me?'

"I agreed and we left. Soon, however, I became worried. 'Where are we going?' I thought. 'This man is a total stranger!' I woke up because of worrying. I remembered this young man quite well. I thanked God for the dream, and in my heart, agreed to wait for this man. Much time has passed since then, and like so many dreams, I forgot it."

I exchanged my military uniform for civilian clothing and eventually started making friends. I looked around for a girlfriend. Once after the evening service, I was going home to the dorm on a trolley. It was very late. I noticed a girl looking at me, and I started to look at her, too. I had never seen her before. Just her look captivated me and I thought, "If only you were a Christian! Oh, but even then, such a beauty would never fall for me." I tried to ignore my feeling of captivation, but I could not remain seated and decided to introduce myself to her.

"Where are you coming from?" I asked.

"From the service," she answered. "We were both there."

I became more bold and asked her, "May I walk you home?"

"Yes, you may," she said, "but only up to the gates. My landlord is very strict."

We started talking. She told me how she had been persecuted and lost her job because of her belief. I fell in love with her instantly and with all of my heart. We arrived at our stop, and I started to walk her home. I did not know how to start the conversation, but I had made a firm decision to propose to her.

"Are you alone?" I asked. Then, startled by my own boldness, went on, "I mean, don't you, um, you don't have a friend, I mean, a boyfriend?"

She was silent.

We were walking together, and suddenly I realized that I had not even asked her name.

"Tell me," I said, "what's your name?"

"My name is Varia. I am originally from the Kursk province."

"I've had many names in life," I responded, "and I don't even know how to present myself."

"But I know you. Your name is Grisha," she said.

"That's unbelievable! How do you know me? This is the first time I've met you!" I replied, surprised.

"I saw you since the first time you came to the park. I saw you at the church often. You always sit at the balcony on the right. I saw you at the youth discussion and heard your story about how you met God. Well, here we are; I'm home already. Of course, I saw you another time, but that was a long time ago."

"When; where?" I asked.

"I can't talk to you for a long time; my landlord is waiting for me."

"That's all right. I have just one more question. Will you marry me?"

She was taken aback. There was a moment of stunned silence and then she said, "I am very poor. I don't have any dowry. If you can accept this and still want to marry me, then yes, I agree."

"It's not a problem for me if you don't have a dowry. I have one! I have my brother. He is an orphan. Tell me, where did you see me before?" I asked.

"In a dream," she answered.

So she agreed, and I married Varia soon after. Our engagement was celebrated at Volodia's house in the village. It was the year 1950.

During those years, there was much persecution of Christians. It began with the imprisonment of the pastors, deacons and preachers. Everyone faced the same set of conditions. All that one had to do was to sign a document asserting that he did not believe in God, and freedom was guaranteed. But if one did not sign such a statement, he was convicted under the "58th clause," which assigned twenty-five years in prison for "betrayal of the homeland." Very few of those convicted under this clause returned home.

The churches which had been opened during the German occupation were closed down. Young people gathered in the evenings and conducted services in people's houses as though the meetings were just birthday parties or get-togethers. Quite often, however, such services ended in sorrow. The house would be surrounded by militia men, and everyone who was eighteen or over was condemned to twenty-five years in prison.

Things were going all right for us. Our wedding day was planned for October 30. We had invited many people from the city, but unfortunately, we heard that only a few people from the surrounding villages would come because about three kilometers away, there was to be another wedding. Stepan Dibrov and Martha Yuhno, a well-known couple from the village of Kniaja, would also marry that day.⁴⁸

The preparations for their wedding were unusually grand. There was enough seating for two hundred people! The head table was raised and decorated as though it was a palace. Even a church altar was put up because they were planning to get married right in their own yard. It was beautiful beyond description. The entire yard was filled with both believing and non-believing guests. The choir was singing wedding hymns.

In a matter of minutes, these mystery guests arrived, only they turned out to be uninvited. About two dozen militiamen with revolvers surrounded those who had gathered for the wedding. To get everyone's attention, they fired a few shots.

The celebration ended in tears. Buses came, and all the guests were loaded into them and taken to a field where they were divided according to belief. Those who were not believers were set free on one condition. They had to prove that they were not believers by smoking or by calling a believer names.

The groom was sentenced to twenty-five years. The bride's brother, Fedia Yuhno, was condemned to the same fate. Since the bride's father was not a believer, he received only ten years. All those who were eighteen or older received sentences from twenty to twenty-five years.

Those were difficult times. Our wedding went by quietly and calmly that day. I received my "dowry", my fourteen-year-old orphan brother, and we left for the city. We were poor, but happy.

⁴⁸ Kniaja is a small village located in the Kharkov province.

Our dowry multiplied: six more children were born. Although it was not easy, we managed to build a house. In it, all my wife's younger sisters found comfort, as did the Christians who had no other place to live. There was never a time when we closed our doors to the needy. In our house we constantly had Evangelical Pentecostal services.

Once I came home early in the morning after working the night shift. It was January 26, 1962. My pay had been delayed, and I did not bring anything home. Varia met me in tears.

"I put the children to bed hungry. I have not eaten anything, and there is nothing to eat for today, and you will be taken away. I dreamed that I came up to a window and saw a *black raven*,⁴⁹ and I screamed out, 'Oh, the *black raven* has come and taken Grisha away.' All the children and I got up in the night and prayed for you."

That evening before we could finish discussing how to feed our children, the uninvited guests of her dream appeared. They showed us a search warrant and began turning the house upside-down, looking for "prohibited or foreign literature." I signed a paper saying that I did not have any. They did not pay any attention to that and ripped the house apart without finding anything. It was dinnertime, and my oldest children, Vitya and Tanya, were coming home from school. From our children's curious looks, we could see that every house they passed on their way home had most likely had people outside it looking at them and saying with compassion, "Run home! Run." Tanya ran into the house all in tears. With confusion, she noticed all the strangers in the house. Seeing that everyone was alive, she ran to me. She had turned nine just three days before. In a few minutes, Vitya, who was ten, ran in, and after taking a good look at everyone, quietly stood next to me.

After the search, they suggested I get dressed.

"Come outside. We need to talk to you for a bit."

My wife started crying. "Children," she said through her tears. "Say good-bye to daddy. The men are taking him away from us." The children started crying.

"Why are you terrorizing the children?" they barked. "Perhaps we should also take them away from you."

"Varia," I said quietly, "calm down. We will only talk, and I will be back."

At this, the men said, "Didn't you read the official orders? They say, 'Search the house of the arrested.' You are under arrest."

Only then did I understand that they were manipulating the order in order to arrest me. I said to my children, "Let's pray." We kneeled down and bowed our heads. Varia fell next to me, and the children, as though trying to protect me from those who had come, circled around me, without paying any attention to the neighbors who had gathered in front of our house, nor to the strange man.

We called out to God. During this prayer, my five-year-old Natasha, gave God a promise to serve the Lord all her life even if Daddy would never return. She stayed faithful to that promise, and the

⁴⁹ The author refers to a nickname of the big, black Volga-model cars which carried secret police. At that time, these cars were known as the *black raven*, as they often carried people away into the night, never to be seen again.

glamour of this world has never touched her heart. During the same prayer, my daughter, Tanya, made a decision to never kneel before any man, only before God. Her little heart had so much assurance in it that she did not even shed a single tear so the men at our door would not see her suffering. When we were saying the Lord's prayer, my one-year-old Luba, who was just learning to speak, added "and sugar" after we said, "Give us this day our daily bread." Her prayer was heard. Thereafter, sugar was never wasted in our house. The neighbors were crying as they looked at us. After the prayer, I hugged my wife and my children, kissed them, and only a moan came out from the depths of my soul. "May God keep them."

That same day, five other people were taken, all of them with many children. We were being convicted in accordance with "clause 209," and sentenced up to five years for "Invasion upon the life and health of citizens of the Soviet Union, under the presumption of religious services."

"Invasion." That meant that the act had not yet been committed, but it could be committed if other circumstances did not prevent it.

Newspapers published articles saying that new religious sects had formed, and that people were sacrificing their own children in order to be forgiven of their sins. About us, they wrote that a horrible religious sect had been uncovered, and that all the leaders were arrested and were going to be convicted in accordance with clause 209 which says: "Invasion upon the life and health of citizens ...". Reading the way acts were justified in those papers, one could accept everything as fact. If it was written in newspapers, the authorities said that meant it was true.

The Horrible Criminals

In 1960, at the time when Mikhail Khrushchev was ruling the Soviet Union, he gave a speech on television and announced, "In twenty years, on television I will show you the last Baptist." God only knows what he was planning. He was not meant to rule that long, for his authority was eventually taken away from him. In the meantime, however, he put his words into action. The media came to his help. The media published all sorts of lies so the nation would rise up against Christians. Any newspaper one picked up, either in a village or in a city, especially the "Komsomol Truth," shared such news. They published articles saying that a "secret of the sectarian pentecostals" had been revealed.

In some city or village that we are not sure of, there have been sacrifices. And do you think that a spotless lamb sacrificed? No. A poor woman who was searching for her soul's rest came to the sectarians to pour out her sorrow to them. They have a main sacrifice bearer. She went in for a confession to him. He listened to her sins as usual and in pity said, "You are a guilty sinner. You are so young, but you have committed so many sins already! You have stolen grain from the collective farm. As you go home, you put some grain into your pocket. That's stealing! You make apple wine; that's alcohol! You drank it and gave it to others; that's all sin! Drunkards do not inherit the kingdom! And how about another major sin of yours? God judges the fornicators and the adulterers. And what did you do? You cannot hide anything from God, nor from people. Everyone knows that your child is going to be two years old soon. That's a terrible sin. You cannot make it without a sacrifice here. God gave His son so that people can be forgiven for their sins. Your son is not yours; you just got pregnant--who knows from whom. To cover your sins, you must sacrifice your son.

Such articles would end with something like:

A broken-hearted mother told this to the neighbors. They went and told the story to the authorities. So this way the horrible sect has been revealed. All of its leaders have been arrested and will be sued according to the clause 209 which says "Invasion upon the life and health of citizens of the Soviet Union..."

After reading such a story today, and the next day, and the next in all of the newspapers, one would take it all as fact. If it was written in the newspapers, that meant it was true. Whose soul would not be angry against the Christians? Everyone would say that all of the Christians needed to be imprisoned, executed, and hanged. In this way, Khrushchev's propaganda against the Christians started.

I will only tell of one incident although there were thousands like it. When we were on trial, a man named Ivan was also tried. He was a hauler on a collective farm and was very strong. When the people were sent to unload train cars, everyone would carry the bag on his back, all bent over, but Ivan would take two in his hands and walk laughing, "I take two, so they balance out! It's better this way." He was a very calm and kind man. The entire district knew him. He loved God and he loved people. He was also a respected brother in the church. He would give advice to some and help others. The authorities did not like him. Every time someone repented from their sins, he was blamed for it. So they said, "It's now Ivan's turn for sacrifice." Then they spread rumors that Ivan was sacrificing people. They made up a false case against him and gave it to the court based on statute 209 for infringement on people's lives. During the trial, there was a live witness of his "wrongdoing." A pretty, blonde lady of about twenty-three years old stood there and testified.

"I am a Christian. I go to the church where Ivan is a leader. I came to their village less than a year so. Ever since my childhood, I have been attending the Baptist church with my mother. I loved to sing in the choir. When I graduated from the institute, I was sent to their village.

"Recently, I have found the Christian community there, but they are not the type of Christians that we had in our village. They talk in some strange way. Then they started teaching me how to speak a different tongue. They scheduled special prayers for this at night. When the prayer was over, everyone would go home, but I lived on the opposite side of the village from where Brother Ivan lives. I used to call him 'Brother' before. Now I call him a murderer. Let me tell you why.

"When we came to my house, he would say, 'Good night, and may God keep you.' He would extend his hand in farewell, and once, from inexperience, I gave him my hand. Then he grabbed me with his huge arm and wanted to drag me somewhere, but I pried myself out of his hands. The second time, he suggested a new shortcut home through the cemetery. He talked a lot about sacrifices on the way home; about the law that Moses invented for sacrificing animals. Then he told me how people used to bring their children as sacrifices. There were even cases where older ladies were sacrificed. He gave an example from the Bible about Abraham wanting to sacrifice his son, and Ivan sacrificing his own daughter. He said that God demanded that. He said that even God sacrificed His own Son.

"By that time, we were in the middle of the cemetery. We were surrounded by trees, and even though the moon was out, it was completely dark. From fear, I came closer to this Ivan. I wanted to find refuge, so I took him by his hand. Everyone said that he was a good Christian, so I trusted him. He walked calmly. Among the trees, it seemed like he was a tree himself, big and strong, and I was like a little sprout! In the darkness I tripped. At that moment he grabbed me in his hands and said, 'This is the way Abraham took Isaac and put him on the wood so he could sacrifice him. Abraham even lifted a knife against his son.'

"At that moment, the moon shone on us, and I saw that he was holding me in one hand and a knife in the other. His face was frightening. I understood that he wanted to sacrifice me.

"I was terrified and began to scream and protest. I called on God for help. Then Ivan put me on my feet and held me very tightly with his hand. I used all of my strength to free myself from his hands, and my God helped me. I freed myself at last and ran away. If I had not run away at that moment, he would have sacrificed me to his God."

The judge then asked Ivan, "Defendant, here is a live witness in front of you who says you sacrifice people. What can you say in defense of yourself?"

"What can I defend myself with?" he answered. "I have a God and He will acquit me. This is her third time witnessing that she was threatened with sacrifice, perhaps even her fourth or fifth. When I was free, I heard stories about her in the village; how she testified in court that the Christians wanted to sacrifice her, and how every time she "freed herself and ran away." She says the same thing today!

"Dear investigator, judge, and citizens present here today, look at my hands, and look at her. She testifies that when I wanted to sacrifice her, she freed herself, and ran away. Even the biggest man on the collective farm could not free himself from my hands, and she managed it? Decide for yourselves..."

So they decided: "For invasion upon the life and health of citizens of the Soviet Union in accordance with the 209th statute and personal testimony of the injured, you are sentenced to three years of prison."

After that incident, the injured lady never returned to the village. She was probably threatened with sacrifice by someone else again.

Now I will write about my trial "in accordance with clause 209." Four months had passed since we were arrested, but we had not been called in for questioning. I was called in only right before the trial to sign a conviction act. The conviction conclusion was four volumes thick, and just to read it one would need an entire week. Investigator Beliaev announced that three victims would come in as witnesses. I read their last names. Two of them I had never heard before, and the third one was Irina Zinchenko, who had the same last name as I. The conviction read: "All three victims have been treated at the psychiatric hospital. Mental deviations have come from religious grounds. Patient Irina Zinchenko was brought under strict care of a psychiatrist from the hospital. Twice a year she undergoes an examination in the neuro-psychiatric institute." This document had been signed by the professor of the institute.

The first two, whom I had never seen or heard about did not touch my heart, but I got very upset about Irina. I had known her for about eight years and had never noticed any mental deviations in her. She knew many Scriptures by heart and could even remember where they were written. Before she was saved, she graduated from an institute and worked as an accountant.

I was very shocked. Could it be true that during the four-and-a-half months I had been there, something had happened to Irina? I asked the investigator when he had seen her last and what had happened to her. He said that he had never seen her and that he had only received the documents from the institute. I was very upset about her because she was a Christian. That night, I prayed for Irina. I prayed that God would free her from the hospital. Just because of her, everyone could be hurt. How could we prove that no one was responsible for her illness?

Later I found out about the two others whose names I did not recognize. The first one was Vera Kovalenko. At the age of eighteen, she received a twenty-five year sentence in jail, for professing Christian faith, but was released in seven years and taken to the psychiatric hospital where she died. She had never been to Kharkov. (I cannot imagine how she could be a witness at the trial.) The second witness was a hauler at a factory. Once when large bundles were being transported on a car, she had been sitting on top and fell off during the ride. She badly injured her head and was then placed in the psychiatric hospital for a long time. Afterwards, she came out as an invalid. She never went to any Christian services. After discovering that believers were going to be convicted on her account, she took the documents regarding her illness and went to the province authorities. There, she insulted the head of the office and was arrested and put into jail for ten days. This happened when we were on trial.

The trial began. Six of us were tried together, including an elderly woman who was over sixty at the time. Our families were not told about the day of the trial. The entire city was filled with posters which read:

The prohibited sect of Christians has been exposed! They are being convicted of invading the lives of USSR's citizens. The trial will be open to the public. Entrance is free for all who wish to attend.

The courtroom was packed. About two thousand people were there.

The first trial had started. Our sister, Motia, as we called her, was helped to her place by her arms because she was very weak from being in the jail for four-and-a-half months. It was very hot in the cells, and no one got any fresh air. The cells were designed for ten people, but over fifty people were held in each cell. In one corner there was a "toilet" and in the morning, it usually was overflowing. Each morning when they cleaned out the cell, the floors were washed with chlorine. From such air even a young person could get dizzy, and our elderly Motia stayed in such a cell. Every day except Sunday, everyone was taken out for a half-hour walk, but our Motia was deprived of that also. Her cell was on the third floor, and she could not walk down the stairs, so for four months she had stayed in the squalid cell.

Questioning started with Motia. "Why didn't you sign the conviction paper?"

"I don't know how to write," she said. "I don't know a single letter."

"Then put a cross instead of your signature."

"Put it down yourself."

So the elderly Motia was tried without being acquainted with the case. I don't know how the trial started because I was very busy with one thought: "Why isn't my wife in the room?" The trial was open to the public. Could it be possible that they did not allow her in? I looked carefully into the crowd but could not see her. There were no children in the courtroom even though all who were being tried had large families. I could not tell if my brothers or sisters were there, either. Then I saw my brother, Vania, raise his hand right next to the wall. He had already served in the army for three years and had come back to live with us again. I watched hopelessly as two men came up to him, took him by the arms, and led him out of the room. I was so upset that I did not even hear the question that I was asked. I was poked on the side, and only then I heard the formidable voice of the judge.

"Defendant Zinchenko, why aren't you answering? I am asking you again; you are being convicted in accordance with clause 209 of the code of Ukraine. Do you consider yourself guilty?"

"No," I answered.

"On what basis do you reject the conviction?"

"If the law says that only one glass of water is allowed to be drunk, and I drink two," I said, "then I am guilty before the law. But I am not guilty before my conscience nor before the people. Your law says that it is prohibited to pray to God, but I pray, so I am not guilty before my conscience nor before God. Based on your law, I am guilty, but I am clean before God."

The judge announced to the people, "Zinchenko has admitted his highest crime! He is being charged on several counts. In our country it is prohibited for one person to exploit another, but there is evidence that in September of 1960, a group of youth from their sect was working at gathering potatoes on the weekend and gave all of their earnings for the day to him. What will you say in defence to that?"

"Yes, that is true, but I did not hire them and did not even know about their wish to help me," I said. "That day, I was sent to visit a group of believing elderly who lived near the city. When I came home, I had potatoes lying in my yard. I did not even see who brought them over. My wife told me that it was the youth from our church who brought the potatoes, and not the sectarians, as you call them."

"The second question. You purchased a suit that costs the same as your monthly wage. You have six children, and it is not possible to feed the children with what you make. Where did you get the money?"

"It is true that I have bought my first suit in my thirty-six years. My wife gave birth, and she was given a one-time benefit for the sixth child. So I added some more money to that and bought a medium-priced suit."

"The third question. You have six children, and your wife does not work. How do you manage your family finances?"

There were journalists sitting on the first rows of the courtroom. Quickly they wrote down the question and looked at the judge as though asking, "Why are you asking such dumb questions. What does this have to do with the attempted invasion of people's lives?" I did not bother to explain that my children do not drink enough milk, and that they have no changes of clothing, but only made a comparison.

"My grandfather had sixteen children, and he managed to feed them all during the time of the tsar. I have only six children, and I am living during the time of Soviet authority."

I got worried, "Have I said too much? Did I insult the authorities? Oh, what have I done! They can add on a political crime to my sentence, and then I am dead; I will never get out of jail?" I decided to be quiet, but I was not asked anymore questions anyway. Brother Nikolai was taken to questioning next.

The judge read his case. "Nikolai Mikhailovich Kozelko, a Ukrainian, born in 1930. Convicted in 1949. Was given the death penalty, but the death penalty was substituted for twenty-five years of prison, five years in exile afterwards, and then deprivation of all his citizen rights."

Then the judge took all of his anger out on Nikolai. "He is a terrorist! He is a traitor of the homeland and had decided to destroy Soviet authority! He is a member of a band of terrorists! He put up signs in the village calling for all of the Ukrainian people to be freed from the authority of Moscow. He called for them to separate from Russia, to destroy the Socialist regime, to destroy collective farms and give the land back to private owners. With his group, he called on men to restore the capitalist regime! All of this occurred when our country was weak in the fight against fascism. The Soviet Army was defeating fascism on its own soil, and here is a man who rose up against such a powerful country--the Soviet country! He has been given mercy. They repealed his death penalty and left him alive so he could see for himself the power of the Soviet government. He was released from the camp because of amnesty, and he organized a religious sect of Pentecostals which is prohibited by the Soviet Union.

"He was the head of their services! He read the New Testament during prayers and conducted communion. Without informing the authorities, he performed baptism. Yes, this man! He and his sect stand accused of invasion upon the lives and health of illiterate elderly men and women. Lately their nets have caught literate and even highly educated youth. Today our task is to eliminate the coming

danger we are facing from this sect and to save the youth from ruin. Our task is to isolate all these sectarians from the people!"

Three days of trial passed in the same spirit. They called up and questioned no less than ten Christian witnesses daily. Most of the questions were the same.

"Do you know the defendants?" they would be asked.

"Yes, I know them," would come the answer.

"Did they read prohibited literature in their sermons, the Bible, or the New Testament?"

"Yes," came the answer, "they read from the Bible."

"We have evidence that citizen Kozelko lead a propaganda attack against the Soviet Union; that he persuaded the youth not to bear arms and to refuse army service. Now remember, for false statements, you are faced with a jail sentence of up to two years."

"I will not tell lies," came the answer. "It is a sin according to the holy Scriptures. I have not heard any propaganda or persuasion."

Every evening we and the defendants were on television. The reporter announced that the witnesses gave notice to large misdeeds of the defendants. The city buzzed like a disturbed beehive. There were meetings at the factories and plants about the trial of the "most horrible criminals" who sacrifice people. People requested the highest measure of punishment; to execute the criminals by public hanging. Newspapers wrote articles, each more frightening than the other: "Children, the Prey of the Sect," or "I Wanted to Go to Heaven, but Ended up in a Psychiatric Hospital," or "The Unsuccessful Sacrifice."

The atmosphere in the courtroom was completely different than the media frenzy. The same questions were asked over and over. "Are you forced to pray, or do you pray freely? You get on your knees to pray; that is slavery." I remember how one elderly Christian lady of about seventy was brought up to be a witness.

"Do you believe that there is a God?" she was asked.

"Yes, Son," she answered, "since I exist, that means God exists also."

"Do you believe that God has forgiven your sins?"

"Yes," she again answered, "I believe, Son. You repent, and God will also forgive you."

"Do you speak in a strange tongue?"

"Repent, Son, and you will also speak a beautiful language."

"Do you believe that God will accept you in heaven?"

"Repent, Son, and He will accept you, too."

"Do you believe that the holy virgin Mary gave birth to the Son?"

"Believe me, Son, a sinner could not give birth to the Holy Son."

“Do you believe that God has brought that Son as a sacrifice for the people?”

“Repent, Son, this sacrifice was also for your sins.”

The room was filled with noise. The people gathered there ran out of patience, and they began to scream out, “Get to the point! How long do we have to listen to these pointless questions? Where are the witnesses against the murderers?”

The prosecutor ordered that the disorder be stopped. He announced that the trial would be moved into the fourth day. Tomorrow the victims would testify.

The fourth day of the trial arrived. The courtroom was filled to capacity. Only a little bit of time remained before the hideous crimes of the sectarians would be revealed. The harmed witnesses would testify. Over an hour passed, but the trial had not started yet. Finally a bell rang. The representatives of the jury walked in. The room was filled with deadly silence. The fourth day of trial started.

Irina Zinchenko was brought to the stand and the prosecutor asked her, “Victim Irina Zinchenko, do you know all of the defendants?”

“Yes,” she answered, “I know them.”

“How long have you known them?”

“About eight years.”

“Do you agree to give a true statement?”

“Yes, I agree.”

“You are testifying before the court as a victim on the grounds of religious abuse. Do you agree to testify on the reason for your illness before everyone?”

“No,” she responded, “I feel fully healthy.”

“Comrade ‘N’, a public accuser is present here. So is a Doctor of Neuropsychiatry from the Neuropsychiatry Institute who can confirm this orally. We also have written confirmation about the history of your illness.”

He took out a sheet of paper and started reading selected parts from it. “Irina Zinchenko has a higher education and, on the basis of religious stress, has mental evasion. At the present time, she is constantly under the guidance of doctors. She refuses to receive hospital treatment and ignores the doctors' advice. Over the last two years, her illness has progressed significantly. She is prohibited from attending church services which have a negative effect on her health. She is only allowed to carry out light physical labor.”

Thus follows signatures of doctors and this statement approved by the head of the institute.”

Irina answered every question of the judge with quotes from the New Testament. That drove the judge completely mad. He announced that Irina Zinchenko's answers were proof that she was a religious fanatic.

A public accuser was called to the stand. He was a professor of atheistic studies. He started an educated talk against the Bible, arguing that all the places in the Scriptures disprove one another. Periodically, he addressed Irina and asked that she explain this or that reference. Surprisingly Irina answered all the questions wisely, and inside of me, I thanked God. To make fun of the Bible, the professor asked her a question.

“How can one understand the Gospel according to John, chapter 1, verse 18? It says here that no one has ever seen God. But in the Bible, when God spoke to Moses, it says: ‘When I (God) will pass by, you will see me.’ What can you say to that?”

Calmly, Irina answered that that was not written in the Bible. The atheist became angry and argued that he had read the Bible at least ten times. He had read the Koran, and was familiar with Buddhism. But Irina repeated again, “There is no such thing in the Bible. You have made it up.”

Then he asked, “What does it say then?”

“‘You will see My back; but My face must not be seen,’ Exodus, chapter 33, verse 23,” she answered.

That was how Irina’s questioning ended. After this, she turned to the prosecutor, “Sir might you allow me to ask the psychiatrist-professor a question?”

“Go ahead,” he answered.

“Professor, please tell me, have I given any answer that you are not satisfied with?”

“I am satisfied with everything,” he said. “Thank you.”

“May I ask another question?”

“Please.”

“Please tell me on what basis you issued me a document stating that I was mentally ill. This is my first time seeing you, and your first time seeing me; is that not true? I have never gone to the doctors and have never been to the psychiatric hospital. I am not in anyone’s files. Concerning physical labor, no one has ever given me any advice about it. Do you know where I work? I work with an electronic calculator. Our country does not even produce such devices yet. Only the two largest factories, Turbin and HEMZ, have three people who know how these machines operate. The presented document is false.”

Immediately the judges grabbed the microphone from Irina’s hands. The trial was interrupted, and the jury was called to a meeting that lasted for nearly two hours. The room was filled with noise; some were disappointed and some were amazed. But the answer to the question, “Where are the victims? Where are the harmed?” was not given. At long last, the trial reconvened, and the judge read each sentence aloud.

“Kozelko, Nikolai: five years in strict regime prison camps after which you shall serve five years in exile. You are subject to confiscation of all your belongings.”

Since his only belonging was a coat, that was taken away even though the family was expecting their third child.

“Durtan, Matrena: one-and-a-half years in prison and confiscation of your belongings.” So this poor elderly woman ended up without a house. Because of her illness, she was let out after eight months, and after that, she wandered homeless among other believers.

“Rubashko, Nikolai; Chubenko, Fedor; and Gorkavii, Ivan: three years in prison camp.”

I received one-and-a-half years in prison camp. I was sent to the camp on a cold mountain in Kharkov. Although it was a painful conviction, I calmed myself with the verse, “If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you.”

The summer of 1962 was especially hot. I worked in the casting shop of the labor camp. The job was difficult. We had to carry heavy, melted, crude iron in our hands. Even though much time has passed, and so much has been forgotten, I cannot forget my friend Djenya Sirohin, a Baptist brother whom I met in the camp. He was convicted on the same clause as the rest of the Christians. We met daily at a spot where there were a few trees and a walking path, the place where the prisoners were allowed a half-hour walk. The entire camp, which consisted of five hundred people, walked behind one another on this path. Djenya would come out to the spot early and stand on the edge with his cane. He was completely blind. He was usually singing this song: *The dawn is rising over our homeland! Oh, brothers and sisters, it's time to arise.*

I would come close to him and listen. Djenya's voice was pleasant and soft. After awhile, I would come up to him and take him by the hand. He would immediately say, “Is that you, Grisha? Let's go, Brother.”

He always called me brother. He would take me by the hand, and we would walk and talk, remembering our past lives and families. Sometimes I even forgot I was at the camp. I remember once I asked him, “Djenya, tell me how you lost your vision.”

“Oh, my Brother,” he answered, “it was during the most difficult years of my life. My father died when I was young, and I lived with my mother. I finished middle school and then the war started. I was fifteen at the time. At the age of seventeen, I ended up on the front. We went through boot camp in three months and then went to the front right away. They did not give us any weapons, but said, “If your friend is killed, take his rifle and fight. So we worked in teams of two; one dug trenches, and the other fought with one rifle. Once during combat my partner was killed, and I was covered with earth. I was injured. I was taken to the hospital, and my face was bandaged up so that only my nose and mouth could be seen.

“Three days later when I was getting re-bandaged, they opened my eyes, but I could not see anything. So this way I was finished with fighting, but I survived. I was sent to Odessa to a famous professor Filatov. The war had already ended, but I was still in the hospital. I was treated for an entire year. It helped me some. I cannot see anything with one eye, and with the other I can see up to three meters, and then there is some sort of a shade. I can also see the road under my feet a little bit.

“I went home to live with my mother. I was forgotten and no one needed me. I even stopped singing. I sat out in front of my house every day. Some just walked by and some talked to me. I could not see anyone with my eyes, but as soon as they began to speak, I could picture them in my mind in the clothes that I remembered them wearing. So, with my imagination, I planned reunions every day. At times when I remembered school, I could see the entire classroom before me. When I wanted to see

one of the girls, and as soon as that thought of her came to me, she would be right in front of me--I could even hear her voice! I remembered my school friend Zoya the most. I could see her smile and hear her voice. We used to sing together on the street. How well I remember!

"A month had passed, and I was still just sitting there. Everyone from the village, both the young and the old, came by at some point. Some would even sit next to me and talk to me. Zoya never came up to me for she lived on the other side of the village. I walked around a little bit with my cane. My legs ached and my eyes could not see. I could have gone to her myself, but who needed a blind man like me? Especially not Zoya. She was famous for her beauty in the entire village.

"One Saturday night, I was sitting there thinking, as usual, when suddenly I heard a voice. 'Do you recognize me?' it said.

"Zoya, is that you?' I said. 'Where did you come from?'

"I could hardly believe my ears. I could recognize her voice among thousands. We had been in the same grade in school.

"In my memory, she remained the same as she was at seventeen. Suddenly she sat next to me. Zoya was sitting next to me without saying a single word for some time. 'Does she need me?' I thought. 'She does not even want to speak to me.' I was angry to a point of crying. Then I heard her heartbeat and her quiet voice saying, 'Djenya, why are you crying?'

"I did not believe her words. Could my eyes really cry? I wiped my eyes with my hand, but she said, 'Don't. Allow me. Let me wipe your tears with a handkerchief.'

"Zoya is that really you? You want to help me? Why?'

"I smelled the fragrance on the handkerchief as she wiped my eyes and face with it. I thought to myself what a kind soul she was and how happy her husband would be. What if she already had one?

"Then she said, 'In the New Testament it says: God will wipe away every tear. Djenya, when I was wiping your eyes, I felt like I was wiping Jesus' tears when he was being crucified.'

"Suddenly, we were interrupted by a drunk woman who shrieked, 'You *shtundist*! Why are you bothering him?'

"What a poor woman she is, Djenya,' Zoya said to me. 'She has wasted so much from drinking. What do you think; does God turn anyone away?'

"That was a weird question for me, but I answered, 'I guess so. He turned away that drunk lady and myself. Zoya, are you really a *shtundist*? Do you believe in God?'

"Yes, Djenya,' she answered. 'I am a Christian. I've been going to the church for two years now. I've found happiness in life.'

"What is he like? Is he beautiful just like you?' I asked.

"I don't understand you, Djenya. What are you talking about?' she asked.

"About the one who gave you happiness, your husband.'

“‘You did not understand me,’ she answered. ‘I am not married but I am a Christian; and Christ has made me happy. God does not turn anyone away. Christ can make you happy, too, and you are wanted. He needs you. Forgive me, please, Djenya, but I am on my way to work and have to go now. In the neighboring village there is a Baptist church, and they have a service there tomorrow morning. I am going to go there; do you want to come with me?’ she asked.

“I was not interested in the service, but I wanted to walk with her. And I did not want to upset her. So I agreed. At three o'clock in the morning, she came to pick me up, and I went to the Baptist church for the first time. There were many songs sung. I wanted to hear Zoya's voice. An elderly man read Matthew 11:28. ‘Come to me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,’ he said. The man spoke simply but with much persuasion. At the end he concluded, ‘A day will come when there will be an end to all sorrows.’ He read from Revelation 7:17 and invited everyone to kneel. I did not know how to pray. It was very pleasant for me to stand there and to think about these people. I could not understand. What had made Zoya come to me for fifteen minutes and then come back again in the middle of the night just to take me to that service? ‘Maybe they have a plan to recruit people,’ I thought, ‘or maybe she was just a kind soul and she did this because of pity for me.’ No matter what, I had convinced myself that she did not need me, but I liked this group of people.

“After that, I was always taken to church by two elderly women. Once Zoya asked me whether the church youth could come to my house on Saturday. I was very happy about such a suggestion. I did not feel so lonely and inferior anymore. When I told my mother that the youth of the church were going to come to our house next Saturday, she spent the whole week cooking and cleaning! The most important thing was that she was saved that Saturday, and from then on both of us attended church.

“The following summer we were baptized. I was so happy to be saved! After that, I developed a desire to save others. I went around the village and invited people to my house on Saturdays. Then we started to have services in my house on Sundays. The people were searching for something new. They were searching for the truth. Our house was filled to capacity. It was not because of my accomplishments, but because Zoya conquered people's hearts with her kindness. A youth choir was organized in our church. We rented a large house. In this way, a new Baptist church formed in our village of Sokolov.

“In the fall I went to our deacon and asked, ‘Deacon, what should I do? I want to get married.’

‘He asked me a strange question. ‘Have you chosen someone? Whom would you like to marry?’

“‘How can I choose if I can't see?’ I asked. ‘Who would agree to take up such hardship on their life? The person who does will be the most precious one to me.’

“‘Do you have the most precious person now?’ he asked

“‘Yes,’ I said. ‘Zoya. She was the first one who cared for my soul, but you know, I cannot even consider her. I am an invalid; I am blind.’

“‘All right then, Brother,’ he said. ‘I will talk to her, and then we will decide.’

“She agreed and we were married. Now we have five children.”

"Now, Djenya," I said, "tell me how you were convicted according to clause 209: 'Invasion on the lives and health of Soviet citizens.'"

"Well, Brother," he said, "have you heard about the publisher 'Christian' that publishes in England? All of the New Testaments published by this publishing house were considered 'prohibited anti-Soviet literature' because they were not registered with the authorities. The New Testaments were given out free and were not subject to sale.

"Well, my thirteen-year-old daughter and I were trying to transport the New Testaments. The publisher was part of a great conspiracy. I was a very useful transporter of the New Testaments. I could not see who gave me the suitcases and did not see who took them from me. I was the perfect connection. They brought the literature to my home, but I did not know who they were. My job was to take it to another station, and there someone would take it from me. Once I came home, and my wife said that our house had been searched, and the suitcase with the New Testaments had been taken away. Later I was taken away, too. I was convicted in accordance with clause 209 and was accused of spreading 'prohibited literature which affects the psychological being.' I was sentenced to three years, and my wife and I lost our parental rights. So I don't know about the fate of my children, or where they are right now. At the time, we were expecting. Zoya is already in her ninth month now."

It was late evening already. Djenya sang a song in farewell: *Don't be cast down*, he sang, *fight with your fate*.

Djenya went back to the barracks, but I could not fall asleep that night. How could you not be cast down when you have been deprived of your innocent children?

The next day I saw Djenya again. He lit up with joy when he heard me. He hugged me and said that he had received a letter from some secret mail network, and that it must be from his friends.

"Let's go away somewhere far from here," he said, "and you can read it to me."

There were two notes. The first one was from his wife. It read:

My dear, all sorts of things happen in life, but I did not expect such hardship. I was notified about your trial date only two days in advance. I was afraid to leave the children alone with our oldest daughter, Tanya, and asked some Christians to stay at our house while I went to the trial. I was so happy with your answers. You boldly defended yourself and proved that the Gospel saves people instead of destroying them. When the verdict was read about you being sentenced for three years in prison, and your parental rights taken away, and the children taken away and put under governmental care, you calmly answered, "May the Lord's will be done."

Forgive me Djenya, but I am a mother, and at that point, I lost consciousness. That could have happened because I am in my last month of pregnancy. I was taken in by friends till I felt better, and the next day we went to our house to prepare the children for the journey. We decided to hide the children among other Christians in different cities. I was so happy that our friends were there for us and did not abandon us in times of trouble.

There were many people who came to our house, volunteering to take the children at night. But something horrible happened, Djenya. When I returned, instead of noise created by children, I found two crying elderly women at the house. Here's what happened. Before your trial was even over, a bus came

to our house, and our children were taken away. The older ladies who were watching the children would not give them up and started to scream. Since this was outside, many people gathered around. Two of the people who had come with the bus explained that "the father has requested that his children be brought to him to say good-bye." I believed him, and so I did not even kiss my precious children good-bye. No one told me where the children were taken, but Christians have been looking for them in secret all over the country.

Our oldest daughter, Tanichka, was found about two hundred kilometers away. I have gone to visit her already, but she does not know where the other children were taken. Just a few days ago, I was told that our baby Lenchka was also found; she is now eighteen months. The worst part is, the youngest ones don't even know their last name or address. If they are not found now, it will be impossible to find them in the future. Djenya, pray. May God keep you. I send you a kiss.

Your loving Zoya.

It was very hard for Djenya to hear the news. He became pale and was quiet for a while, but then he said, "It would have been better if they executed me than if they took our children from us. The children need their mother! Why are they tearing the mother's heart in pieces?!"

I could not help him with anything except saying, "Poor mothers, who can understand their motherly love for their children?"

'Can you read me this second letter, Brother?" Djenya asked.

This one read:

Dear daddy! Today I both cried and laughed from joy. Mom came here. They did not allow her to come in, but we saw each other through the bars. My hand was small enough to reach between the bars, and Mama kissed it. Mama said that you were locked up for three years. They also told me that when I turn sixteen, they would let me out. I want to go home now, but I am not permitted. In three years they will let me out. I will come home to Mama. I send you a kiss, Daddy.

Tanya.

Full of pain, Djenya and I went back to the camp. In parting I recalled a movie that I had seen when I was a child called: "Guilty, With Our Guilt." I mentioned the film to Djenya and asked, "What are our children guilty of?"

Djenya answered, "They are guilty because their parents were born in the Soviet Union."

Two weeks later Djenya received another letter through the secret mail.

"Please read it for me, Brother," he begged. "The worst part has passed; everything is sure to be better in the future."

The letter read:

Rejoice in the Lord always....

Dear Djenichka, I am announcing a joy to you! We have a new baby boy, and I named him after you. Another joy is that our friends have managed to locate all of our children! They are in different

boarding schools in different cities, but I have only been able to visit the youngest, Lenchka. They allowed me inside on one condition: that I would not talk to her but only look at her from the side.

Lenchka was playing outside in the sand. There were many little ones like her. As I sat close by, I could not hold back my tears. The manager came up to me and warned, "Don't terrorize the children; what are the tears for?" I answered, "I can't hold them in; this is my daughter, Lenchka." Lenchka heard my voice and yelled, "Mommy! Mommy!" Djenichka, understand my condition then. The manager began to cry herself and she let me hold Lenchka in my hands, but the meeting lasted for only fifteen minutes. May God bless you.

I send you a kiss. Your loving wife, Zoya.

I gave the letter back to him, but my own children were before my eyes, for I had six back home, after all.

"Don't be worried, Djenya," I said. "Somehow, everything will be all right. We were also deprived of our parental rights by the decision of the district authorities, but my children are still at home. At our meeting, Varia told me how she hid the children at the noise of any car. Our neighbors are kind, and they have provided refuge for our children. She did not let Vitya and Tanya go to school until the school director promised that she would not allow the children to be taken away to an orphanage without their mother."

Everything seemed to have calmed down, but in September they started registering the children into orphanages. By that time my third son was already starting school. I remember one incident Tanya told me about during a visit. She was in third grade then. Newspaper reporters had come to the school. The school director called her into his office for a talk. There were two men, a woman, and the director who decided at that moment to convince a little girl that there was no God.

"You believe in God," the director started, "but have you ever seen Him?"

"No. I have not seen Lenin either," she answered, "but I still believe he existed."

After such a comparison, the group lost their gift of speech for a few minutes. For about two hours they attempted to convince her to deny God and to agree to live in an orphanage where no one would even remember about God. Finally the school director could not stand the fact that they could not convince some little girl. She took Tanya by her braids--and Tanya had thick and long ones, down past her waist--wrapped the hair around her hand, and dragged Tanya out of her office. Then she kicked her and ordered Tanya to go back to class. Tanya went to her younger brother Tolik's class, called him out, and the two of them ran away from school.

I was even more upset at a visit from Natasha. She lay down to sleep right next to the heater and told me she did not want to leave there, saying that it was warmer here than back home. When we all left the visitation room, she begged the prisoners to hide her among them so she could live where her father was. When she was not allowed to do that, she began screaming so loud that even the guard could not take it and ordered me to calm her down. I promised her that when I was released, I would not even go home but come straight to her kindergarten and pick her up. At this she calmed down and quietly went to her mother. I did not make a big deal of the promise; I just wanted to calm her. I do not know how she remembered the day of my release, but that day the attendants at the kindergarten

where she and Petia stayed in a twenty-four-hour group could not put them to sleep. She told everyone that her dad would still come for her even in the night. Could I even think that she was waiting for me, even in the night, without losing hope?

Our Soviet government could not even release people properly from jail. They needed to ruin that day, too. My family had been waiting for me since morning. The children were sitting down on a stone by the bus stop the entire day. The *borscht* which was cooked for Daddy's welcome home got spoiled. I was only released at eight in the evening after the work day was over, when all the authorities were going home. I arrived home at night and was totally surprised to see my children waiting for me at the bus stop.

It is easy for an authority to determine the preferred fate of those under its power, but it is not easy at all to confine those under its power to such fate. Laws were passed to uproot everything holy, to eradicate the church, but the words of Jesus Christ ring true. He said, "...and the gates of hell shall not prevail" (against the Church); the Church will exist!

No matter what laws are passed on this earth, the Church of Christ is, was, and will be.

Epilogue

Is there any person whom God considers to be unnecessary?

Life is given to man by God (Genesis 1). Because of Satan, death entered into the world.

The battle between life and death, between light and darkness began. Man is a slave, but also a king. You are given the opportunity to choose life or death. God has suggested a better thing. "I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life...." (Deuteronomy 30:19).

My epigraph in the beginning of the book says, "Life is a struggle with death." Reader, ask yourself a question: "Why do I live?"

Jesus Christ, the great King of the universe, used a small donkey for His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. My reader, I also remind you that the Lord needs you.

I am seventy-three years old and have lived in America for seven years. What I have received here I do not deserve--I have an abundance of food and clothes. I am full of gratitude to the American people and am no less thankful to God. And the fight for life continues. I am striving for the higher reward of the heavenly calling.

I published a small quantity of this book in the Russian language and have received many good responses. Some people have raised me to a hero; others express their compassion; still others are glad that I am leaving a memorial for my children.

Many write about themselves; about their experiences during the Second World War in Germany or under the German occupation. They complain about the brutality of the Nazis.

How do I view it all? It was a battle between ideas. Evil was destroying evil that the truth of God might be freed. Many millions of people died, but from God's truth, many received life. Thus my three daughters serve the Lord, and my three sons have bowed down their heads before Him. And I serve the Lord as a messenger. You, the reader, have paid the price to acquire this book; maybe not even knowing that you have given bread to the orphan that he/she may have food for a few days. A Russian proverb says, "Each in the world gives a thread and the naked will have a shirt."

The Lord needs you for this purpose. And I as His servant will deliver the bread to the hungry. When I am gone, somebody else will continue this noble goal of saving orphans and homeless children.

My last question to you is, "Where will you spend eternity?"

Gregory Zinchenko, the author, September 1998

Finally, the author's wish came true to translate his book into English. When the book came out in Russian, many readers said that they wanted to find out the fate of the author and also that of his children and grandchildren. God gave the author and his wife six children, twenty-three grandchildren, and two great-granddaughters.

A lot of the readers are wondering about Father's health; after all, he has gone through so much. I clearly remember from my childhood when winter was about to come, Mom was worried about how my father would live through the winter. He had bad lungs, and he frequently had pneumonia. I also remember when my mother used to cook medicine for my father in a ten-liter kettle. The medicine consisted of honey, aloe, and something else that I was not familiar with. After our father was arrested, we did not expect to see him back. No one else could make this medicine for him, and he would not even be dressed warm. To add to all this, he was put in small, single cells with cement walls where even the most healthy did not survive. But God performed a miracle, and my father was healed. To this day, he does not complain about his health.

Father had always wished to receive a good education, but this never happened. The want for learning was acquired by his children. Four of his six children finished school with a very high average and also got a higher education.

Three of his sons live in the former Soviet Union. Right now, the oldest son, Viktor, is finishing an academy, and his son is finishing a university. Three daughters moved to the United States with their families. Tatyana was forty years old when she moved to the United States. She did not know any English; the language that she studied in her school was German. English did not come easy for her. For the first few weeks she could not even say, "My name is Tatyana;" but after a year, she entered Broome Community College in Binghamton, New York, and finished it with success.

Two of the author's grandchildren entered college this year, but the others are still growing up.

Even though the book is very sad, we can end this book on an optimistic note! Praise the Lord!

We thank everyone who helped our father publish this book in English.

Tatyana Koval (Zinchenko)

Natalya Karandeeva (Zinchenko)

“You give them something TO EAT” Mark 6:37

Orphans have no mother. Who will give them bread?

~~Joseph Mission Corporation~~ • Orphan's Fund

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