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1942-1943

SOVIET SHORT STORIES

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1942 - 1943

**EDITED BY IVOR MONTAGU
AND HERBERT MARSHALL**

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The stories in this book all reflect the courage and humanity of a great people engaged in total war. The authors include such well-known writers as Sholokhov, Simonov and Wanda Wassilewska, and there are several whose work will be new to British readers.

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KIBRISTA SOSYALIST

GERÇEK LONDRA BURÖSÜ

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FOREWORD

★

ALL THE stories in this collection, possibly all the stories now being written in the U.S.S.R., deal with one of two themes: the human being portrayed as a Soviet citizen capable of heroism and sacrifice, the presentation of the contrast between the Soviet citizen and the fascist.

Love becomes not a separate theme, but a transfiguration and illumination of sacrifice, gaining rather than losing thereby in poignancy.

"The typewriter is also a weapon", says the Soviet author, and with the mobilisation of his whole people for war he at once assumes with his talents a part in the conflict, not as a self-imposed task, but as a natural act.

What is this task? Stalin has called writers "the engineers of the soul". By this is meant that there is an inter-influence between literature and life. In so far as a character is realistically portrayed, it will in turn exert influence upon the reader. The model, fixed and selected by the author, if not sentimentalised or exaggerated, will be reflected in however small a degree in the heart and conduct of the general.

Herein lies the importance of the Soviet writer's role in the war.

It is a little difficult to disentangle, in the short story, fiction from reportage. The creative writer goes to the front, works at the front, and his published writings include all shades from war correspondence to romance based on his experiences.

Certain selections have been made here to illustrate this graduation. Certainly such a piece as Isbach's "Duty" is an extreme case of communiqué, bearing as well as the author's signature that of the Brigade Commissar, and serving almost as a citation in dispatches.

But are the stories by Pavstovsky, Petrov and Sholokhov

FOREWORD

V

reportage, rendered vivid by their creative talent in presentation, or fictional exercises on the basis of experienced material?

With Tikhonov it is clearer that the latter interpretation is the correct one, while with Sobolev and Wassilewska we come more into the field of imaginative fiction proper.

Some brief bibliographical and personal notes: Isbach was even before the war a specialist in Red Army subjects. He and Pavstovsky were both represented in the earlier volume in this series "Soviet Short Stories". Readers of the two Pavstovsky pieces will find an interesting preoccupation with the mind of the old craftsman running through both.

Petrov, who was killed while reporting the siege of Sebastopol, shortly after writing the piece included here, was with Ilf (who predeceased him before the war), co-author of the brilliant comic and satiric volumes *Diamonds to Sit On*, *Little Golden Calf*, *Little Golden America*.

Sholokhov, famous author of the series of Cossack novels beginning with *Quiet Flows the Don*, is engaged on a new novel, *They Fought for their Country*. His seventy-five-year-old mother was killed when the Don village in which she lives, Veshenskaya, was bombed by the Germans from the air.

Wanda Wassilewska is the distinguished Polish authoress, writer of *Rainbow*, Stalin Prize Novel for 1943 (published in England by Hutchinson), who is a Deputy of the Supreme Soviet and Chairman of the Union of Polish Patriots in the U.S.S.R. The two stories by her included here were first issued in a small volume entitled *In the Hut*.

Tikhonov is a veteran Leningrad poet and man of letters, who remained in his native city throughout the siege. The stories selected here were taken from his *Tales of Leningrad*.

Gorbatov's short volume *Aleci Kulikov, Red Army Man* is about to be published in English.

Simonov is a young Ukrainian writer who has leaped into fame as a war correspondent and with his successful play *The Russians*, which has been performed in translation in both New York and London. His story printed here was included in a small collection entitled *On the Petsamo Road*.

The story by Sobolev, *Blue Scarf*, has given its name to a romantic song extremely popular in Russia. With the other two Sobolev stories it was first included by him in a small volume entitled *One Desire*.

Three of the subjects included have previously been published in the *Anglo-Soviet Journal* of the Society for Cultural Relations.

The choice of an anthologist under war conditions is, of course, more restricted than when, as in making a peace-time selection, he has the leisure to range over a wide period and abundance of material.

It is hoped, however, that each story included will be found sufficiently illustrative of Soviet scene and people, sufficiently characteristic of the role of its author in his people's effort and ordeal, to serve the general purpose to which this whole series is devoted.

I. M. and H. P. J. M.

INSIDE THE HUT

By WANDA WASSILEWSKA

*

"GRANNY! I say, Granny!"

Anissia looked up. Natalka was calling to her from the other side of the fence.

"What is it?"

"May I come in for a minute?"

"No reason why you shouldn't. Come in if you want to!" Anissia mumbled in her grouchy way.

Oh, how warm the sun was to-day! At last her stiff aching bones would get some warmth into them. The good, kind July sun. If only it wouldn't rain any more. The very prospect set her worrying in advance. Rain—no, nothing could be worse. Then every bone in her body ached, shooting with pain, the joints swelled, and it was difficult even to take a step. But when the sun was shining, particularly as it was just now—then things were different. The kind July sun which caressed the earth with its golden rays.

"Granny!"

"What is it now?"

"Can you hear me?"

"Why shouldn't I hear you? . . . Of course I can hear you," Anissia replied indifferently. "That girl's always up to something. . . . Why can't they let an old body rest in peace? One doesn't ask anything from life any more, only a little peace, only a little peace, only to while away the hours before death, which lingers so on the road, takes one," was the thought in her mind.

"Granny," Natalka persisted, "look at me!"

The old woman raised her heavy eyelids reluctantly. Her faded eyes, which seemed covered by a film, peered at the girl.

"Granny, the Germans are coming."

Anissia shrugged her shoulders. She'd heard the rumour for several days running. They were coming, were they? Well, and what if they were? The Germans at least would let an old bundle of bones like herself die in peace. If they were coming, let them come. Germans—the word itself seemed so remote and, really, meant nothing to her. What was more important was to bask in the sun and feel the pleasant warmth creep through her aching bones. The Germans—let the young people worry about the Germans. . . . What could it matter to an old woman like her. . . .

"Granny, we're going off into the woods."

"Well, go if you want to," Anissia mumbled. "What's that got to do with me? . . . I'm not going with you."

Natalka impatiently caught hold of her arm.

"Don't do that. . . . It hurts. . . . Now see what. . . ."

"Granny, Granny, please do listen to me for a minute!"

"I'm listening. . . ."

"Can you hear me?"

"Yes, what is it?"

"Granny, we're going off into the woods. Dad's going and I'm going and so's everybody else!"

"Well, go then. . . . The Germans are coming are they? . . . Then of course you must take to the woods. But I'm going to stay here and sun myself. . . ."

"Granny, there are two Red Army men in our garden."

"Two what?"

"Two Red Army men. Do you understand me?"

"Yes. . . . But what's that got to do with me? . . ."

The girl shook her by the shoulders in desperation.

"Granny, you are dozing off again. Do try not to fall asleep."

"I'm not falling asleep. . . . I'm drowsy, that's all. . . ."

"Granny, are you listening to me? There are two Red Army men in our garden, in that shed of ours near the plum trees."

"Well, what of it? Have you taken a fancy to one of them?"

Natalka sighed in despair. She squatted down and, looking into the faded old eyes bleary, with cataract, explained to her loudly, stressing each word to the utmost.

"Granny, there are two Red Army men in our garden. They're wounded. We can't take them with us. They're too sick to be moved. Do you understand?"

"Yes, yes, I understand. . . . They ought to be out in the sunshine. . . ."

"But, Granny, they're badly wounded, do you understand me? We're all clearing out to the woods. The Germans may be here any moment now. . . . Granny, somebody will have to get them a drink of water, take care of them, do you understand?"

"There's nothing much to understand, is there?"

"Could you manage to do it?"

"Why not? As long as there's a bit of sun and my bones don't ache, I'll manage all right."

"You haven't forgotten where our shed is?"

"No, of course not. . . ."

"Then you'll take a look at them?"

"Yes, yes, I'll take a look at them. . . ."

"Only be careful the Germans don't notice anything. . . ."

"They won't, not a thing. . . . Why should they watch an old woman? I'll just sort of ramble around until I come past those plum trees, past those plum trees. . . ."

"You won't forget, Granny?"

"Why should I forget. . . . Two, you say. . . . They'll be wanting water, and somebody to smooth their pillows for them, and things like that. . . . Some food, I suppose. That's to be expected. . . ."

The girl was overjoyed.

"Yes, yes, Granny. Only they can't eat just now, poor chaps. . . . But in a day or two, perhaps, when they begin to feel a little better. . . ."

"I'll do what I can. . . . I'll bring them some bread or a bite of something else. . . . I'll look after them."

"When will you go to them?"

"I'll go now and then later on I'll look in again. . . . Don't worry, everything will be all right, everything will be all right. . . ."

"You won't forget?"

The old woman grew angry.

"Now don't be cheeky. Remember once and for all, if Granny Anissia promises something, she keeps her word. What's worrying you? You think Granny Anissia is such an old bundle of bones that she's already worse than useless? Nothing of the sort. . . . As long as there's sunshine I can still do something. . . ."

Natalka patted the trembling, wrinkled hand.

"Well, good-bye, Granny. . . . I'm pretty sure we'll be back soon . . . but for the time being we've got to make ourselves scarce. We'll keep on pecking at them from the woods."

"That's right," the old woman muttered. "From the woods. . . . Don't worry, you'll find them safe and sound when you get back. . . . I won't forget these boys of yours. . . ."

A voice called from the other side of the fence:

"Natalka! Where are you? Natalka!"

"I'm coming, Dad! I'm coming!"

Her bare feet flashed by in the sunlight. Anissia shook her head.

"Just like a frisky young goat. Well, old bones, it's time you had a look at those two. . . ."

She struggled to her feet with difficulty. It always cost her an effort to get up. But once she had straightened her back her aching feet bore her along. Leaning heavily on her stick she rambled slowly round the garden. Her half-blind eyes looked for the familiar paths in the glare of sunlight. She could find every one of them blindfold. She had lived here, on this plot—for how many years? Ninety? Ninety-one? . . .

"No, I've lost count. I've got all the years muddled up. How many of them I've seen."

She made her way around the fence and entered the garden of her neighbour, Natalka's father. The plum trees grew at the further corner past the rows of sunflowers and hemp, past the clumps of raspberry bushes. The shed—a tiny building covered with straw—was buried under a heap of twigs and branches. She groped around to find the entrance.

"You can hardly find it. . . . They've covered it up so that it's next to impossible to find. . . ."

Two wounded men were lying on some straw. The old woman knelt down and peered at them.

"Why, bless me, they're only youngsters. . . ."

One of the wounded men awoke from the feverish doze into which he had fallen and raised his bandaged head.

"Who's there?" he cried.

"Sh! Sh! . . . It's Granny Anissia come to see you. . . . You just lie still and be comfortable. . . ."

"Water. . . ."

"Water? . . . Of course I'll bring you some water, sonny. I'll bring you whatever you need. . . ."

The old woman could not understand where she found the strength. The shooting pain in her legs ceased. . . . She forgot all about it. She drew some water from the well, filled a pitcher and then returned to the garden, to the shed beyond the plum trees.

"Here, have a drink, have a drink, sonny. . . . It's fine water, nice and cold from our own well. Here, have a drink. . . . It's a real life-saver and not just ordinary water."

The second wounded man was tossing about in high fever. She moistened a rag and put it on his burning forehead.

"So an old body can be of some use yet. . . . And Natalka—the way she went at me, the way she went at me. . . . What is there to understand? Who doesn't know that a sick man wants a drink of water . . . and you, sonny, you just lie still and make yourself comfortable. . . . Take it easy for a day or two and then you'll begin to feel better. . . ."

She set the pitcher down near the wounded men and slowly shuffled off to her own hut. Once back, she sat down again on the doorstep and immediately dozed off, tired out by the cares of the day. In her sleep she sensed, as it were, the droning of the sleepy, indolent flies, the heat of the sun, and the bliss as her whole body was suffused with its warmth. The chill of the evening air aroused her. With an effort she shambled off to the wounded men and then again returned to her own hut.

"Well, the day's over at last. . . . And to-morrow it's going to be a fine, clear day too!"

The next morning three men entered her yard. Granny Anissia was not in the least scared by them. What did she care for the Germans? Another few days, perhaps, and death would come for her, death which tarried so long on the way.

She waited calmly. She could hear the harsh sounds of a tongue that was alien to her. Let them gabble for all she cared. . . . All the same she couldn't understand a thing.

They yelled at her but she only smiled good-naturedly, trying her hardest to get a close look at them to see what they were like. Yes, there were only three of them, three young whipper-snappers, no older than those who were lying in the shed, in the farther corner of her neighbour's garden. Then all of a sudden the thought entered her mind—was there enough water in the pitcher? If only they would go away and leave her in peace; it was high time to have a look at those others. . . . Yes, she would do it on the sly, on the sly, and nobody would notice her. . . . Who, after all, would pay attention to an old soul who could hardly move around.

They yelled and yelled at her, and finally they went away. Anissia thought that that was the end of them, but she had barely managed to get up from the doorstep when the yard was full of Germans.

"Is this your hut?"

She raised her arm to shade her eyes from the sunlight. Someone was speaking to her in Ukrainian—in her own native tongue, only the words were pronounced somewhat more harshly and hoarsely. She understood everything the man said. However, she did not feel like talking.

The officer, however, was insistent.

"Speak up, is this your hut?"

"Mine. . . . Why?"

The officers conferred amongst themselves. Anissia was terribly angry at them because they kept out the sunlight. She snorted angrily through her nose.

"What's that?"

"Nothing. . . . It's nothing. . . ."

"Open the door!"

"Why, it's open," Anissia said in surprise.

"Open it when you're told," the interpreter shouted at her.

Slowly, with many a groan and a moan she struggled to her feet and, leaning heavily on her stick, pushed the door further open and entered the hut. The officers crowded after her.

"It's small and stuffy," the colonel said, making a wry face.

"The window can be opened," and one of the subordinate officers dashed forward and pushed the small window. The windowpanes rattled as they flew open onto the shady garden still fresh and cool from the morning dew.

"Ask her where the villagers are," the colonel ordered.

Anissia stood where she was, leaning on her stick, silently taking stock of the strangers.

"How should I know?" she said, shrugging her shoulders at the question of the interpreter. "I'm an old woman, and hardly go out of doors."

"Do you live alone here?"

"Yes, all alone. . . . It's ten years now that I've been alone. . . ."

They left her in peace. They made themselves at home on the bench and the bed and began to talk about something noisily. She remained where she was for a while and then shuffled towards the door. A heavy hand fell on her shoulder and pulled her back. She realized that they would not let her out of the hut. The colonel discussed something at great length with the interpreter.

"Keep an eye on her. She may be old and blind but the devil alone knows what she may be up to. . . . Before you know what's what she'll be giving somebody wind that we're here. My orders are not to let her out of the hut, don't lose sight of her for a moment, not for even a moment. . . ."

When the interpreter explained to her that she would have to stay indoors all the time Anissia nodded her head several times in compliance. What difference, did it make to her? . . . She was ordered to stay indoors, she'd stay indoors.

She clambered up onto the flat top of the stove where she had her bed and fell into a doze. The Germans in the room were talking loudly, laying out maps on the table, quarrelling, whistling,

making the floor ring with their hobnailed boots. This did not bother her. She kept on dozing. The flies kept up their never-ending drone, doors creaked, soldiers came running in and out. All this reached her as through some thick mist, her whole body under the spell of her senile torpor.

But towards evening she grew uneasy. Inside the shed, hidden away under the plum trees, there probably wasn't a drop of water left in the pitcher. The lads were doubtlessly waiting impatiently for Granny Anissia. They could not be expected to know what was going on. What they most likely thought was that the old woman had forgotten them, that she was too lazy to budge....

She was wide awake now and took careful stock of what was going on in the room. It was full of Germans. They crowded around the door, and she could see them pacing to and fro in the passage. A sentry stood on guard at the entrance? No, there was no chance of slipping out unnoticed. Groaning she clambered down from the stove.

"Where are you off to?"

The interpreter appeared suddenly as if from under the ground.

She angrily pushed away his hand with her stick.

"Now, none of that. . . . I have to go out sometimes. D'you understand?..."

He stepped back but outside she noticed that he was following at her heels. She shrugged her shoulders.

"Well, I declare! Fancy the Germans being afraid of an old woman. . . . Although I'm so old, I can still do something, it seems. Very well, watch me, watch me. . . ."

She went back to the hut and to her place on the stove. She was anxious about those two. The thought of them weighed heavily on her heart.

"Now Natasha, probably, would have managed to slip out. . . . As for me, an old body like me. . . . What can I do, sonnies, if they won't even let me go out when I have to, without somebody trailing after me as if I were God knows who. Now what am I to do? What should I do?"

For a long time she tossed and turned on her bed, sighing heavily.

When, at last, she did fall asleep she dreamed of those two. They were asking for water, imploring for water, but there was not a drop of water in the shed. They were calling for her, calling for Granny Anissia, but Granny Anissia did not come. The bandage had slipped from the head of one of the wounded men, but there was nobody there to adjust it. And they were complaining to Nataalka that Granny Anissia had not kept her word and Nataalka was threatening her with her finger and giving her a bit of her mind and oh! so sternly that the tears were welling up in Anissia's old eyes. Oh! how loudly they were shouting, how they were crying for water! They were crying so loudly that Anissia awoke with a start. And she instantly felt that something was wrong. She peeped down from the stove and it seemed to her that she must still be dreaming.

The officers were sitting round the table on stools and on the bed. Facing them and supported on either side by soldiers, stood those two from the shed under the plum trees. It seemed to Granny Anissia that the film over her eyes which had been growing for years had suddenly cleared. She saw everything so distinctly, far more distinctly than she had for oh! so many years—the bandages on their heads and legs and arms, the many days' growth of dark stubble on their youthful faces. Their eyes burned with a feverish light. Anissia raised herself a little on the stove, her finger nails cutting into the palms of her hands to keep her from crying out aloud.

The colonel was seated in the middle rocking himself in his chair and an enormous, monstrous shadow flittered on the wall in time with his movements. The kerosene lamp threw the light downwards and the colonel's eyes were swallowed up in the black shadow cast by the deep sockets. The interpreter was standing at the table near the wounded men. The colonel snapped out a question and the interpreter immediately repeated it in a gruff, hoarse voice:

"What unit do you belong to?"

Granny Anissia could hear everything distinctly as though

the plug which for years had seemed stuffed in her ears had gone. Every word reached her clearly and distinctly as never before for ever so many years.

Even up there on the stove, Anissia could hear the heavy breathing of the wounded men. They were gasping for air through their parched lips, breathing with an effort. They were swaying on their feet but the hands of the German soldiers held them up roughly and firmly.

"What unit do you belong to?"

They did not answer. The colonel struck the table angrily with his fist.

"Tell them that I won't stand any nonsense, is that clear? Tell them that my advice, my sincere advice to them, is to speak. Tell them that I have my own way of dealing with people like them. Ask them what unit they belong to, when it was quartered here, where it was bound for, where it came from, where the army is, where the villagers are, what battles they fought in? That's the lot! Go ahead!"

Anissia caught the ominous threat in his voice. She could feel her heart throbbing ready to burst. It beat as it had not beaten for many, many years and it seemed to the old woman that the men sitting around the table must surely hear the turmoil that was tearing at her breast. But no one so much as glanced in her direction. All eyes were on those two who stood there reeling before the table, supported by the rough hands of the soldiers.

"What unit do you belong to?"

The one who was wounded in the head drew a deep breath. Granny Anissia waited to hear what he would say, trembling from head to foot.

"I won't tell you."

"You won't, eh? Now then, Hans, help him out. He can't get the words through his teeth. Go on, help him out!"

The soldier raised his fist and struck the wounded Red Army man full in the face. The head bound up in dirty, blood-caked bandage fell back helplessly. But the wounded man, with a supreme effort of will power, steadied himself.

"I won't tell you."

"Where's the army?"

"I don't know."

"You don't? Now, Hans, just freshen up his memory, freshen it up for him. The poor chap's evidently forgotten. . . . But we'll try and make him remember, oh! yes, we'll do our best to make him remember. . . ."

A blow on the jaw followed, then a second, a third. Fresh blood stains appeared on the bandage. Only with an effort did Anissia suppress the cry that was ready to tear from her throat.

"Where are the villagers?"

"I don't know. . . . I never saw any of them," came the husky reply.

The colonel in a fury crumpled up the papers lying in front of him.

"He never saw any of them, Hans. . . . Just fancy, he never saw any of them. . . . Go on, man, help his eyesight for him. You understand, help him so he'll be able to see. . . ."

The Red Armyman fell to the floor. Anissia raised herself. No, it couldn't be, her old eyes were deceiving her! The soldier took out his bayonet. Two others sat on the prostrate man. Then with a careful, almost gentle movement the soldier, Hans, drove the blade into the wounded man's left eye. An inhuman, strangled cry rent the air. It ceased almost immediately.

"Where's the army?"

"I don't know. . . . I won't tell you. . . . You won't get anything out of me. . . ." the wounded man replied hoarsely, with an effort. The blood trickled down from the eye socket, gathered at his mouth. The colonel got up from behind the table and bent over the dying man. The expression on his face was something akin to curiosity. He kicked the motionless body with the toe of his boot.

"Ask him for the last time whether he'll speak or not."

The interpreter bent down over the man prostrate on the ground. Granny Anissia heard the blood gurgling in the wounded man's throat. And above this terrible sound she could hear the words coming with an effort, intermingled with groans of pain.

"Then comrades... come rally... the last fight... let us..."

"What's that? What's that?" the colonel asked with interest.

"What did he say?"

"Nothing."

"What do you mean by nothing? He did say something..."

"Something unintelligible..."

"Finish him off," the colonel ordered.

The soldier raised his bayonet.

"Not here," the colonel shouted, "do it outside!"

The soldier caught hold of the motionless body under the armpits and lugged it towards the door. Anissia saw the helpless legs dragging along the floor leaving a trace of blood the whole length of the room.

She sat up, her hand to her heart. Black shadows danced on the walls, hobnailed boots stamped on the floor. Now the second one was standing before the table. He was rocking on his feet. The rough hands of the soldiers supported him.

"Question him."

Anissia hastily hid her head under her quilt. She stuffed up her ears so as not to hear. She pressed her hands to her eyes that she might not see. With a groan she cursed this life of hers that had dragged on for ninety, ninety-one years, and brought her to this night, to this ghastly night! She cursed her eyes because they had not lost their sight in time, because they had not become altogether blind, because they had been able to see. She cursed her ears. They had not gone deaf in time, they could hear what was happening.

Through the quilt the old ears could hear the moans and groans and the same cry repeated in a desperate monotone:

"I don't know! I won't tell you!"

At last, silence fell. But for a long time she could not bring herself to look out from under the quilt. Finally she poked her head out. The Germans, apparently, were preparing to go to sleep, taking off their belts and boots. They adjusted the wooden shutters over the windows, bolted the door. The soldiers were camped outside the hut. A sentry paced up and down in front

of the door but the officers evidently trusted no one. The colonel himself inspected the bolt and tried the door and the shutters and he even came up to the stove to see if the old woman was asleep.

Anissia hastily shut her eyes and tried to breathe evenly and quietly.

The lamp was snuffed out. Anissia felt her arms and legs grow stiff, as though weighted with lead.

She waited. Time dragged on slowly, oh! so terribly slowly! In the sinister gloom of the room the seconds dragged out into eternity. Time was at a standstill. Anissia's arms and feet were as cold as ice and icy beads of perspiration covered her brow and her back. Still, she had to do it!

Somebody was snoring already, Anissia noiselessly sat up on the stove. It seemed to her that she could be seen in the darkness and that every movement she made could be heard. But the Germans were sound asleep. Their wheezing and snoring could be heard from all sides. There they lay, sprawling on a rough-bedding of straw on the floor. The colonel occupied the bed. She lowered one leg cautiously over the side of the stove. She waited. Nobody stirred. Then the other leg—so far so good. And just as noiselessly and cautiously she let herself down from the stove. If only her heart which was pounding so loudly, just like a tom-tom, did not wake them up. But no, they were fast asleep, the deep, sound heavy sleep of weary men. Anissia groped her way to the door. Hardly daring to breathe, she turned the key in the lock once more and took it out of the keyhole. After that she tightened up the cross-bars on the shutters. What strength there was yet in those trembling, swollen hands! Now the door was shut fast as though with a clamp, and so were the windows. Now nobody would be able to get into the hut, hinder the sleep or disturb the rest of the officers.

She waited for a few minutes. Then she groped around under the bench. Yes, the bottle was in its usual place. It was full to the top, Natakka had brought it for her from the store only recently and put it there. The bottle was full.

The old woman pulled out the cork. Noiselessly she bent

over the bed and slowly, carefully, poured some kerosene on the straw at the colonel's feet. Then she stepped back a pace and just as slowly and cautiously poured some kerosene on the floor where the officers were lying, on the threshold, all over the room.

The beams were dry, so were the wooden walls and floor. For how many years had the hut been standing? The woodwork was as dry as straw. Ah, yes, the straw, of course, the straw. . . . She sprinkled the straw bedding again carefully.

With trembling fingers she searched for the matches in the niche in the stove. There used to be matches there. To be sure, there they were, in their usual place. . . .

Throwing the quilt over her head she struck the match under cover of it. Even so it seemed to her that the spurt of the match rang out louder than a rifle shot. But no, everything was still quiet in the hut, the only sound being the regular snoring of fatigued men, wrapped in heavy slumber. She bent down and applied the lighted match to the floor and then found she could not straighten her back any more. The flame crept swiftly over the straw, darted in and out like a snake among the stalks and then spread everywhere.

Anissia could not tear her eyes away from the flames. She did not feel her kerosene-soaked skirt catch fire.

When one of the sleeping men did at last jump up with a cry, the hut was already enveloped in an all-devouring, swiftly mounting blaze. Someone was pounding desperately at the door.

Granny Anissia struggled to her feet only to pitch headlong into the flames. Her last thought was that the doors and windows were closed, closed ever so tightly and that no one could possibly open them.

DUTY

By ALEXANDER ISBACH and Z. ZLATOPOLSK

★

SHE VOLUNTEERED for the front the very first days of the war. She was just seventeen, and to the Red Army men whose wounds she tended it seemed that it was a beloved younger sister touching their burning foreheads.

Once, after a particularly hot engagement, Nurse Tamara Kalnina was entrusted with the evacuation of the wounded Red Army men and commanders. The red crosses on the ambulance stood out quite clearly, and this may have been the very reason why the fascists decided to smash it, hoping to exterminate the wounded Red Army men whom it carried.

Seven enemy planes were flying just over the road. Seeing the ambulance lorry, all the seven of them dived. 300 feet. Then 150. 100. 40 feet. Nearly touching the ground, the hostile birds of prey swooped past. Then they returned, flew past again and lashed the ambulance lorry with incendiary bullets.

Tamara sat riveted to her seat, not daring to breathe. The wounded moaned. She readjusted their bandages, gave them water from her flask. After that they felt better and calmed down.

Another volley—and the lorry was enveloped in flames. It stopped in the middle of the wood, blazing like a gigantic bonfire. The wounded tossed about, falling off their racks, shifting their bandages; they gasped and choked in their helplessness, gulping down the scorching air. For an instant, only one instant, Tamara lost her presence of mind. The girl leapt out of the flaming lorry. To flee! Into the forest. To escape from imminent death. . . .

What was that? Instantly she came to herself. Where could she flee, leaving behind her the wounded, the men entrusted to her care? She—a Young Communist. . . a volunteer. . . . How could she go on living after that? How would she look people in the face?

She rushed back to the lorry. With feeble, childish hands she started dragging out the wounded. At first the driver helped her, but there!—the enemy planes had again returned, again they were attacking the burning lorry, and, mortally wounded, the driver fell to the ground.

Tamara was now alone. Alone in the middle of the wood, in a blazing lorry, her fifteen wounded desperately in need of her help, the enemy's bullets flying overhead.

Fifteen times she clambered up into the burning lorry. Fifteen times, clasping her arms around the big heavy body of a wounded man, she dragged him, panting heavily, to a hollow near the wood, and there stopped to gasp for breath, to gulp down a whiff of fresh air, to put out the fire that had caught her dress.

The whole thing seemed impossible. It seemed beyond all human strength. Yet it was not beyond the strength of a real human being, a fearless girl who defeated the flames, defeated seven fascist vultures, defeated death itself.

Some of the wounded lay unconscious, others opened their eyes and with wonder, with rapture looked gratefully at this mite of a girl who had saved their lives.

"Don't worry, lads," she whispered, moving her cracked, parched lips with difficulty. "Never mind, it'll be all right. I'll never, never leave you!"

And only her eyes could smile to them, her large, deep compassionate eyes.

The lorry was burning out by the time Tamara had dragged all fifteen men over to the hollow. Tearing off her smouldering clothes, not paying any attention to the dreadful pains she felt in her burnt limbs, half delirious, she ran, walked, crawled to the First Aid Post for help. In a broken whisper she explained, where they could find the wounded, and then lost consciousness.

The fifteen men were saved, every one of them. They were taken to hospital.

And many of them never even learnt the name of their heroic young rescuer. She is Tamara Kalnina. Will you ever forget this name?

She lay on the brink of death—from her burns, and from the

chill she had caught. She was sent to a hospital by plane and was snatched from the jaws of death. They saved her as she saved you, Red Army men and commanders!

She will live.

And when the greatest artists of our country erect a monument in honour of victory and glory, by the side of our mighty warriors, by the side of Gastello and Mamedov, beside our airmen, tank-men, riflemen and sappers, let them place the figure of a slight, small girl with a Red Cross on her sleeve, the figure of the Young Communist Tamara Kalnina.

By order of the Military Council of the North-Western Front, the Young Communist Tamara Kalnina has been awarded the Order of Lenin.

THE PARTY CARDS

By WANDA WASSILEWSKA

★

"COME ON, Katya, come on. . . ."

Hurriedly, with feverish fingers, she prepared a new belt. Her hair straggled in disorder from under her kerchief. Alexei, all intent on his machine-gun, did not so much as glance at her.

"Come on, Katya, come on. . . ."

The machine-gun rattled away, the long belt moved inexorably through the breech case. Katya snatched up the next one and held it in readiness.

"Katya!"

"Yes?"

"Try and ring up again. Report to the colonel, d'you hear? Tell him everything."

She crawled through the underbrush. On the other side of the slope she jumped up and ran for all she was worth to a house. She snatched up the telephone.

"Get me the town, quick, 3-5."

"They don't answer."

"Try 3-6."

"No reply."

The receiver clicked. Katya stood where she was, wringing her hands. She rushed to the window. The crackling of rifle fire, volleys and isolated shots, came from somewhere beyond the bushes. With trembling hands she snatched up the receiver again.

"Dear, please, this is Orlovka speaking. . . . Orlovka . . . do be a dear and get me the town, 3-5. . . ."

"There's no reply."

"But please, understand . . . this is Orlovka speaking . . . Orlovka! I must get the call through. . . . Any number in the town will do, you must put me through!"

"I'll do what I can, hang on," came the voice over the wire.

She repressed a shiver: from somewhere, from afar, Katya could hear the clicking of lines being connected and the pleasant voice of the switchboard girl repeating persistently:

"Town. . . . Town. . . . Town. . . ."

"Hello, is that Orlovka!"

"Yes, I'm Orlovka, Orlovka. . . ."

"The line to the town has been cut. They're fixing it now. You'll have to wait."

Katya's hands dropped helplessly.

She dashed out of the house. To gain the clump of bushes she had to crawl flat on her stomach. Now she had already reached the firing line. Alexei turned his head for a moment from his machine-gun, perspiration pouring down his smoke-begrimed face.

"Well?"

"The line's cut. They're repairing it."

He ground his teeth.

"Katya, have a look at Grisha, will you?—I can't hear anything from his side."

She crawled to the right to the top of the mound. The young frontier guard was lying there, his face flattened against the ground. She touched his youthful cheek ever so gently with her lips. It was still warm. She put her hand under his tunic—his heart had stopped beating.

"He's dead," she said to Alexei.

"Nine," he rejoined. "Some more ammunition, Katya."

She kept on feeding him with ever new supplies. Her eyes, dilated, intent on that spot over there on the other side, on the narrow strip of river and bridge. From there, from beyond the bridge, red spurts of flame leapt up against the background of green. The Germans were there.

"Come on, Katya, come on. . . ."

They lay there, flattened against the ground, hidden by the bushes and by the riot of wild grass. And oblivious to everything he kept on firing away, never stopping even for a second. Between

them and the Germans was a stretch of not more than two or three hundred yards.

Katya kept handing him machine-gun-belts. She did it mechanically, and just as mechanically she kept reckoning: yes, nine left, only nine. Grisha didn't count any more. . . .

A groan came from somewhere quite nearby. Now there weren't nine any more but only eight.

"Katya, try again, have another try, maybe its mended."

She jumped up and ran.

"Orlovka. . . . This is Orlovka speaking. . . . Do be a dear, please, connect me with the town. . . ."

"The line will be in order again in two hours' time."

Katya flung down the receiver and made her way back as fast as she could.

"Alexei, it won't be mended for two hours."

"We won't be alive in two hours, Katya darling."

Hurriedly, she numbered them off. Seven. Yes, only seven. . . .

"Katya, your hand is bleeding. Wrap it in a handkerchief and crawl over and see what's happened to Platon."

Katya hastily bound her hand and crept away into the bushes.

"You're badly wounded, Platon, you'd better crawl to the rear. . . ."

"It's only a scratch, Katya, it's nothing."

"Katya!"

She heard her husband's voice and made her way to him.

"Listen, Katya. . . ."

Alexei did not even turn his head toward her. His eyes were intent on the green spinney, over there beyond the bridge, where the red spurts of flame grew so profusely.

"Could you manage to get the truck out of the shed?"

She staggered backward as though somebody had hit her on the chest.

"Well, could you?"

He would not look at her, his eyes were glued to one spot, to that green spinney over there which seemed to be alive with red balls of flame.

"Yes," she said in a muffled voice.

"Are you listening, Katya?"

"Yes."

"The documents are in the cupboard. Get them all into the truck and make for town. Hand them over to the colonel. D'you understand?"

"Alyosha, darling, I'd rather stay. . . . I simply can't. . . ."

"Katya, immediately! You understand? At once! A moment's delay and it might be too late. The documents—everything that's in the cupboard. D'you understand, Katya? . . ."

"Yes."

He would not turn, even for a single glance at her. And she, she suppressed the longing to touch his hand as it reached out for a new belt of cartridges.

"Get the truck and step on it. Race her for all you're worth. Take the revolver, d'you hear? And remember, Katya, there are seven bullets in the barrel—and leave the last one in case anything happens, d'you understand?"

"Yes. . . ."

As silently as she could she crawled towards the underbrush. Suddenly he called her back.

"Katya, wait a tick, take my Party card, and take the others' too. Hand them over as well."

She took the little red-covered book. She crawled from one to the other. Five, only five Party cards were handed over.

"Take them from the others."

She searched the pockets of the men who had been killed. Now she had them all, the little red-covered books.

"Don't forget, Katya, to have some petrol ready, in case of accidents—pour it over everything and put a match to it. . . . And the seventh bullet, don't forget about that. . . . Now hurry up, Katya, as quickly as you can. . . ."

This time he turned and looked at her. Grey, beloved eyes. . . .

"Alyosha. . . ."

"Never mind, Katya, never mind."

Suddenly she felt all her desperate, uncontrollable love for this man.

"Hurry. This is true love, Katya."

This is true love. She bit her lips. She crawled along cautiously, the sharp corners of the red little books pressing into her breast.

And then—she made a dash for it. The truck was in the shed, at the back of the house.

Katya started the engine. Over there, behind those bushes, they could most likely hear the engine running. Alexei could hear it too.

"This is true love. . . . This is true love," she kept on repeating through parched lips as though in a daze. She got the truck out onto the road.

She bent over the wheel. It was a straight and smooth strip of road. Katya let in the clutch. The wind whistled in her ears:

Green trees and white huts kept flashing by. The truck tore over the road quickly, ever more quickly, Alexei's words ringing in her ears:

"At once! A moment's delay and it might be too late."

At the cross-roads she had to stop the car and ask the way. She didn't know this locality. It was the first time she had ever been here. One evening and one night after having been parted from Alexei for six months. . . .

At last she reached the town. She was stopped and questioned. She replied mechanically.

They told her how to get there. Her legs seemed weighted with lead as she walked up the staircase. One flight, two flights. . . . What a terribly long staircase. . . . One door, two doors, three. . . . Men in military uniform, in the uniform of the militia, crowds of people. Green-topped caps. Her heart contracted at the sight of the green-topped caps of the frontier guards.

She went up to the table and said:

"The commandant, Alexei Nazarov, ordered me to deliver these documents."

She handed over the papers, briefcases, packages. The man on the other side of the table attended to everything in turn, with calm and quiet efficiency.

"And now you must sit down and rest."

She wanted to say that she was not tired, but her knees gave way. She sat down heavily in the proffered chair. The crack of rifle fire and the unbearable chugging of the truck's motor still rang in her ears.

The man on the other side of the table took off the receiver. "Get me Orlovka."

Katya waited.

"Orlovka, Orlovka, at once!"

Katya's breath almost stopped. Her fingers convulsively grasped at the edge of the table. Her burning eyes tried to bore into those of the man at the telephone. Tried to read in his eyes an inkling of what was happening at the other end of the wire.

"So. That's right."

Slowly he put down the receiver.

"What is it?"

He came over to her from behind the table, took her cold, tightly clasped hands into his own.

"Orlovka doesn't answer."

"Isn't the line in order yet?"

She felt her fingers grow numb, her legs seem to turn cold and also her whole body.

"My dear, be brave. . . . What can we do? It's war. . . . The Germans are in Orlovka."

And like an echo the words of a song flitted through her memory—who was it who used to sing it and when? Alexei, whose grey eyes were set off by black brows—darling, beloved, dear Alexei!

*My only regret is to leave the wide heath,
The sun in the sky and love down beneath. . . .*

She pulled herself together.

"Excuse me, I'll be going. . . . I have to go to the Regional Party Committee."

She was told where to go.

Again a writing table, again a man behind a desk. And again

her heart contracted. Whom does he look like? Why, yes, Grisha, young Grisha, the one who was the first to fall.

"I've brought these Party cards."

She took them out from under her blouse. Ten tiny, scarlet books.

"Where did you get them? Whose are they?"

Katya straightened her shoulders and without the slightest tremor in her voice she said:

"They are the Party cards of ten comrades, ten frontier guards, who this morning, at dawn, died at their post, fighting the Germans."

The secretary stood up. The Party cards lay on his desk. Ten tiny, crimson books that stood out against the green cloth like drops of living blood.

ZERO HOUR

By BORIS GORBATOV

★

COMRADE! They have just read the order to us. At dawn we go into battle. Seven hours until dawn.

It is night. Overhead the faraway twinkling of the stars. And silence. The thunder of the artillery fire has ceased. My neighbour has fallen into a light slumber. Somewhere in the corner a buzz is barely audible. The liaison man is whispering something. . . .

There are moments of a strange kind of silence that are impossible to forget!

Some day I shall recall this night—the night of 30th October, 1941. I shall remember the moon drifting over the Don steppe, and how the stars shivered as though chilled. I shall remember how my neighbour tossed in his sleep. And over the hillocks, over the trenches and firing positions, hung a silence—a storm-charged silence. The silence before a battle.

I was lying in the trench, covering my flashlight with the front of my wet overcoat, writing a letter to you, and thinking. . . . And millions of other fighters, from the north Arctic Ocean to the Black Sea, were lying, just as I was, on this night on the damp ground, waiting for daybreak and the attack, thinking of life and death, and of their fate.

Comrade! One wants to live very much. I want to live, to breathe, to be able to walk, to see the sky over my head. But I do not want to live just any kind of a life. I am not interested in just being alive—in just existing.

Last night a man crawled into our trench "from the other shore". Escaped from the fascists. He came crawling on swollen legs, on skinned and bloody elbows. When he saw us, his own people, he began to cry. He kept shaking hands. He wanted to embrace everyone. His face jerked; his lips quivered. We

gave him some bread and butter and tobacco. After he had finished eating, he quieted down and told us about the Germans; he told us of rape, torture, robbery. Listening to him made one's blood boil and the heart pound faster.

I saw the man's back. I could look at nothing else. My eyes were glued to his back. It was more frightful than any story.

It had been only a month and a half that this man had lived under fascist rule, but his back was bowed, as though his spinal column were broken. As if during the entire month and a half he had walked around bowing low, turning and twisting, his back trembling in anticipation of blows. This was the back of a man whose will was broken. This was the back of a slave.

"Straighten up!" one wanted to shout. "Throw your shoulders back, comrade! You're among your own."

Crystal clear I saw what the fascists have in store for me: a life with a broken back, a life of submission.

Comrade! Five hours are left before daybreak. In five hours I go into battle. It is not for this little greyish hillock in front of us that I will fight the fascists. No, the fight is for bigger stakes. For the decision who is to be the master of my fate: Hitler or I.

Until now you and I, each one of us, has been the master of his own destiny. We chose our own type of work, we chose the profession we liked, we married the woman we loved. Free people in a free land, we bravely looked to the future. The entire country was our motherland. In each home were comrades. Every profession was honoured, work was a matter of valour and glory. You knew that each new ton of coal you mined brought you honour, fame, and reward. Each bushel of wheat you harvested multiplied your wealth, the wealth of your family.

But now the fascist comes. The fascist will be the master of your fate. He will trample your To-day and will steal your To-morrow. He will rule your life, your home, your family. He will deprive you of your home, and you will be driven with a bent back into the rain and the mud. Yes, he may let you live. He needs beasts of burden. He will make a slave of you—a

slave with a broken back. You will harvest the bushel of wheat, but he will take it away and leave you hungry. You will mine the ton of coal, but he will take that away and swear at you: "You Russian swine, you work badly." You will always be for him the Russian Ivan—an animal of some lower order. He will force you to forget the language of your fathers, the language in which you dreamed dreams, the language in which you told your sweetheart of your love. He will force you to speak his language, and will jeer at you as you struggle with a foreign tongue.

He will trample on your dreams and spit on your hopes. You have hoped and dreamed that when your boy grows up he will become a learned man, an engineer, a worthy man. But the fascists will have no use for Russian scientists; they have herded their own into concentration camps. They need but dull beasts of burden, and your son will be driven under the fascist yoke, forfeiting his childhood, his youth, and his future.

You have watched over and cherished your lovely daughter. How many times have you and your wife bent over the little white crib of Marinka and dreamed of her happiness. But the fascists do not want clean, wholesome Russian girls. To a house of prostitution, for the pleasure of their brown-shirted hordes, will your pride and joy—Marinka, lovely child—be thrown. . . .

You are proud of your wife. She is well liked by everyone in our village, your Oxsana! We all have envied you. But in slavery women do not have a chance. They age before their time. Your Oxsana will fast become an old woman. An old woman with a bowed back.

You honour your parents—your father and mother—for did they not bring you into the world and raise you? Our country helped you to arrange for them a happy, quiet, honoured old age. But the fascists will have no use for old Russian people: the old cannot work, and so they must starve, for the fascists will not give your parents any of the bread which you harvest.

It may be that you can bear all of this. It may be that you will not die, but will become dulled, will compromise, will drag out a blind, hungry, joyless existence.

I reject such a life! No, I don't want to live like that. Better

death than such an existence! Better a bayonet in my throat than a yoke over my neck! No, better to die a hero's death than to live as a slave!

Comrade! Only three hours are left before daybreak. My fate is in my hands. My fate is at the sharp point of my bayonet. My fate, the fate of my family, of my country, of my people.

Comrade! There are two more hours till daybreak.

I look through the night with the eyes of a man who, because of the nearness of the battle and possible death, can see far ahead. Through many nights, days, months, I look ahead, and over mountains of sorrow I see our victory. We will achieve it. Through rivers of blood, suffering, and torture, through the muck and horror of war, we will arrive at victory. To a final and complete victory over the enemy. We have suffered for it, and we will win!

Remember the years before the war. Our generation has always had this sword of war hanging over its head. We lived, worked, caressed our wives, brought up our children, but not for one minute did we forget. There across our borders a wild beast was getting ready, was baring and sharpening its fangs. War was our constant neighbour. The breath of the rattlesnake poisoned our very lives, our labour, our love. We slept uneasily. We waited.

The beast attacked us. He is on our land. The most terrible battle is on. A battle to the death. Compromises are impossible now. There is no choice. To strangle, to destroy, to end once and for all the Hitler beast. And only when the last fascist is thrown into his grave, when the last volley from the howitzers is discharged, only then will the horrible nightmare be dispelled. A stillness, a great unbroken stillness of victory will then come. And we will then hear, comrade, not merely the rustling of the joyous forest leaves. We will then hear the relieved and happy sigh of the whole world, of all mankind.

We will enter the liberated cities and villages, and a triumphant stillness will greet us—a stillness of hearts overflowing with joy. And then—smoke will burst forth from the rebuilt factories and mills, life will begin to surge. . . . A remarkable life, comrade.

A truly great and precious life in a free world, of a brotherhood of all people.

For such a life, dying is not too much. It is not death. It is immortality.

It is daybreak, comrade . . . timid, grey shadows streak the ground. Never did life appear so beautiful to me as in this hour. Look how the Don steppe blossoms forth, how the chalky mounds become silvery under the rays of the sun.

Yes, life is worth while. To see victory achieved. To press into the folds of my greatcoat the curly head of my little daughter.

I love life very much—and that is why I am now going into battle. I am going to fight for life. For a good life, comrade, and not for a slave existence. For the happiness of my children. For the happiness of my motherland. For my happiness. I love life, but will not spare it. I love life, but I am not afraid of death. To live bravely, and to die bravely, is how I understand life.

Dawn. . . .

The machine guns have begun their rattle. The artillery is preparing. And in a moment we, too, go in.

Comrade! Over my native Don steppe the sun is rising. The sun of battle. Under its rays I triumphantly vow to you, comrade: I will not falter. If injured, I will not leave the ranks. If surrounded by enemies, I will not give myself up. There is no fear, no confusion in my heart, no compassion for the enemy. Only a hatred. A fierce hatred. The heart is fired. This is our battle to the death.

Here I go!

THE SNIPER

By LEONID SOBOLEV

*

FROM THE deep well of complete forgetfulness a vague feeling of heaviness in his legs began to rise hazily. It became more and more persistent and finally ended in an unconscious movement by which the sleeper attempted to make himself more comfortable. But something hindered him from moving his legs and this flashed an alarm signal to his brain. His first unclear thought was that Kolya Sitin, who had the hammock above, had again fallen on his legs. With an abrupt but already conscious motion he tried to free them. Then he felt the pain and opened his eyes.

For a few seconds he stared ahead of him, blinking at the bright light and trying to understand why he was lying on his stomach in the snow, pinned down by a fir tree whose thick branches made a heavy canopy over him.

Through the green needles redolent of frost and pitch hanging in his very face, the snow glared blindingly. The great bough which held him down could not be moved. Someone's laboured breathing was disturbing the profound quiet of the winter forest.

He listened attentively. And suddenly realising that it was he himself who was breathing so loudly, he opened his mouth wide. With this precaution of a scout he came to completely, and immediately realised where he was and what had happened. He broke out in a cold sweat. His heart beat fast and loud. Neither the greatest exertion of his will power nor his even breathing was now able to stop its frenzied thumping, which seemed to fill the whole forest. A nauseating weariness rose from his legs, spread through his whole body and flooded it with a motionless and paralysing langour. It was fear, ordinary brute fear, the desperate protest of the living body of a human being that suddenly finds itself in a trap from which the only way out is death.

He tried to take stock of his situation. In an enemy-occupied forest, mercilessly lit up by the sun, he lay quite alone, practically unarmed, with only a hand grenade at his belt, lay there held down by a tree. It had saved him from the unerring aim of a sniper, but it had crushed and perhaps broken his legs. His rifle had been knocked from his hand by the heavy blow which had thrown him from the dense fir grove to this place in the snow at the foot of a pine tree, plunging him into oblivion.

That night there had been two of them—Kolobanov himself and his restless bunk-mate Kolya Sitin. They had crawled here, in white overalls, cautiously and noiselessly, two bosom friends, two happy-go-lucky Red sailors, two of the finest scouts of the Naval detachment. And there in that dense fir grove they had crouched for half an hour, or perhaps an hour, before creeping forward to the open snow between the fir grove and the motionless trunks of the pines. They had lain quietly and listened. Their experienced ears had caught the distant clanking of weapons and the rustling behind the pines. But where they had lain all had been quiet.

Then Sitin had signalled to him that he was going ahead alone, and had crawled out of the fir grove. He had disappeared within three paces, an indistinct shadow moving over the snow, slowly and noiselessly, as only he could do. But nevertheless from somewhere nearby the low sound of a sniper's shot had cracked out as if someone had stepped on a dry twig, and then once again the profound woodland silence had enveloped the night.

Kolobanov had waited five or ten minutes, confident that Kolya would return. Many a time after such shots, of no avail in the dark, they had met again, safe and sound. But this time Sitin had not returned. Then he had crept forward to help him if he were wounded or to see if he had perished. But after he had moved off about three yards, a second shot had cracked, from a different direction this time, and a puff of snow had eddied up near his left shoulder. He had stopped stock still and lain flat for a long time, waiting for the eyes of the invisible sniper to grow dim, tired with their tense peering into the darkness.

But presently someone had tugged at his right leg. Sitin, the "invisible scout" as they nicknamed him in their detachment, had crawled back and round behind him. Kolobanov had crept back to the fir grove and stretched out beside his friend. The feverish breath of the latter had burned his cheek, and he had been able to guess that Sitin was smiling nervously and excitedly, like a hunter who has sighted game. Without a sound, with just his excited breathing, Sitin had said: "The place is alive with snipers. . . . Let's go through the fir grove. . . . We'll poke around a bit." And immediately his lithe body had slipped into the thicket. Kolobanov had followed him, carefully bending and pushing aside the heavily snow-laden branches. Suddenly a column of fire had shot up ahead; the heavy air had scorched his face. He had not quite realised that he was being carried by the irresistible force of an explosion when he had lost consciousness.

Now, upon regaining consciousness, he realized that he had been thrown into this pit at the foot of the pine at night by a mine that had exploded and uprooted a fir tree, which had fallen on him. Without moving he peered through the needles of the fir, at the snow and trees, looking for Kolya. Then he saw something horrible in the reddened snow and closed his eyes.

He was alone. There was no doubt about it now. And this was the end.

The day had just begun. Bright, merciless sunlight flooded the woods, and on the trees sat snipers, those who had hunted for them at night. It was impossible to leave the pit. The only thing that remained was to wait for night, but he was not warm enough to do this. As it was little heat remained in his body, which had been frozen through by the long hours of unconsciousness.

The sun crept through the thick fir trees, moved around the yellow resinous trunks of the pines. All this took place slowly. The forest was hushed and silent.

He thought of everything but the forest, silence and light. He pictured to himself a dark Ukrainian night, the fragrance of cherries and the croaking of frogs at the pond. He called to mind

all the various kinds of darkness he had ever known. He thought only of the darkness—of the darkness for lovers, the darkness for battle, the darkness for weariness, and the darkness of the sleepy night. He waited only for darkness, under cover of which he could crawl out from under the fir tree. From time to time he opened his eyes and gazed at the trunks of the pines bathed in the vivid sunlight.

Time lost all meaning. It did not move, and it seemed that darkness would never come.

Despair seized him. He felt for his grenade. That would be the simplest of all. He had only to pull out the ring and he would lie as calmly as Kolya Sitin. . . . He would no longer have to count his heart beats, to search for a way of getting into the shadow of a pine. He would no longer have to wait and wait and wait, when waiting was impossible.

Once again his eyes turned to the reddened snow around the motionless body; and suddenly he felt the hot breath of his friend on his cheek, his soundless whisper, his excited smile, and the thought flashed through his head that most likely Kolya had whispered sweet nothings into some girlish ear in just that way, stirring the tendrils of hair with his breath. And once again a thirst for life gripped him. He had to live in order to take revenge on those who had forever stopped that fiery breathing. This thought seemed to him of the utmost importance, and he tensed his muscles, priming his body for an encounter, his brain for quick thinking, his soul for hatred.

Suddenly the quiet of the forest was broken. A dry rumbling shook the air. The branches of the fir trees stirred and great pyramids of snow fell from some of the branches. Again and again the roaring was repeated from somewhere high up in the sky, and Kolobanov realized that the barrage had begun; our artillery was sending shrapnel over the trees, frightening off the snipers. The forest came to life. Twigs fell to the ground, snapped off by the hot metal. All around shrapnel was whistling by. Two crows whirred past noisily. A squirrel darted out and hid in the thick shelter of the branches, shaking them and sprinkling down the powdery snow.

And then from a pine tree not far off, slowly and clumsily, a man lowered himself, swinging from branch to branch.

He was in alien but familiar uniform, wrapped up and muffled against long waiting in the frost. He came down without his gun, leaving behind the automatic rifle with which he had shot at the scouts the night before. A hot wave ran over Kolobanov's body, almost lifting him from under the fir. Then he thought better of it and cautiously reached for his grenade, no longer fearing to betray himself. The sniper was not interested in the stirrings in the fir tree now—shrapnel was whistling through the forest and his only thought was to find shelter. Kolobanov managed to drag his legs from under the tree. He crouched against a snowdrift in readiness to jump, throw the grenade and dash into the fir grove—but just then something warm and heavy dropped on him.

Not yet realizing what it was, he jerked back his elbow sharply, heard a groan and then instantly turned around under the weight that had knocked him over.

It was a second sniper, who had been in the pine over Kolobanov and who had just lowered himself down into the pit at the foot of the tree in which he had been hiding. The skirmish was short and fierce. The enemy tried to get at the dagger in his belt. Kolobanov, pinning down his arms, sought for a weapon. Once again his hand grasped the grenade, and swinging it lustily like a hammer he hit the enemy on the head with it several times until his body relaxed.

Trembling with loathing, he pulled the dagger from the sniper's belt and did what was required by this sudden encounter in the pit. Then he raised the branch of the fir, thrust out his head and looked around with no thought of concealment. Shrapnel was still whistling through the branches, the air roared with the crashing as the barrage kept up steadily and ruthlessly. He glanced at the enemy he had killed, looked up at the pine, and then climbed up.

Among the branches he found the sniper's nest. Here hung an automatic rifle, clips of cartridges, a kit-bag with food supplies, field glasses and a canteen—all that was needed to remain in the

tree until relief came, even though it might be as long as three days. Shrapnel whined and whistled in the air, and for the first time in all this period Kolobanov opened his mouth to speak.

"A good job they're doing," he said out loud. "The enemy 'll not be sitting pretty under a barrage like this. . . ."

And he settled himself more comfortably among the branches, picked up the automatic rifle and waited, ducking his head whenever the shrapnel burst over the trees.

The first one he picked off was the sniper whom he had seen rushing away to take shelter. As soon as the barrage was over, he had lifted his head from the hole in the ground into which he had dug himself, sniffing the air like a rat. Kolobanov raised his rifle, but then changed his mind. He let the sniper climb half way up a pine and then shot him square in the forehead. The sniper threw out his arms and pitched into the snow. It looked as if he had been killed by a shrapnel bullet.

He had to wait a long time for his second mark. The forest was deserted. Apparently only these two snipers had been there. Kolobanov picked up the field glasses, carefully turned around and began to peer through the branches behind him. The sun was already setting when he noticed the figure of an officer coming from behind the trunks of the pines in the distance. Kolobanov took aim and fired. The officer fell. Two men immediately dashed out of the grove and ran over to him. They crashed to the ground beside him.

It was growing dark, and Kolobanov could leave now. But he remained in the pine. He was waiting for the relief. . . .

It came when it was already quite dark—four men, walking confidently and carelessly. When they reached the fallen sniper they stopped, bent over him and began to talk excitedly. One after the other all four fell: two on top of the first body, the third at the foot of the pine tree to which he had run, the fourth on the snow beside the body of Sutin, an indistinct shadow in the ashen murk.

It was quite clear that the firing would attract the attentions of the enemy. And soon Kolobanov saw flashes spurting up here and there in the darkness. A regular siege was being laid to the

pine. Bullets whistled past, tearing the bark from the trunk, but so far none of them had hit Kolobanov. After waiting a while, he noiselessly and nimbly lowered himself into the pit below.

There he pulled out his grenade, placed it beside him and thrust his automatic rifle through the branches. The firing had become more frequent. The enemy was coming closer. He peered through the darkness for the dim silhouettes, but saw only the flashes. Snow showered down on him together with the twigs that were being snapped off. The enemy was raking the top of the pine with his fire. He waited.

Then the firing ceased. Evidently the enemy thought that the nest must be empty by now. He heard loud voices. They were coming towards the pine.

Kolobanov looked up at the sky. Stars twinkled over him brightly through the frost. He rested the barrel of his automatic on the body of the dead sniper, the former inhabitant of the nest above, and reached for the grenade.

But once again the sky was riven, and shrapnel began to whine. Our men were laying down a new barrage. Kolobanov hung his grenade on his belt again, thrust the clips into his pocket and, pushing his automatic rifle in front of him, crawled over to the fir grove.

By morning he was back in our lines.

THE THIRD ADJUTANT

By KONSTANTIN SIMONOV

★

THE COMMISSAR was convinced that brave men had much less chance of being killed than cowards. He liked to bring this point home and was always annoyed when anybody attempted to dispute it.

In the division he was liked and feared. He had his own way of inuring people to war. He studied men in action. He would take a man along with him to the divisional headquarters, or to one of the regiments, keep him at his side the whole day long, have him accompany him wherever he had to be that day. If an attack was impending they would go into action together, side by side.

If the man passed the test the commissar would, so to speak, become formally acquainted with him in the evening.

"What's your name?" he would unexpectedly ask in his staccato voice.

The surprised man would again mention his name.

"And mine's Kornev," the commissar would say shaking him warmly by the hand. "We've been in action together, sprawled on the ground together, so we might as well know each other better."

The very first week after he came to the division two adjutants of his were killed in succession.

The first showed funk; at a tense moment he scrambled out of a trench intending to crawl to a safer spot. He was simply riddled by a machine-gun.

In the evening, on the way to headquarters, the commissar indifferently passed by the body of his dead adjutant. He did not even turn his head to look at him.

The second adjutant received a bullet wound through the chest during an attack. The rays of the waning autumn sun hurt the eyes. It was cold and unbearably dry. The adjutant

lay on his back in the recaptured trench, gasping for air. He asked for water. Nobody had a drop. The strip of "No-man's land" beyond the breastworks was strewn with the bodies of dead Germans. Near one of them lay a flask. The commissar took out his field glasses and peered through them for a long time, as if trying to make sure whether the flask was empty or not. Then, swinging his no longer young and now grown heavy body over the breastwork, he walked over to it with his usual unhurried gait.

For some reason or other the Germans did not shoot. They opened fire only when he had reached the flask, picked it up, shaken it and, holding it tight under his arm, turned to go back.

The Germans aimed at his back. One bullet hit the flask. He stopped the hole with his finger and went on, but now he held the flask in front of him.

He jumped into the trench and, carefully, so as not to spill a drop of the precious liquid, handed the flask to one of the men.

"Give him a drink," he said.

"Supposing, after you'd taken all the trouble of going for it, the flask had proved to be empty?" someone asked.

"I'd have got back and sent you out to look for another one that wasn't," he retorted, looking at the questioner with an angry flash in his eyes.

He often did things which, as commissar of the division, he was not bound to do. But he always recollected it after the thing had been done. Then he would be angry at himself and at those who reminded him of it. That was what happened this time, too. After he had got the flask he no longer went near the adjutant and, for all anybody could tell, he had entirely forgotten about him—so engrossed was he in how things were faring in the field.

Fifteen minutes later he suddenly hailed the battalion commander.

"Well, have you sent him off to the field hospital?"

"No, comrade commissar, we couldn't do it, we'll have to wait till dusk."

"He'll be dead by then," the commissar said and turned away to signify that the conversation was at an end.

Five minutes later two Red Army men, crouching as low as possible to escape the bullets whizzing past, carried the adjutant's motionless body away over the rugged field.

Perhaps it was rash, but when the commander of the battalion called for volunteers to carry the adjutant, all the men who had seen the commissar go after the flask offered their services to a man. It was only natural after what they had seen.

As for the commissar, he remained unperturbed as he watched them go. His attitude to danger was the same whether it concerned himself or others. People get killed—that's war. But brave men are less likely to be killed.

The Red Army men went on boldly, never stopping once to take cover, never forgetting for a moment that they were carrying a wounded man, and that was why he was confident that they would get through without a scratch.

That night, on the way to headquarters, he stopped over at the field hospital.

"Well, how is he progressing?" he asked the surgeon in his usual abrupt manner. In his opinion, at the front, everything could and had to be done with the same promptness—whether it was delivering despatches, or going into action, or treating a wounded man.

And when the surgeon told him that his adjutant had died of loss of blood he raised his eyes in surprise.

"Do you realize what you are saying?" he said in an undertone, taking the surgeon by the belt and drawing him closer to himself. "The men carried him two miles under fire in order to save his life and now you are telling me he's dead. What was the use of their doing it, then?"

He did not mention a thing about having himself gone under fire to get some water for the wounded man. And it was not out of sheer modesty; he had simply forgotten all about it.

The surgeon shrugged his shoulders.

"Besides," the commissar added, noting the motion, "he was a brave chap and should have pulled through. Yes, yes, he should have pulled through," he repeated angrily. "You're not doing your job properly."

And turning on his heel he went back to his car. The blue spots of the headlights glided over the black trunks of the cypress trees. The car turned to the left and disappeared from sight.

The surgeon stood on the steps looking after him. Of course, the commissar was wrong. Logically, what he had said was even stupid, perhaps. But in his words, in his impatient and sad voice, there was something so potent and convincing that for a moment it seemed to him that the commissar was right, that brave men ought not to die, and that if they did it was because he, the surgeon, did not do his job properly.

"Nonsense," he said aloud, trying to shake off this strange idea.

But the idea persisted. He pictured in his mind the two Red Army men carrying the wounded adjutant over that endless, rugged field.

"Mikhail Lvovich," he suddenly said, addressing his assistant, who had just come out onto the porch to have a smoke, "in the morning we must have two more dressing stations with surgeons in attendance fixed up nearer to the front lines." He spoke of this as of something that had been decided long ago.

It was daybreak by the time the commissar reached headquarters. Outside it was drizzling. The rain turned into sleet. It was the beginning of the autumn season of bad weather. The commissar was in bad humour and his manner was especially terse and peremptory that morning. It was not only a mood, however. He had his own reasons for wanting people to go away with hurt feelings after an interview with him. The commissar was of the opinion that there was nothing a man could not do. He never scolded anyone for not doing what could not have been done. But when a man did accomplish a great deal, the commissar would reproach him for not having done more. He was profoundly convinced that people's minds worked better when they felt nettled. He was in the habit of ending a conversation abruptly, when he was satisfied that the person to whom he was talking had grasped the main point. The rest he left to him to figure out for himself. In this way he always succeeded in making his presence felt in the division. He could not devote much of his time to everybody. But after he had been a minute

or so with a person he left him with enough food for thought until the next interview.

In the morning a list of the previous day's casualties was placed on his desk. As he read it he thought of the surgeon. Of course, it was tactless on his part to tell that old, experienced surgeon that he was not doing his job properly, but never mind, no harm done: let him be offended—perhaps it will make him think of something worth while. He did not repent a single word he had said. The saddest part of it all was that the adjutant had died. However, he did not permit himself to ponder over this too long. After all these months of war he would have too many people on his mind if he did. That would have to wait until later, when the war was over, when violent death would be solely the result of an accident, or some misfortune. At the front, however, death was always violent, there was no other kind, therefore one might as well take it for granted. But in spite of all these reflections, he could not help feeling sad, and that was why his manner was especially brusque when he told the Chief of Staff that his adjutant had been killed and that he needed another.

The third adjutant was a small, fair-haired, blue-eyed young chap who had just graduated from a military academy. He had never been to the front before.

When on the very first day of their acquaintance he accompanied the commissar over the frost-hardened autumn field in which trench-mortar shells burst at frequent intervals, he walked along at his side without faltering for a moment. He kept as close to the commissar as possible because, as he understood it, that was his duty as an adjutant, and besides, the big, heavy-set man walking along unhurriedly next to him seemed invulnerable. It seemed to him that he had only to keep close to the commissar and nothing could happen to him.

When the shells began to come over in rapid succession and it was obvious that it was they the Germans were after, the commissar and his adjutant dropped to the ground occasionally.

But hardly had they dropped down, and even before the

smoke of the close-by explosion had been dispelled, when the commissar would be up on his feet and continuing on his way.

"Get a move on, man, get a move on," he muttered, "there's nothing for us to do here."

They had almost reached the trenches when they were caught between two shells—one burst in front of them, the other behind them.

The commissar jumped up and shook off the dirt.

"You see," he said, pointing to the tiny crater behind them, "if we'd funkyed it and waited, that shell would have got us straight. It's always the best policy to keep going ahead, and quickly at that—then you'll never be hit."

"But supposing we had walked faster, then . . ." the adjutant nodded in the direction of the crater in front of them.

"Nothing of the sort," retorted the commissar. "They were aiming at us here, and that one fell short. If we had been over there they would have aimed at us there and that shell would have fallen short, too."

The adjutant could not help smiling at this: the commissar was certainly jesting. But glancing at his face he became aware that the commissar was in real earnest. He had spoken with profound conviction. And, suddenly, the adjutant was seized with a feeling of confidence in this man, a feeling which in war comes to one unexpectedly, on the spur of the moment, and then remains forever. The last hundred yards he walked alongside the commissar, so close to him that they were almost rubbing elbows; he was absolutely certain now that neither the commissar nor anyone who walked alongside of him could be killed.

That was how their acquaintance began.

A month passed. The roads in the South were now hardened by frost, now slushy and impassable again. In the vineyards the grape crop, which had been left unharvested, was gathering rust and rotting. The desolate fields were criss-crossed with trenches.

Rumour had it that somewhere in the rear the necessary forces were being mustered for a counter-offensive. In the meantime the thinned division was still fighting sanguinary defensive battles.

It was a dark autumn night. The commissar was sitting near the iron stove in his dug-out, drying his wet boots which were thickly coated with mud.

That morning the commander of the division had been seriously wounded; apparently it was fatal. The Chief of Staff, one wounded arm in a black sling resting on the table, was softly drumming on the table-top with his fingers. The fact that he could do that gave him great pleasure—it meant he would be able to use his fingers again.

"Very well, my stubborn friend," he said, apparently continuing an interrupted conversation, "let us assume that Kholodilin was killed because he got cold feet, but how about the general? The general was a brave man, wasn't he?"

"Not was, but is—and he'll pull through," said the commissar and, as was his wont, he turned away as though indicating that there was nothing more to be said on the subject.

But the Chief of Staff tugged at his sleeve and said in a whisper, so that no one else could overhear his words:

"It's all right for you to say that he'll pull through, but Mironov didn't pull through, nor did Zavodchikov, nor Gavrilenko. They all died, yet they were all brave men. Where does that leave your theory?"

"I have no theory on that score," the commissar retorted sharply. "All I know is that, given equal conditions, brave men are less likely to be killed than cowards. And if we keep repeating the names of brave men who died, it's because when a coward dies he's no sooner buried than forgotten, but when a brave man dies he's remembered, spoken of, written about. We only remember the name of the brave. That's all. But if you insist on calling it my theory—have it your own way. A theory which helps people not to be afraid is a good theory. All other theories are bad. Incidentally, it helps me too not to be afraid", the commissar suddenly added with a smile. "Because—between you and me—whatever you may say, sometimes also you and I feel a bit scared."

The adjutant came in. During the past month his face had grown haggard and there was a tired look in his eyes. But in

every other respect he remained the same young fellow he was on the first day the commissar had seen him. He clicked his heels together as he drew up to attention and reported that on the peninsula from which he had just come everything was in order, only the company commander, Senior Lieutenant Polyakov, was wounded.

"Who's taken his place?" asked the commissar.

"Lieutenant Vasiliev of the 3rd platoon."

"And who's in charge of the 3rd platoon?"

"One of the sergeants."

The commissar pondered a moment.

"Are you very cold?"

"To tell the truth, I am."

"Here, drink this." The commissar poured half a glassful of vodka from the teapot, and the adjutant, without removing his greatcoat, only hastily unbuttoning it, swallowed the draught in one gulp.

"And now you'll have to go back," said the commissar. "I'm worried, d'you understand? Your place is over there, on the peninsula. You'll serve as my eyes there. You'd better be off quickly."

The adjutant got up. He buttoned his greatcoat with the slow movements of a man who is anxious to linger a little longer in a warm room. But once buttoned and belted he did not lose a moment. Bending low, so as not to bump into the lintel, he disappeared into the darkness. The door slammed to behind him.

"A splendid chap," said the commissar, "the sort of fellow, you know, I'm sure nothing will happen to. I'm convinced that a man like him will come through it all without a scratch and he is convinced that I will. And that's the main thing. Am I right, Colonel?"

The Chief of Staff slowly drummed with his fingers on the table. He was a brave man, but he did not like to theorize about bravery—whether his own or other people's. Now, however, it seemed to him that the commissar was right.

"Yes," he said, "and in general I don't believe that anybody dies. It always seems to me that when anyone is killed there is

invariably someone else ready to take his place—someone who is not a bit worse than the dead man. That's why I'm convinced that we are bound to win. Because, since this is the case there can be no other result."

Logs crackled in the stove. The commissar slept with his head on a large-scale map and his hands extended over it as if trying to retrieve the entire area of land desecrated by the enemy.

In the morning the commissar went to the peninsula himself. He crossed the inlet in a frail little rowboat. The wind, blowing from the north, raised small foamy waves which hit against the sides of the boat.

He has never since cared to recall the details of that day. In the night the Germans had unexpectedly landed on the peninsula and in a fierce engagement had wiped out the entire 3rd platoon.

During the day it fell to his lot to do what he, as commissar of the division, really was not supposed to do. In the morning he rallied all the available men he could muster and led them three times into the attack. The grating sand which had been touched by the first frosts, was dotted with craters and drenched with blood. Many Germans were killed, others, who tried to swim across to the opposite shore, were drowned, the rest were taken prisoner.

The commissar handed his now no longer needed rifle with its bloodstained bayonet to one of the men and went to make the round of the peninsula. Only the dead bodies could tell him what had taken place during the night. The dead can speak too. Interspersed with the bodies of killed Germans were the bodies of the Red Army men of the 3rd platoon. Some lay in the trenches, stabbed to death by bayonets, gripping their broken rifles with dead fingers. Others—those who had flinched and tried to flee—lay stretched in the open field, in the frozen steppe, where the bullets of the enemy had overtaken them. There they lay with arms outstretched, facing east, their backs to the enemy. The commissar slowly walked through the silent battlefield scanning the poses of the killed, their rigid faces. Even dead these men were to him either brave or cowards. In the poses of the dead he read their conduct in their last minutes of life. And even

death did not extenuate the guilt of the coward. That was something he could not forgive. If it were possible he would have buried the brave apart from the cowards. Let there be a distinction between them after death too, just as there was when they were alive.

He peered intently into the dead faces, looking for his adjutant. He could not have fled nor have been taken prisoner. He was bound to be somewhere among the dead.

At last the commissar found him far from the trenches where the men had fought and died. The adjutant lay flat on his back, one arm awkwardly bent behind and under him and the other outstretched with a revolver held in a death grip. His tunic was covered with congealed blood.

For quite a long time the commissar stood contemplating the body. Then he hailed one of the commanders who accompanied him and ordered him to roll up the tunic and see whether there was a bullet wound or a bayonet stab. He would have done this himself, but his right arm, injured by several fragments of a hand grenade, hung limply at his side. He looked with irritation at his tunic which was cut as far as the shoulder, and at the blood-stained, hastily applied bandages. What irritated him was not so much the wound and the pain as the fact that he had been injured—he who was regarded as invulnerable. He knew that this faith in his invulnerability had encouraged men to go more fearlessly into battle. It was a very inopportune wound and the best thing was to get it healed and forget about it as soon as possible.

The commander bent over the adjutant, unbuttoned the tunic and raised the undershirt.

"It's a bayonet stab," he said, turning his head toward the commissar. Then he bent again over the adjutant and for about a minute kept his ear pressed to the motionless body.

When he got up again his face expressed surprise.

"His heart's still beating," he said.

"Really?"

Not the least flicker betrayed the commissar's agitation. He had not yet made up his mind whether he should be agitated on

account of this man who turned out to be still alive. He lay there, far from the trenches; most likely he had fled. Yet—no, that was impossible, he rarely misjudged people.

"Here, you two, come here," he suddenly ordered in a sharp tone. "Pick him up and rush him to the dressing station. Maybe there's a chance of saving him."

He turned on his heel and proceeded farther along the field.

Would he pull through or not? This question was tangled in his mind with two others: How had he behaved during the engagement? Why was he found apart from all the others, by himself? And involuntarily, the two questions soon merged in one: If nothing was amiss, if he had behaved bravely, he would surely get well, he would certainly pull through.

Perhaps that was why, when, a month later, the adjutant, just out of the hospital, pale and thin, but as fair-haired, blue-eyed and looking as much like a youngster as ever, appeared at the divisional headquarters, the commissar asked him no questions, but stretched out his left, sound arm to shake his hand.

After the first words of greeting the adjutant said:

"That time, you know, I never got up as far as the 3rd platoon—I got held up at the crossing, I was still about a hundred yards away when..."

"I know," the commissar interrupted him, "I know it all, you don't need to explain. I know that you acted splendidly and I'm glad to see you on your feet again."

He looked with envy at the lad who one month after sustaining what was equivalent to a mortal wound was back again hale and hearty. He nodded at his own bandaged arm and remarked sadly:

"The colonel and I are getting on in years, you see. It's already more than a month ago, and my wound still hasn't healed. In his case it's three months ago already. And so we have only two hands between us to manage the division—he his right and I my left. But people say the result's not too bad for all that..."

HIS SWEETHEART

By LEONID SOBOLEV

*

ON THE days when Lyuba was on duty in the ward we were all in excellent spirits. Charming and glowing with life, she would fly into the ward in the morning in her soft slippers without a sound, a visible ray of sunshine. The frost would still be blazing in vivid cold flames on her cheeks; her laughing, guileless eyes would sparkle and dance, and the legless major in the last bed would invariably exclaim:

"A maiden's cheeks are brighter than roses. . . . What do you say, Lyubochka, are we to go on living?"

"Absolutely!" she would reply in a clear ringing voice, breathing on her frozen fingers.

Putting her hands behind her back she would press up against the big black stove, a slim white figure whose business-like seriousness was as delightful and touching as a child's. While she was warming her hands she would babble away at the rate of about a thousand words a minute about everything: about the morning war communique, about what had happened to the damp firewood, about what was cooking in the kitchen for lunch, about the movies she had seen the day before. And little by little the moaning in the ward would quieten down, faces that had testified to agonizing pain would clear up, the depressingly dreary hospital air of the ward would freshen, sorrow grow lighter, and thoughts look up and smile.

Then she would place her slender fingers against her neck to make sure that they had thawed out, her straight little nose would wrinkle up in a preoccupied way, she would throw a rapid, experienced glance around the ward deciding where to start—and the workday of the ward nurse would begin.

Everything she did was done quickly and tenderly—she would wash the patients' hair without spilling a drop of water on the

pillow, write letters for those who were unable to do so, immediately notice if a patient took a turn for the worse and send for the doctor, fight tenaciously and passionately for the life of a wounded man when he was on the brink of death, comfort those who seemed to have lost all rest, and lull them into tranquil and healing sleep.

We were all fond of her and perhaps all of us were in love with her. But jealousy was not allowed into our ward. And if in a free moment Lyuba would sit down beside some one of us and play a game of "Old Maid", we all knew that on that day he must be feeling worse than the rest.

On this day I was by right the first candidate for "Old Maid". I had not slept all night, I had worried about matters that have nothing to do with this story, and in the morning I had only been able to manage a grimace in the semblance of a smile in reply to her greeting. It was amazing how this young woman, little more than a girl, immediately sensed something wrong in another person's soul. She had barely glanced at me and yet when she had finished her round she unerringly walked over to my bed with a pack of cards in her hand.

But we did not have a game. Her child-like mouth drooped bitterly, her merry eyes were sad, and suddenly it seemed to me that she was years and years old. The cards lay idly, the ten of spades, symbol of sorrow, looming black on the white counterpane, and we began to talk softly and unreservedly.

Her husband, a captain in the Tank Corps and a man of great courage which had already won him a decoration, had been reported missing. For a whole month she had been unable to trace him. For a long month this young woman had come flying in to us with her sunny smile, and all the time her soul had been heavy within her and her heart had ached, while at night she had cried softly to herself in the dormitory, trying not to wake her friends. Yesterday she had asked for the day off and had looked up an old friend of her husband's, someone high up in the Tank Corps. He had taken her hand and said:

"I shan't try to fool you, Lyuba. Pavel got left behind in enemy-occupied territory. The others broke through, but he

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hasn't turned up." He had squeezed her hand to keep her from crying. "Take it easy, Lyuba, he may come back. You see, you must wait. Of course, it's a great art—waiting. I promise to tell you when there's no use in waiting any longer."

I looked at her and tried to find in myself the strength of character that there was in this young woman. In face of her grief I forgot my own, but I could not find in my clumsy, awkward and selfish male soul those words of comfort and hope which she so lavishly bestowed on us all.

The major in the end bed groaned. His imaginary agony had begun: it seemed to him that the soles of his amputated feet were itching. Lyuba jumped up and rushed over to him. And once again her eyes were as they had been before. The hurt, her own hurt, gave way before that of another. And no one in the ward saw how great a burden of sorrow lay on her slim girlish shoulders.

Shortly afterwards, I was transferred to another hospital for a time. A week later I returned to the ward I had been in before. Many of the old patients were no longer there, new wounded had arrived, and in the bed next to mine I saw a big motionless dummy made of bandages.

This was a tank man who had been severely burned on the chest and face. Everything that could possibly burn on a human face had been burned on him: the hair, eyebrows, eyelashes and the skin itself. From the white gauze the bulging dark lenses of huge goggles leered ominously. The glasses kept out the light, protecting the pupils of the eyes, which had been saved by a miracle, and keeping them from coming in contact with the bandage.

Beneath them a slit for the mouth had been cleverly and skillfully left. From this slit came human speech, living speech, the only conveyor of his thoughts and sensations.

The tank man was fighting against harrowing and protracted pain. He suffered tortures when his dressings were changed, but he wanted to live. He wanted to live and to return to the firing-line again. This will to live seethed in the tongue-tied, indistinct speech that came from his seared lips.

He passionately desired to talk. In his dark and solitary world he thirsted for companionship. The words that issued from the motionless bundle of gauze were muffled and strange, but after I had learned to understand these wounded, broken words, I could make out the sounds of valour, hatred and victory, the din of battle and contact with death, distinguish dreams and hopes, confessions and beliefs—everything that a twenty-two year old man who was fleeing from the spectre of solitude could possibly tell a friend. A friend—for in that night we became fast friends with that sudden strong friendship that comes in battle or in illness.

I woke up before dawn, when it was still quite dark. The ward was breathing heavily, and from time to time a groan cut through this alarming breathing of strong male bodies that had been broken in battle. And from the fact that no soundless white shadow glided rapidly towards this groan, I knew that Lyuba was not on duty. Most likely the other nurse was on duty—Fenya, a plain woman, no longer young, who tired quickly, and frequently fell asleep on the chair in front of the stove at night. I got up to go out for a smoke and I heard the tank man asking for water. Fearing that I might hurt him, I wanted to wake the nurse.

"Don't," he said. "It doesn't matter. . . ."

I carefully poured a few mouthfuls of water through a funnel into the opening in the bandage, and, of course, wet the gauze. Very much embarrassed, I apologized.

"It doesn't matter," he repeated, and laughed, if the soft gasps could be called laughing. "Only she knows how to do it. . . . As though one were actually drinking with one's own lips. . . ."

"Who is she?"

"My sweetheart."

And I heard an unusual tale of love.

He spoke of a woman whom he had not seen and could not see. He called her by an old Russian love word, "*dushenka*" (sweet soul). He had called her this on the very first day, sensing in her a special tenderness and warmth of heart, and he continued to call her this because his burnt lips would not let him say her name. "It's Lyuba, of course," I thought. Her name

would indeed sound strange pronounced by him since his mutilated lips could not frame the letter "b": Lyuba—Lyusha. . . .

He spoke of her with the utmost feeling, pride and, strange to say, passion. Dreaming out loud, he pictured her to himself, describing her face, her eyes, her smile, and I was amazed by this second sight of love which had indeed desecrated the beloved image. Lowering his voice he confessed that he knew her hair, the fine silky hair that tumbled from under her cap: once he had touched it when he had tried with his blind fingers to help her find the thermometer case, which had fallen behind the night table. He spoke of her hands—tender, strong, careful hands, which he had held in his for hours, telling her about himself, about his childhood, about the fighting, about the tank explosion, about his solitude and the horrible life of a cripple which awaited him.

He told me everything that she had said to comfort him, all her tender words of hope, her faith that he would be able to see, to live and fight again, and it seemed to me that I could hear the voice of Lyuba herself. In an almost inaudible whisper he told me that to-morrow was the decisive day: the professor had promised to remove his goggles and perhaps he would begin to see. He had not told this to "*Dushenka*"—what if he would not be able to see? Better that she should not suffer. If it should come to nothing, it would come to nothing—in any case he knew her face. It was beautiful and sweet and in her eyes he could see love. Then there was something else: she had talked him into a delicate operation which would return to him his eyebrows, eyelashes and fresh pink skin. He knew at what price of pain he would buy this new face for himself, but he was willing to go through anything for the sake of his sweetheart.

Yes, his sweetheart. He repeated this word with pride. Her husband had fallen at the front not so long ago. She was alone, just as he was, and even more unfortunate than he: he had lost only his face, while she had lost a beloved person. In the course of the long nights they had learned all there was to know about each other, and love had come to this ward where death stalked. Life, brought by love, had gained the upper hand over him. For

there had been a time when he had wanted to shoot himself—what was the sense of his continuing to live a cripple? . . . Now, everything was different. He was living in hopes of the future, fighting for life, for health, for strength, for happiness, for the chance to take revenge on the enemy for himself and for others.

"She told me that it doesn't matter what the result is with my face. She said to me, I love you and not your face, you see. . . ."

And he wept. I could tell that he was crying because his breast, filled with happiness, heaved and his breath became laboured.

Leaving him to himself, I lay down quietly in my own bed, thinking about Lyuba. I wondered at her strange fate. Was this real love, the inexplicable love of a noble woman's soul, or tender pity, which is so often kin to love? Or perhaps it was the sharing of a sorrow, the horror of a loss, the finding of the ghost of what she had lost: a tank man, a hero, a fighter. . . . I waited impatiently for morning and the shift of the nurses in order to read Lyuba at a glance and see the answer—in such eyes everything was plain to see. With these thoughts I fell asleep.

I woke up late. By the familiar signs of the ward's daily routine I realized that the nurses had already shifted, but Lyuba was not in the ward. I walked over to the tank man and asked him how he felt.

"Fine," he replied. "She's gone to find out about my dressing. Only listen here, not a word about the professor. Will I really be able to see to-day?"

By his voice I could guess that he was smiling.

"She's a real beauty, you know her, don't you?"

"That's true enough, she is beautiful," I replied.

Again he began to speak to me about how he was to see her to-day. Suddenly he fell silent, and in silence, listened to the steps, the light steps in felt slippers, and it was strange that through the bandages which muffled his head he was able to distinguish them. Or was it the ears of love that heard?

"It's she," he said softly. "*My Dushenka*. . . ."

I turned around. But it was Fenyä who came up. Evidently

she had been detained after her shift. I wanted to tell him that he had made a mistake.

"Good morning, Fenichka," I said. "Will Lyuba be through soon?"

"Good morning. Back with us again?" she asked. "Lyuba's gone, she found her husband. He's wounded."

And she sat down beside the tank man.

"Kolya, dear," she said, caressingly. "Be strong. . . . We have to change your dressing now. . . ."

He held out a trembling hand, and immediately this hand of a fighter, which had touched death and which was trembling in anticipation of the pain, found Fenya's hand. Evidently the dressing of his wounds was agonizing.

She covered his hand with her own other hand, and a long and expressive silence fell between them. Softly she smoothed his hand and twined her fingers in his. And in her eyes, which were fixed on the dark glasses, there glowed the warm, slow fire of love.

I looked at her face—the undistinguished face which we had been seeing every day and which we had passed over with an indifferent glance. The amazing change in it astonished me. Elderly, tired, inspired by the force of love it was beautiful, the simple face of a Russian woman and mother filled with hope and sad tenderness. Then the tears welled up in her eyes and she softly turned her head aside so that they would not drop on his hand. But feeling this light movement he became alarmed.

"Dushenka, dear, what's the matter?"

And—astonishing thing—Fenya began to talk vivaciously and merrily, cheering him up while the tears coursed down her cheeks rapidly and without stop, and the deep hurt twisted her mouth from which these jolly and joking words came. Then her eyes turned to the door, and hopeless silent misery filled them. I followed her glance: a wheelcot was standing in the doorway, and I understood her tears. She was anticipating the approaching pain.

They put the tank man in the cot and Fenya walked beside him, holding his hand. I accompanied them. At the door of the

bandaging room she left him. Her strength deserted her and, leaning her head against the door-jamb, she let her tears flow freely. I touched her on the shoulder. She raised her eyes.

"The professor told me. . . . The professor told me. . . ."

She was unable to speak.

"I know," I replied. "But why do you upset yourself ahead of time. . . . Be sure, he will see."

She shook her head as if with pain.

"And he will see me. . . . How can I compare with what he imagines? . . . What has he invented about me, why has he invented these things? . . . Beautiful, beautiful. . . . Oh, leave me alone!" she suddenly exclaimed, almost shouting, and pressed her ear to the door.

I could hear the professor's cheerful voice through the door: "That's enough, that'll do for the first time. Just one more week in the dark!"

Fenya grew pale with the terrible pallor of despair and quickly walked down the corridor.

No one ever saw her in the hospital any more. Later we found out that she had gone back to her home town—a great-souled woman who preferred to go away in order to leave with the man whom she had returned to life and victory a beautiful dream about a beautiful young woman who loved him for himself alone and not his face, rather than disclose to him the truth which would shatter his dreams.

THE MUSICIAN

By NIKOLAI SHPANOV

★

I

THE COLONEL shook his head disapprovingly: "You're dead tired—you'll have to rest."

Prokhor wagged his great head: "You give me any sort of a job to do, and I'll show you whether I'm tired."

"You're tired, and I order you to rest," repeated the Colonel imperturbably.

"I'm not going to rest," said Prokhor doggedly.

"Report to the Chief of Staff: you've been ordered a rest. Go into the town, and don't come back till to-morrow."

In the voice of the Colonel could be heard the tones which we knew well enough not to query when we heard them.

Unwillingly Prokhor stood up: "May we dismiss?"

There was nothing to be done except go and "rest".

We were going into the town when the evening mist drowned everything. The streets seemed unusually wide, so few cars were about; the pavements were too narrow for the pedestrians who groped their way along. If the white line on the edge had not warned them of the danger, the crowds would have surged across the road right under the cars which were moving along without lights.

We knew nothing of the town except the restaurants, our usual haunts when on leave. We went past blacked-out shop-windows and hardly-glimmering lamp-posts.

In the square we came upon a mass of people thronging the feebly-illuminated doorway of a large building. It was a concert hall, and a piano recital was in progress. Prokhor stopped undecidedly in front of a notice.

"Is it forbidden us to return before dawn?" he asked.

"Forbidden," I replied.

"And we can't sit in the restaurant till then?"

"No."

"Let's have a little highbrow recreation," he said, smiling and pointing at the notice with his finger.

"You won't find it a bit interesting," I replied.

"I'm going in for your sake," said he, and opened the door.

"You can listen and I'll go to sleep."

I knew he said this just to annoy me.

In the stalls Prokhor made a great show of folding his arms, disposed himself suitably in his seat, and pretended to go off to sleep.

A slightly-built man in an evening dress suit with long tails came on to the platform. He sat down, then moved the piano-stool about from place to place several times, and meditatively began to rub his long, thin fingers together. At the same time he looked vaguely over the piano. His auburn hair was combed back, displaying a wide and prominent forehead.

The pianist dropped his chin onto his tie, which stuck out like the wing of a white butterfly, and laid his fingers on the keys. He played Chopin—polonaises, ballades, preludes. Prokhor cast mocking glances at me. He really seemed to be getting bored. I realized that a fighter pilot did not have to understand and love the piano. But now the brave notes of a mazurka were ringing out; then came waltzes and polonaises. The pianist went on to Liszt. The ponderous bass of the funeral marches thundered out in the room like the hammer-blows of destiny. Prokhor no longer blinked disdainfully. He cupped his head in his hand and fixed his gaze on the pianist, whose auburn hair, as he played, fell in disorder over his forehead and covered the delicate ears with fiery strands. Turning his head, the musician let his eyes wander above the piano, to the black velvet of the wings.

When the first part of the programme finished I said: "Shall we go?"

Prokhor only looked surprised.

At the second interval he was all attention.

"The devil take him!" he cried, as we went out, "the devil ake him!"

Somehow it happened that instead of going to the restaurant we went to the railway station. Sitting in the dark coach of the suburban train I asked him: "Well, what do you think of our bit of rest?"

He looked at me for a long time without speaking. Then he said very seriously: "If I had known how good it could be, I shouldn't have started arguing with the Colonel. I really did have a good rest. Tell me, please: where does such a little, feeble fellow get all that strength from? His fingers were like matchsticks, but look at the strength of them! He literally carried me away, picked me up and took me into another world, the devil knows where."

II

In the life of all of us there are black days. Such a black day for Prokhor was the one on which he lost his plane in battle and came down in a wood, cut off from his base. Believing that if he went to one side of the wood he would be able to see his own people, Prokhor left the wood quite openly. But the first thing that he set eyes upon was a German patrol. There was nothing for it but to get back into the wood as quickly as possible.

He spent nearly the whole night, helped by the peasants of the neighbourhood, in looking for an old acquaintance, "the man with the glasses", the leader of a guerrilla band. This man was getting ready for an important expedition. As quickly as possible, since the forces of the guerrillas were limited, they had to remove some maps from a Nazi Headquarters. Everything was arranged so that under the guise of a "delegation" they should get into the German Headquarters. "The man with the glasses" invited Prokhor to take part in the expedition, and Prokhor joyfully accepted. They gave him the task of attracting, by any method he chose, the attention of the German officers to himself, until his companions had looked over the house. "The man with the glasses" had a great deal of experience of that sort of thing. Everything went according to plan. The delegates stood in front of the German major. Prokhor, acting the part of a traitor, gave the most fantastic information about the Red Army.

The Nazi listened to him incredulously; in the end he couldn't stick it any longer, and unrolled a map.

"Herr Colonel," he called out behind the partition. "Something important."

In the doorway appeared a small red-faced man with glasses. He looked attentively at the "delegates" standing with caps in their hands, and without speaking went up to the map lying on the table.

"What's the matter now?"

Prokhor had hardly begun spinning a rather attractive yarn when two guards came in with a little chap wearing a torn, light-coloured mackintosh tied round with a narrow strap. Beside the officers' uniforms and the soldiers' greatcoats this mackintosh gave the impression of a childish attempt at fancy-dress. But when he looked at the prisoner Prokhor realized that there was no question of dressing up. The prisoner's face was blue-grey with cold and his teeth were chattering like those of a hunted animal. His great blazing shock of red hair was uncovered. Prokhor did not immediately remember how it was that he knew this man. But when he remembered he started: it was the pianist, the very same pianist.

The officers conferred and Prokhor listened.

"Herr Colonel, here is the same Jew that we caught yesterday near the bridge. He still insists that he is a musician, and that he had no intention of damaging the bridge."

The colonel turned his solemn grey eyes on the pianist.

"It looks as if it might be true," he said slowly; "you need the strength of a bear for such a job and this is something—" Then he stopped and turned to the captive: "Musician?"

"Yes."

"We'll prove it—show what you can do." The colonel nodded towards an old harmonium standing against the wall.

"If you're really such a famous musician as you say, we'll let you go. Play!"

The prisoner sat down at the harmonium and raised his hands. Then he suddenly looked at his blue fingers, cramped with the cold, and dropped them helplessly.

"His hands are frozen," said the major to the colonel.

"Warm your hands," said the colonel shortly, and again he nodded and pointed to the lamp.

The musician went over to the lamp and began to warm his hands. His thin wrists glowed right through; his blood began to flow again. Prokhor looked at his hands, forgetting why he was here, forgetting the story he had begun over the unrolled map.

The musician sat down at the instrument. He rubbed his hands now with the movements so well remembered by Prokhor at his first concert. Prokhor saw in his delicate skin deep scratches and scars. The pianist, too, as if conscious for the first time of the wounds on his hands, cast a frightened glance at the Nazis, and hurriedly bent over the instrument.

The funereal tones of the Requiem filled the room, went out through the cracked windows, into the frosty, dark quiet of the wood, which came right up to the house.

The colonel unceasingly watched the pianist's hands, his brows drawing nearer to one another over the bridge of his glasses. Noticing this movement of the brows, the major shouted to the musician: "Stop! Cut out that Slav moaning."

The pianist stopped playing in terror. His hands, like a bird shot in flight, hovered for a moment, then fell on the keyboard.

The colonel angrily turned to the major: "What do you mean, all this Slav stuff? This is our German composer Mozart."

"*Ach! Sol!*" ejaculated the major apologetically. "*Wunderbar.*"

The colonel shouted at the pianist: "Play!"—and once more his keen grey eyes were fixed on the musician's fingers.

The Germans again spoke among themselves.

"With such hands you could never do anything," said the colonel. "They're the hands of an artist."

"Yes," agreed the major.

"In America they insure hands like that," said the colonel to the musician. "And in your country?"

"In my country it is not necessary," said the pianist quietly.

"But my hands were actually insured when I went to the State."

"How much for!" asked the major eagerly.

"Two hundred thousand dollars," said the musician quietly.

The Nazis looked at one another in amazement.

The major went up close to the pianist, and Prokhor saw his fist clenched for a blow. Prokhor had to make a great effort to restrain himself from attacking the officer, and— But he must not make a disturbance without orders from the "man with the glasses". The job was the most important thing.

"Then—your fingers are a treasure," said the officer in mocking tones.

The pianist looked at his fingers wonderingly, as if such an idea had never occurred to him before. He nodded without speaking, and glanced round at those present in embarrassment.

The colonel's glance over his glasses was again expressionless. He turned his back on the pianist indifferently and bent over the map.

The major grasped the pianist violently by the arm just above the wrist and flung him on the table. The crack as his hands hit the table broke the death-like silence of the room.

"Stay there! Quietly!" ordered the major, and quickly picking up a heavy paperweight which was on the table he suddenly hit the pianist's fingers with it. A terrible shriek rang through the house.

An itch like an electric current ran up Prokhor's arm from the tip of his fingers to the shoulder. He felt as if the German had smashed his own fingers. The sick feeling was so real that he felt his teeth grating. His glance met that of the "man with the glasses" as it turned aside. Prokhor immediately followed the direction and saw that the colonel was taking a bundle of marked maps out of a case. Prokhor understood that these maps were the object of their expedition, for the guerrilla was looking at them so eagerly. But before he had time to turn his eyes back to his leader's face a new noise filled the house. Prokhor forgot everything—the orders of the "man with the glasses", the job to be done, all his caution. His reason simply ceased to function. His great body went out in an irresistible leap. Everything was

in confusion. The room was filled with shouts, smothered grunts, the din of fierce fighting. The lamp was hit, and the whole house was plunged into darkness.

A few hours later, in a rough hut, hidden in an unfrequented part of the wood, Prokhor jealously followed the skilful movements of the guerrilla nurse who was bandaging the broken fingers of the pianist. Prokhor had brought him there on his shoulders, and now treated him like a precious trophy. The bandaging was finished, and then the "man with the glasses" came into the hut and said to Prokhor: "You're lucky: those were the papers we needed."

"And if they hadn't been?"

"Don't ask," said the guerrilla seriously. "We should have shot you for disobeying orders."

"Strong discipline," smiled Prokhor, and shrugged his shoulders nervously.

"Accepted voluntarily," said the guerrilla. "Now, listen," he began in a new tone, smiling gently with his short-sighted eyes; "not far away is hidden an aeroplane. We have guarded it like the apple of our eyes, though there is no one among us who knows how to fly. Have a look at it this very night, so that at dawn—" The guerrilla waved expressively with his hand and pursed his lips. "You'll take these documents."

"That's the stuff!" cried Prokhor delightedly. "That's the real stuff!" Then he looked at the pianist, who was lying on a heap of pine-branches, and asked the guerrilla: "What sort of plane?"

"How should we know what it is?"

"Right," said Prokhor decisively. "Whatever it is, I shall take him with me."

"Yes, here he would have a rough time," said the guerrilla mildly; then he asked the musician: "But who really did what the Fritzes suspected you of?"—and then he explained to Prokhor: "Someone left the bridge in such a state that several German tanks dived under the ice."

The pianist looked up above the other's head. Prokhor was reminded of the same sort of look directed across the piano,

behind the velvet curtains of the wings. But this time, instead of the black velvet before the musician, was the open door of the earth hut, and beyond that the sleeping wood sprinkled with snow. The pianist let his glance rest on the guerrilla and, smiling in a rather embarrassed way, said: "I did."

A CHILD IS BORN

By NIKOLAI TIKHONOV

*

THE MAN stood panting heavily. He was irate and confused.

"I had the devil of a job finding you. A man would walk past his own house in this blackness," he said, shaking the snow from his cap. "Is this the lying-in hospital?"

"It is," he was told. "What's the matter?"

"What's the matter? Why, a woman is giving birth to a child in a back street. That's what's the matter."

"And who are you?"

"I am just a chance passer-by. I was on my way home from the night-shift. Let's make haste. I will show you the way. What a business! . . . I was walking along, and there she was, and not a soul about except myself. . . . What could I do? I am not a midwife."

A minute later Irina, a hospital attendant and the stranger were stumbling through the snowdrifts. It was very dark. The houses stood like stark cliffs. Not a light to be seen. Along the street swept a blizzard and snow-dust whirled through the air. And it seemed as if the shadows of scouts were stealing through the street, transparent, frigid and swift-moving.

Suddenly, they squatted down in the snow, their noses buried in each other's backs. A thin, evenly rising sound was heard, drawing closer and closer. They drew their heads into their shoulders. Somewhere from around the corner red flames shot upwards and a thunderous explosion reverberated through the street. Icicles dropped from the house-eaves and shattered on the pavement with a splintering sound.

"I hope it hasn't struck her," exclaimed Irina.

"No, she is on the other side. Look for her there," said the stranger. "You will find her beyond the lamp-post. I'm off."

The bombardment is fierce to-night, I don't want to get hit before I get home."

Irina was not an accoucheuse by training. She was a nurse in the reception room of the lying-in hospital. But now she had to go forth into the night to seek out this woman and help her to give birth to her child. There was no time to lose. Nobody else would come to her aid. It was the dead of night. Frost and blizzard. With a hiss and a clang, shell after shell passed overhead. Irina and the attendant ran from snowpile to snowpile, stopped and listened.

A groan was heard from the right. They dashed to the spot and, sure enough, beyond the lamp-post, as the stranger had said, leaning her back against the wall of a house near the tightly locked gate, sat a woman in the snow. Irina dropped on her knees before her, and the woman seized her hand in her own. It was hot and trembling.

Yes, it was too late to bring this woman to the lying-in hospital. She was already in the throes of childbirth. She was giving birth to a child in the snow, in that black winter's night, illuminated by the fitful glare of bursting shells. Irina glanced around. It all looked like a gloomy nightmare. The snow sifted under the collar of her coat, fierce gusts of wind struck her in the face, her hands began to freeze, and her heart pulsated so violently that she could hear its beat. It seemed as if there were no Leningrad, but only a wild, black wilderness, swept by a winter storm, to the howl of enemy guns. It would be vain to hammer at those tightly-locked gates, it would be vain to call—the street was deserted, and until the morning came no human being would pass this way.

Yet here, in this murk, in this open spot, swept by all the winds of heaven, a new life was being born. It had to be saved, it had to be torn from the cold and the murk and the guns. Her ear was already deaf to the exploding shells. She helped the woman as if she were lying in a snug ward, in the way women are always helped in childbirth. . . .

. . . She raised the infant high in the air, as if to display it to the great city lying lost in the gloom. She carried it tightly clutched

to her bosom, this warm, whimpering mite, nestling beneath her coat. She strode through the snow, which was fresh and still unmarked by human feet.

Behind her, supported by the attendant, like some large ruffled bird, the mother dragged her weary feet. She stumbled in the snowdrifts. She whispered through her parched lips: "I can walk by myself. . . ." The attendant, himself wearied and harassed, merely kept reiterating: "We'll soon be there; it's not very far now. . . ."

The blizzard drove handfuls of dry snow into their faces. A rain of shattered glass followed on each reverberating explosion. But they strode forward like conquerors, conquerors of the night, the cold, and the cannonade. If need be, this procession would have marched through the whole city, carrying this new tiny life, this new tiny being, which had appeared in our city in this amazing hour.

The mother already knew that she had given birth to a girl. Now and again she would stretch forth her hands towards Irina, who was carrying the infant, as though she wanted to detain her, and would then let them fall again.

They arrived at the lying-in hospital. And when the woman had already been put to bed, and everything was being done to make her comfortable, she called for Irina and said to her in a curt, almost stern whisper:

"What is your name?"

"Why do you want to know?" asked Irina.

"I must know."

"My name is Irina. But why do you ask?"

"I shall call my daughter after you. Let her remember you. You saved her life. I thank you from the bottom of my heart. . . ."

And she kissed her three times. Irina turned away and burst into tears. Why, she could not say.

THE OLD SOLDIER

By NIKOLAI TIKHONOV

*

HE WAS very old, and his eyes could scarcely see. They were all standing at the open windows. He went up to them, but he could see nothing. So he asked:

"Tell me, what is happening over yonder?"

"Somewhere, far away, thick clouds of smoke are rising above the city. Enormous mountains of white smoke. Their edge is rosy in the light of the sunset. And now the smoke is turning blue. It has reached the very zenith. . . ."

"What is it—fires?" he inquired. "Have the Germans done it?"

"Yes," he was told.

The anti-aircraft guns were still firing, but lazily. . . . He used to pore over his maps far into the night. He was an old Military Geography teacher and an inventor. He had piles of maps. The variety of the contours, the richness of the terrestrial features and the quaint intricacy of the reliefs were a source of consolation to him. Beyond these blue patterns and brown patches, beyond the green and yellow strips, he saw the life of a mighty country—vast, ardent, free and growing. He knew how its map was changing from year to year. But now, as he gazed at the maps of Leningrad and its environs, his brow was furrowed and his glance was veiled and sombre.

The Germans were promenading along the avenues of the Pushkin Park, their shells were battering the palace at Gatchina, Peterhof was being sacked, and the rattling of machine guns could be heard not far from Kolpino.

"No, it's impossible," he said to himself; "it cannot be. It cannot be that the Germans will enter Leningrad, this city which has never surrendered to an enemy. I cannot believe it—my mind refuses to conceive it. Never has this city been yielded,

never, never. Can it be that our times are to be covered in shame?"

He flung down his magnifying lens in agitation and strode up and down the room.

"And yield it to whom? To the Germans! To those doltish, brutish, bloodthirsty assassins of women and children. To the fascists! . . .

"No, no!" he muttered to himself. "The German generals are smug marionettes. Though they are not bad as administrators, and they know how to fight. . . .

"But do they know how to fight?" he cried the next minute. "They are adventurous gamblers, and all their plans are the ruses of bandits, designed to hypnotize, to disarm, to discourage. . . . No, but it will not work this time! We are not to be fooled. . . . The Russian people are not so easily duped. You will never get Leningrad!"

He retired to his bed, but sleep would not come. His whole being shuddered at the thought of the battle going on around the city. He closed his eyes and the picture rose in his mind of those peaceable environs where over half a century ago, as a young officer, he had taken part in manoeuvres. Those quiet nooks were now one by one disappearing in the smoke of conflagrations, and—horrible thought!—perhaps enemy tanks had already penetrated to the outskirts of the city. If that were so . . . well, he still had the strength to throw a hand-grenade. He would not ask: "How many are there?" True, his eyesight was feeble, but he would ask: "Where are they?" But no, it was impossible; the Germans would never tread these sacred streets and squares. Never!

When the air-raid alarm sounded he did not go to the bomb-shelter. The house shook with the force of the concussions, shell fragments rained down on the roof, the windows rattled, and the house swayed as if it were a thing of matchboard, but all he said was:

"Fly, you vultures, but you will soon break your necks! . . ."

The battle dragged on. The enemy entrenched outside the very walls of Leningrad. Winter came. It was cold and dark in the house. A few damp shavings in the small iron stove

emitted but a feeble warmth. Every day it became harder for the old man. He lay beneath his rug and his whole life passed before his eyes. It had been a long, industrious and interesting life, and had it not been for the present privations he could have carried on for a long time yet. But weakness had now fettered his arms and legs, and even the firewood for the little stove he had to have cut for him, for he himself, he was ashamed to say, was rapidly fatigued by this child's labour.

He thought of the wonderful, inimitable, majestic city beyond his windows that was living its life of labour and battle. Shells were often bursting now in the neighbouring street, and the thunder of their explosions drove him into a state of acute irritation.

In sentimental moments, when the thought of his ebbing life was particularly oppressive, he would take a gold watch out of his table drawer and fondle it in his hand. This watch had been presented to him in recognition of his work at the Higher Militia Courses, where he had taught for many years and had helped in the training of many a young, intelligent and dashing commander. . . . He thought of their smiling faces, their youthful spirits, their noisy discussions. And then he suddenly saw himself, young, riding on horseback by foaming mountain streams or ranging the Caucasian heights, an inquisitive cartographer, traveller and historian of mountain warfare. . . . But that was all so long ago.

He had grown very feeble. He even found it an effort to raise his soup-spoon to his mouth at table, and his daughter had to feed him. And as she did so she recounted the news from the fronts.

"Retreating, always retreating!" he would murmur with a heavy sigh, and his shortsighted, almost blind eyes would peer in agony at his daughter.

"The old fellow won't last long," the neighbours said.

. . . One fine morning, the old soldier's daughter heard strange noises emanating from her father's room. First there was the sound of a saw, then of a hammer, then the sound of singing. . . . Yes, somebody was singing in the room. The words were in-

distinct; in fact, the song could scarcely be said to have any words at all. It was a sort of contented, self-engrossed rumbling.

As far as she knew, the old man should be lying, covered with his ancient rug, subdued, debilitated and discouraged.

She went to the door, but it was some time before she made up her mind to open it. When she did, she saw that her sick and senile parent was sawing away at a plank and singing to himself. Yes, it was he that was singing. And as he sang, his eyes gleamed. And although an old overcoat hung from his frail shoulders, he looked as majestic as a patriarch.

"Father, what is the matter with you?" she cried in alarm. "Why have you got up? And why are you sawing? You are not strong enough for that!"

He glanced at her, and then in a clear and sonorous voice, said: "Didn't you hear the radio this morning?"

"No," she replied. "What did it say?"

The old man almost hopped, with the saw in one hand and the plank in the other.

"You didn't hear it? The whole world has heard and you know nothing. The Germans have been smashed at Moscow! Smashed to atoms, to powder . . . the wretched adventurers! I always said that the only way they can fight is like bandits. Their tactics are the tactics of footpads and highwaymen. They have been routed, do you understand? And if they got a beating like that at Moscow, they will never get Leningrad. When I heard that I could not stay lying down any more. I jumped up. I jumped up to cry: 'Long live victory!' You can't cry that lying down, daughter, can you?"

THE FAMILY

By NIKOLAI TIKHONOV

★

"MOTHER, come here for a minute, I want to tell you something," said Semyon Ivanovich.

Dasha stared at her husband as if she was seeing for the first time this broad-shouldered, serious-looking man with the unhurried movements and the stern eyes, who for so long now had not smiled at her or jested with her. She wiped her hands on her apron, sat down on a chair, and with averted eyes, said:

"I know what you are going to say, Semyon."

"You do, do you? How do you know? . . ."

"I feel it in my heart. . . . Well, go on, what do you want to say?"

"Shut the door, I don't want Olya to hear. . . ."

"Olya has gone for water. I will tell you myself what you want to say; you just correct me if I am wrong. . . . I have seen, of course, what you have been going through ever since Kostya was killed. Well, Kostya died a good death, defending Leningrad. And we have got to take revenge on the fascists; we have got to take revenge on them every day, every hour. . . . Oh, the villains, the scoundrels, the things they are doing! It is terrible, it is horrible. I hate them, I despise them. . . . You want to take revenge for your brother Kostya. You want to join the army, you want to go to the front. That is so, isn't it? Am I right?"

Semyon Ivanovich slapped his knee, rose, went up to his wife, embraced and kissed her, and said:

"You are a regular mind-reader, Dasha. You are right, I couldn't have put it better myself. Well, to settle the matter I have already filled in the applications. So that's how it is, mother. There will be one soldier more in the Red Army. I can't go on working at the bench; my heart is just boiling over. And I am an old soldier, I have been through the last world war, and I haven't

forgotten how to shoot. . . . But I have little time to spare, mother. Help me to get my things packed. . . ."

"I'll see to it," said Dasha softly. She went to the window and looked into the street to see whether Olya was coming. The street was crowded with people, as though it were a holiday. They were all walking on foot, because the street cars were not running. Many were dragging sleds loaded with firewood or sacks. On some of the sleds sat old men or women, wrapped up in shawls and scarves.

Water too was being carried on sleds—in children's baths, in churns, in buckets and in kegs. People slipped on the frozen road, the water would splash out of its receptacles and freeze in tongues of ice. The frost was fierce. Gusts of wind came blowing from the gulf, hurling prickly snow and biting icedust into people's eyes. Everybody had his face bound up to the mouth in a black scarf, and seemed to be wearing a half-mask, like a masquerader. Dasha stood for some time staring at the endlessly moving throng. Beneath the masks, the breath froze into an icy lacework and a white vapour rose from the pedestrians' mouths. It would be hard to spot Olya with her bucket in the thick of this human torrent. She should be coming any minute.

"I also have something to say," said Dasha, turning away from the window. "I have made up my mind too: since you are going to the front, I shall take your place in the factory. Don't interrupt me, listen to what I have to say. Our city is besieged. The sufferings of the people are indescribable. The city has now become the front—that is what the papers are saying. And it is true. And that being so, and since you are going off to take revenge on the Germans for your brother, I shall take your place. I am still hale and hearty, and I can stand it. You don't have to worry. I have got commonsense, and I like work. I shan't let you down. You won't have any cause to be ashamed of your wife. . . . I'm used to the life. After all, I only left the factory because of the children. . . ."

"But that situation is still the same now," exclaimed Semyon Ivanovich.

"How is it still the same?"

"Petya is little more than a baby. And even Olya is only twelve; and she is such a delicate girl. What will become of the children, if both of us go away? The home will go to wrack and ruin, mother. Have you thought of that?"

"I have, Semyon, I have thought it over very carefully. I shall send the children to Porokhoviye. I have an old friend there and she has children just about the same ages as ours. I shall ask her to take care of them. And then our hands will be free. This is not the time to think of family life. We may see one another again, or we may not. Yes, the enemy is even smashing up our homes. We've got to fight, we can't sit with folded arms. Nobody will fight for us if we don't fight ourselves. . . . Am I right, Semyon?"

"You are right, mother," Semyon Ivanovich said approvingly. "You put it well."

Olya came in. Leaving her bucket of water in the kitchen, she went straight into the room to warm herself. She walked up to the little stove and spread her tiny hands, blue with cold, before it. She was struck by something unusual in her parents' manner.

"Mamma," she exclaimed, "what is the matter with you today? Something has happened. Has somebody else been killed? No, tell me the truth, don't hide anything."

"We have nothing to hide from you, my dear," said Dasha. "Take off your things and listen carefully to what we have decided." She took a deep breath and said rapidly, with scarcely a pause between the words: "Your father is going to the front, and I am going to the factory to take his place, and we have decided to send you children to Auntie Lolya at Porokhoviye to be taken care of. . . . That's how it is, Olya. . . ."

Olya opened the stove door, threw in a couple of billets and sat staring at the low reluctant flames. Then, without raising her head, she asked:

"But why send Petya and me to Porokhoviye?"

"Because there will be nobody to look after the house, my dear. Who is going to queue up for bread, and get firewood, and fetch water, and feed Petya? Somebody will have to look after

him when he comes back from playing with the neighbours' children; he can't be left to himself. . . . Who is going to do all this when I am away? . . .

"Mamma, I won't go to Porokhoviye, and don't send Petya. I don't like Auntie Lolya. She is always complaining. She keeps grumbling all day. . . . And as to the house, I shall manage all right myself."

She stood up, with an abrupt movement threw her coat from her thin, almost boyish shoulders, shook her head and began to speak in a distinct confident voice:

"Do I manage badly now? Don't I fetch the water? I can manage. I know where to get firewood; Valya from No. 17 will help me. And as to lighting the stove, I can manage. And I can make the dinner too. Valya and I will take turns queuing up for bread. And I give Petya his food every day anyhow. Don't think I'm just a child. There are no children now, we're all grown up. Go, both of you, since that's what's needed. Don't worry about us. You'll be coming home each day for a bit, won't you, mother? . . . Well, that's all right. If it's hard for me, what of it? It's hard for everybody nowadays. Nothing will make me go to Porokhoviye. So there you are, mother darling. Don't worry, everything will be all right. . . . There, let me kiss you. That's all. . . ."

ONE QUARTER OF AN HOUR

By LEV KASSIL

★

THEY'D gone! And I was in a great hurry. They had said: "In a quarter of an hour." I don't know how much time had passed. It was some minutes before I fully remembered. Many minutes were wasted, gone from the short space that they had left me to live, and only then did I see perfectly clearly that we should not get out alive.

"Keep away! Keep away from this house, friends! Get away quickly and keep right away! There's a mine here!"

Now I will explain everything, if there's time. They had gone and left us behind—little Tatyana and me. They had gone, and they had got nothing out of me. How they had tried to get information doesn't bear remembering. . . . But I said nothing. Tell Nikon Matveyevitch and Tarasov and Sonya Ivanovna, I said nothing.

It was two days after I fell into their hands. I could not stay in the cellar any longer. In my arms little Tanya was burning with scarlet fever. I went out at night to find the doctor. They were firing all round, and the whole town was rocking and burning with a deadly glow like my little Tatyana. I just ran, stepping over the heads of the people lying in the streets, bending and slipping under the feet of those swinging from posts. As I ran I thought to myself: "Not everyone's killed or is killing; there must be some people who will help me to save my dying child." . . . Well, they caught me; I don't know who informed about me. Whether he did it through fear or for money, may his traitorous soul burn within him while he lives. Anyway, somehow or other, the Germans found out that I was connected with the group. But they wanted to know more—they wanted to know everything—and they learnt nothing.

You know, comrades, a thrashing from the enemy is not really

such a disgrace and pain. Waiting for the blow is very much more awful than the pain itself. It is true, comrades! It is only the waiting that is so terrible. How silly is the degrading fantasy with which the slave comforts himself: "The punishment of the kind-hearted doesn't hurt for so long!" How stupid it is! How untrue! If a person I really loved were to lay hands on me I could not bear it. I should hate him for ever. And that wound would never heal. But blows from a cruel, hated enemy, whom you don't even regard as human, merely leave their mark on the body. The heart does not feel it, for in the heart there cries out such proud anger that any pain is silenced.

I bore everything. I want you to know that. Sonya used to say: "Our Antonina is too delicate a creature. She is given too much to refined poetry. I am worried if anything were to happen to her."

Now she need no longer doubt. Something has happened to me, and I have come through. I was quite alone among them; they took Tatyana away somewhere—to the doctor, they said. This evening they had a sort of bazaar, dragging in all sorts of parcels, tearing them open and arguing among themselves. I knew that our people were not far away, but I felt sure that I should never see you again. Then they had to get away in a hurry, so they pushed me into this cellar and made another attempt to get some information out of me quickly. But you can rest assured that they got nothing. And do you know what they did then? They put under the building a delayed-action mine—a devilish contrivance operated by clockwork—and explained to me in detail how it would work: the time goes by, the mechanism ticks away, then I am blown to pieces. However, an alternative was possible; I might tie a white handkerchief to a small stick, which they politely handed to me, and push it through a little opening high up under the ceiling. That would be a signal that I was giving in. And then, if it were not too late, they would remove the mine, and everything would be all right. I just laughed in their faces. But they were amused, too, and after a minute a junior officer pushed his way into the cellar, a man with a sharp face, like a pike. He was carrying under his arm something

wrapped in a dirty, tattered blanket. They threw this bundle into my arms, and at once through the blanket I felt the warmth and palpitation of a body in a terrible fever. It was Tatyana, my Tatyana.

"So that you won't be lonely," said the officer.

I confess: I could not hold out any longer. Forgive me, comrades—I began to implore them, in a moment of weakness, you quite understand—it was my child. I begged them to take the child away, it did not matter where, if only they took her away quickly out of that tomb, where I was being buried alive. Yes, I threw myself on my knees, and cried like a baby, tugged at them, thrust my little girl into their indifferent arms, but they pushed her away as if she were not fit to be touched. Then they departed, carefully locking all the doors.

"A happy sojourn," one of them said.

I don't know how much time has gone by since then; maybe I shall not even finish writing this note. Death may come to me at any moment. They said fifteen—twenty minutes, but I haven't a watch; the junior officer tore it off my wrist, and when I asked what time it was he said: "It will be all up with you within a quarter of an hour."

I searched the whole cellar, without letting Tatyana out of my arms, but there was no way out. I want to write to you so much, but the time is so short, and Tatyana's breathing is so difficult; she does not recognize me, the poor feverish little mite. Please don't think to yourself: "What rock-like self-possession! She even finds strength to write!" It is simply that I cannot do otherwise—I want to be with you during these minutes, any one of which may be the last. To speak the honest truth, it is terrifying. But to be a traitor—no! That would be a thousand times more terrible.

How dreadful that ticking is! At first I did not notice it, but when they had all gone I suddenly heard it—"Tick, tock, tick, tock"—they had set the clockwork of the mine going. And the noise was hard and unpleasant, with a German accent, "Tick, tock"; I believe there is a German word like that "Tick-tock", but I can't remember what it means. It sounds somewhere quite

close; the mine must be right underneath me: I hear it so distinctly. I would stop my ears, but I am holding Tatyana in one arm and a pencil in my free hand, and I must try to go on writing to you. Is it true or is it my imagination—that “tick-tock” is getting louder and louder. There’s a pendulum there in the mine itself, trying to hurry on our death like a cursed saw, to and fro; tick, tock, to and fro; tick, tock, sawing away our life. Perhaps it all hangs on a hair. It touches: crash! . . . and the end.

There’s some sort of activity and noise in the street. Is there a possibility that our people might arrive in time? It has got dark in the cellar. Someone has covered the little window up there. No . . . it is not our people. They have come to offer me life again. I ask them not to worry me. They said it would be soon. Again—“Tick, tock, tick, tock.”

What is it that they are shouting at me from up there? At first I did not understand. Only now do I realize what the man with the ugly, pike’s face has been saying to me. Apparently it is only just now that they have connected the mine to its clockwork mechanism. That’s why they were so brave in coming back into the cellar! So the pendulum ticking had meant nothing! They had simply been having a game with me! All that I had suffered during those two days was not enough for them. But now they have attacked it in good earnest. I could hear them fussing about, and how the pike-faced man gave orders.

They have gone. All is quiet. Somewhere, seemingly nearer than ever, is that “tick, tock, tick, tock. . . .”

Did a woman really bear these men? You just can’t believe that any of such people ever had a mother, the wife of a human being. Their foul breed was born of a corpse-eating hyena! I know: you mark my words, friends. And I do not feel sorry for their wives and mothers. If they have only the faintest resemblance to their husbands, then there is nothing that can affect their toads’ hearts. But if anything womanly has remained in them, then let them recoil under the curses that are merited by those who rocked these criminals in their cradles or fondled them in their beds.

For a while I couldn’t write; I walked round the cellar, rocking

Tatyana. She cried in my arms: “Mamma, what is that ticking?” “That’s a clock, darling. Listen to the clock ticking.” “Mummie, let’s go away from here. It’s not a bit nice here. Mummie, are we going out soon?” “Very soon, my dear, very soon.” “And you won’t go without me?” “No, we shall go together . . . together.”

She went to sleep and was quiet. Then there was silence in the street, too—they had all gone away. Now it must be very soon. “Tick, tock.”

Good-bye, all my dear ones. Remember Tatyana and me sometimes. I don’t know where exactly Lyosha is now. I hope they will broadcast on the radio, in “Letters to the Front”, my last greetings to him, to my beloved. And you must write to him about yourselves, too, girls. Tell him how we fought behind the German lines. Write about everything. I can just imagine what the announcer will say: “Radimtsev, Alexei Petrovitch, we are broadcasting a message to you from your wife Antonina Kirilovna.” Only I shan’t hear it; I do hope the announcer will be a woman—she will understand how to read such a letter.

Lyosha, my dear one, goodbye. They will write to you about every little thing that happens, and I am writing this to you at the last moment, and I must hurry. I have often been annoyed that you were always so busy, that you were always in a hurry; you never had any time; now, you must forgive me—I have no time to spare, my minutes are disappearing.

Lyosha, my dear, precious one. I know it will be very hard for you, a terrible blow, when you know. . . . But you can be proud that it was not in vain that you always trusted me. You see, I haven’t disgraced you. Of course it is terrible for me too, Lyosha. And it’s heart-breaking about our Tanya. She would have been a tall girl. She has often remembered you. But you will understand me. We have always understood one another, you and I, we had plenty of good times together, Lyosha. Do you remember how at College I was afraid of you at first, you the chief assistant to the professor, while I was only a research student? Do you remember the Volga? The mountains came right down to the water, brown at the foot, chalky-white farther up, like dough?

The boat goes quite close in to the shore. In our wake is a long curving wave which washes ashore the pebbles. Little boys row desperately to get outside our wake. I am standing with you in the very bows of the boat and I even lean forward over it, while a little breeze fans our faces. We are standing there, holding each other's hands. And in front there is so much air that you can never breathe it all; and the water stretches so far into the distance that there is no limit and no end; and to-morrow it will be just the same, and next week; and we shall stand all the time, just like that, side by side, arm in arm.

Or again, remember, in the Suramsky Pass, we touched the sky with our hands when the storm broke on us. Out of the cloud came a man with a shaggy cloak and a shaggy cap, as if he himself were clothed in cloud; he set before us a basket full of peaches and said to me: "Eat, and good health to you; greetings to you, you fortunate one. I see that you are lucky, for you have a faithful husband." . . . The whole of our country was before us, like that basket, bountiful, inviting.

Life before us—how good it was to have been! I had had so little life, and how greedy I was; I could never get tired of life.

But now nothing of that will be mine any more. "Tick, tock", and then—full stop.

As Kipling says:

*"The tides they'll go through Fundy Race, but I'll go never more
And see the hogs from ebb-tide mark turn scampering on the
shore.*

*No more I'll see the trawlers drift below the Bass Rock ground
Or watch the tall Fall steamer lights tear blazing up the Sound."*

Ah, how I should like to see the light again! By the way, where is that Fundy Race? I shall never know now.

You remember, Lyosha, they sometimes used to send for you urgently, fetch you straight from the cinema to the College, and you would sigh and say: "Now, Antosha, see it through for me as well." Now, I am asking you: Lyosha, see it all through for me as well. And be happy for me. For the future, for the victory

we all long for, for the right which is on our side, I am ready to die. I have said it now! And already the horror of it has gone. Already that cursed "tick, tock" has stopped frightening me. . . . Do you know what I have suddenly remembered? How we rode through Moscow—the Mail connection never arrived, and we went in a taxi. And now, here am I, sitting over an infernal machine, and the meter is ticking just the same with its metallic "tick, tock". I look at it with fear; I look, just a little longer, and it will swallow up my last rouble.

No! To-day I know—you will repay for me, and for that "tick, tock", to the uttermost farthing. I am sure of that.

Enough! One mustn't breathe too strongly in the moment before death. Now I am going to place the letter in a shawl, tie it up with string, and throw it out of that little window up there. Our people will come and see it. Then we shall wrap ourselves in a blanket, my little daughter and I, and try not to hear the explosion. I embrace you for the last time, darling Lyosha. Let me kiss you even at this distance. I have just closed my eyes and I can see you quite clearly. All's finished. Tonya.

To Senior Lieutenant ALEXEI PETROVITCH RADIMTSEV.

On ascertaining your whereabouts we send you a letter from your wife, A. K. Radimtseva. Comrade Radimtseva was discovered when our forces recaptured the town of N.^a As our troops neared the house in the cellar in which Antonina Radimtseva was locked by the Germans, a note tied up in a woman's shawl was found in the snow; this note warned our men that the house was mined. In addition, hearing the voices of Red Army men near by, Comrade Radimtseva began calling out from the cellar to tell everyone to keep away from the house, since an explosion might take place at any moment. It appears that this did not stop our men, who ignored the danger and went into the cellar and brought out your wife and three-year-old daughter Tatyana. The explosion followed four and a half minutes later, destroying the whole building down to the foundations.

We inform you that the health of your wife and daughter is now entirely satisfactory. Your daughter is well on the road to recovery. At first your wife suffered from a nervous affection, but now she is better. The only trace of her experiences is that she still cannot stand the ticking of a clock.

Military Doctor (2nd Class) STEPANOV.

THE RAZOR

By KONSTANTIN PAVSTOVSKY

★

AT DAWN two Red Army men brought into the major's cottage an old, bent man. Without a word the men placed on the major's table a passport, a razor, and a shaving brush—all they had found on the old fellow. Then they reported that he had been detained in the gully near a well. The old man was questioned. He gave his name as Avetis Akorov, Armenian barber employed by the Mariupol Theatre, and he told a story that later went the rounds of all the units in the district.

The barber had been unable to get out of Mariupol before the Germans entered the town. He hid in the cellar of the theatre along with the two small sons of his Jewish neighbour. The day before, the children's mother had gone to town for bread and had not returned. Probably she had been killed in an air-raid.

The barber spent more than twenty-four hours with the two boys. The children sat huddled close together, not sleeping. On the second night the younger boy began to cry loudly and insistently. The barber soothed him and he quieted down. Then the barber took a bottle of water from his pocket and the child drank loudly, greedily gulping down the water along with his tears.

On the second day a Nazi corporal and two soldiers pulled the children and the old man out of the cellar and took them to their chief, Lieut. Friedrich Colberg, who lived in an abandoned flat that had belonged to a dentist. The smashed windows were boarded up. It was cold and dark in the rooms. An icy storm was sweeping over the Sea of Azov.

Colberg was crouching before a stove, thrusting legs of chairs and gilded picture-frames into the fire. "What have you got there?" he asked, when the soldiers and captives halted at the door. "Three of them, Herr Lieutenant," the corporal replied.

"Not exactly," the lieutenant replied softly. "The brats are Jews but that old freak is a typical noble Greek descendant of the Hellenites, I'll wager. What's that? You are an Armenian? How can you prove it to me, you old ape?" The barber did not reply. Kicking the last piece of frame into the stove, the lieutenant ordered the prisoners removed to a vacant apartment next door.

Toward evening the lieutenant came in with his pal, a fat airman named Erli. Under their arms they carried large bottles. The lieutenant sat the boys at the table, opened up one bottle, and poured out four full tumblers of vodka.

"I won't give you any, Achilles," he said to the barber. "I want you to shave me this evening. Going to pay a visit to your local belles."

The lieutenant forced open the boys' mouths and poured a full glass of vodka down the throats of each. The children choked and spluttered. Tears streamed from their eyes. Colberg clinked glasses with the airman, drained his and said, "I always favoured the humane way, Erli." He poured another glass of the fiery liquid down the throat of each child. The boys resisted as best they could, but the lieutenant held their hands and made them swallow every drop. The smaller boy began to vomit. His eyes grew red and inflamed and he slipped from his chair onto the floor, but the airman put him on the chair again. Then the older boy screamed a loud, piercing scream. He stared at his tormentor with eyes round with horror. Then he toppled off the chair and crawled over to the wall, obviously searching for the door, but blinded by alcohol he struck his head against the door-jamb, uttered a groan and fell silent.

"By night they were both dead," the barber said. "Their corpses were black as if lightning had struck them." "Yes, go on," said the Red Army major, reaching for the document on the table. The paper rustled loudly. The major's hands were trembling.

"You want to hear the end? As you please. The lieutenant ordered me to shave him. He was very drunk, otherwise he would never have done anything so foolish. The airman had left. I lighted a candle in an iron candlestick, heated water on the

stove, and began to lather his face. I put the candlestick on a chair beside the mirror. Then I thrust the soapy shaving-brush right into the lieutenant's eyes. He hardly had time to cry out when I struck him a heavy blow on the temple with the candlestick." "Kill him?" interposed the major. "Outright. Then I made my way over to you. It took me two days."

The major glanced at the razor. "I know what you are thinking," the old man said. "You are wondering why I didn't use the razor. That would have been more certain, of course. But to tell you the truth I couldn't bring myself to use my razor for that job. I've worked with it for ten years."

THE PROFESSOR OF MUSIC

By YEVGENY PETROV

★

THIS SIMPLE soldier had a fine, very expressive face; his long hair hung down over his ears; and his fingers were what are generally called artistic. True they were dirty and cracked, but they preserved their sensitiveness and suppleness. He was continually fingering the edges of his greatcoat, which was several sizes too long for him.

He was a musician from the town of Kassel, by name Reinhardt Raif; he was young, only twenty-eight years old, but he had already had some success in life. He had finished the pianoforte and violin courses at the College of Music, and very soon afterwards had become a professor of theory in the same College at Kassel. He was conscripted in 1939, and since that time had carried out every sort of job behind the lines. One day he was sent to the Soviet-German Front, and immediately gave himself up.

"This war, it is terrible," he said; "I never imagined anything like it."

A very characteristic remark. They all expected to find in Russia what they had found in France—plenty of champagne and a scarcity of opposition. After being choked with their own blood, they realized their mistake. Reinhardt Raif did not take very long to decide for himself the question of peace and war. He quite simply chose peace. He had already lost the fear of death, and was now experiencing the pleasure of security.

I questioned him: "What is your attitude to the Hitler regime?"

"Oh, all that sort of thing—politics—does not interest me in the least. There's only one thing in the world for me—music."

"You're quite a young man. You grew up and were formed under Hitler's rule. It's impossible that you should be quite unaffected by Hitlerism."

"Put it this way," said the young man, with a pleasant smile. "I have only one love—music: nothing else exists for me."

I tried to see things from his point of view. Perhaps he was genuinely convinced that music and politics are incompatible. Music is—well, just music. Rather strange to be talking of music while not far away a fierce battle was raging, and the windows of the hut where we were talking rattled every now and then, because the Junkers have a habit of dropping bombs when no one asks them to. Yet music is a very pleasant subject to talk about.

"Let's talk about music," I said.

"With the greatest of pleasure," he replied.

"What do you think of French music?"

"I beg your pardon: French music?"

"Yes."

He was struck dumb. For a time he just stared at me in sheer amazement. Then, apparently remembering that he was a prisoner, he said very gently: "But there is no music in France."

"How do you mean, no music?"

He looked at me a little pityingly, and repeated: "There is no French music."

"Don't you know one French composer? Can't you name a single one?"

"N-no," he replied, shrugging his shoulders and clearly trying to remember. "French? N-no, I don't know of any."

"Fine!" cried a commander, a major, who had come into the hut and obviously did not approve of this conversation about music. "Gounod's *Faust* and Bizet's *Carmen*! A fine teacher of music. He's simply lying, he's no sort of a musician."

"Just a moment," I said, and turned to the prisoner: "But you know some Russian composers?"

"Russian? Certainly! Who doesn't? Tchaikovsky!"

"Of course! Yes. And what did Tchaikovsky write?"

"The Fifth and Sixth Symphonies. They are works of genius."

"Do you know what your soldiers and officers did at Klin, in Tchaikovsky's house, where he wrote those works of genius?"

I gave him a brief account of what I had seen.

"How horrible!" he said. "It was probably as you say."

It was quite obvious that he knew very well what German troops are capable of.

"Well, and what else did Tchaikovsky write?"

The musician was silent.

"Surely you are not ignorant of it. Have you never been told?"

The musician shrugged his shoulders.

"He's lying," muttered the major angrily. "He's no sort of musician."

"What other Russian composers can you name?"

Reinhardt Raif puckered his brow and thought, trying hard to remember.

"Tchaikovsky," he said, "... and that fellow ... another musical genius ..."

He waved his hand, but could not remember.

"All right, we'll leave Russian and French music. There is this about it, that this music belongs to your enemies" (an appealing gesture from the musician). "Now, here's your ally—Italy. Do you like Italian music?"

"Oh, Italian music! Yes, I like Italian music very much."

"Splendid. I like it too. Tell me about the Italian composers, and name their works."

"Verdi," he blurted out at once. "He wrote *Aida*."

"That's correct. What else did Verdi write?"

"*Aida*," repeated the professor of the theory of music, "and then ..." He waved his hand. I already knew what that meant.

"Verdi wrote dozens of operas, and half of them are world famous. Any first-year student in any music school can recite their names. All right, let's leave Verdi for a while. After all, there's not only Verdi in Italy. Name some more Italian composers."

"Rossini. He wrote a very fine opera. . . Why, it's gone clean out of my head!"

"Well, when all's said and done, the name is not very important. Let's call it *The Barber of Seville*. Tell me the theme of that opera."

The musician from Kassel said nothing. He had gone very red. There were beads of sweat on his brow.

"You know," he said, "everything is so easily forgotten at the Front."

"What's that! Even music is forgotten?"

"Music is never forgotten. I remember Rossini's music very well."

"Good. Sing me any melody from any of Rossini's works."

There was a very uncomfortable pause. At last the musician cleared his throat, spat, and said: "You know, I've caught a cold at the Front. Your Russian weather is so terribly cold that . . . hm!"

He pointed to his throat, as much as to say: "Ask me anything you like, but I just can't sing."

I took a piece of paper, and drew on it five lines, with a flowing treble clef, and held out the paper to Hitler's musician.

"Please write down any melody of Rossini."

The soldier blushed furiously. At last he said: "I don't know one."

"Well, you tell me you like *Aida*. Write down any melody from *Aida*."

"I can't," he muttered.

"All right; put down any melody by any foreign composer."

An oppressive pause.

"I've already told you that he isn't a musician at all!" the major burst out.

But think of it, comrades, he really was a musician. He wasn't telling lies: he was telling the plain truth.

I wrote down the whole of my conversation with the young man with shorthand accuracy. It turned out later that the young man had an excellent knowledge of German music, that he really had finished at a Hitler College, and had later become a teacher there.

It's a terrifying fact. At a tender age this musically gifted man had entered a sort of musical concentration camp, where German music was the only music. From everything else created by man in the realm of music, from everything else beautiful in the world,

he had been shut off, as if by barbed wire. So Hitler had got what he wanted. He brought up his ignoramus, who was convinced that there is only Germany in the world, that no other country has or can have its own art, that every other land must be nothing more than Germany's slave. Now, as a prisoner, he certainly had his tail between his legs. You see, he loved music, and politics meant nothing to him. It meant nothing to him that a gang of criminal maniacs had turned a thing of such universal importance as musical education into an instrument of national oppression, and hence of piracy and robbery.

For a number of years there have been trained in cold blood in Central Europe millions of assassins. It was necessary to train them in such a way that nothing and no one could move them to pity; it was necessary to make it clear to them that the Germans are the only people capable of creating cultural treasures. The whole of the rest of the world consists simply of two-legged creatures incapable of anything. This young ignoramus believed absolutely sincerely that there is no French music; how many other young German blockheads are there absolutely certain that in France, in Russia, in England, in America, even in Italy, there is neither painting, nor science, nor theatre, nor cinema, nor literature?

For a long time we could not realize all this. We did know it, but we could not believe it, since it was beyond our understanding. Our imagination created for us a young German whom it would be not too difficult to educate. But we could not grasp the idea that Hitler has long since turned the youth of Germany into anthropoid apes, who have learnt nothing more than how to wear trousers, shave themselves, shout "Halt!" and "Go back!", fire automatic weapons, and hate the whole human race.

THE BLUE SCARF

By LEONID SOBOLEV

★

WHO THIS pilot was and where I met him—in Odessa, Leningrad or Sevastopol—is immaterial. It is not about his bravery that I want to tell you, but about how it was born.

The fighter planes were circling for a landing. From the cockpit of one of them a long blue scarf was streaming. And suddenly I recalled the stories about knights I had read in my youth. So it was that the armour-clad knight had galloped into battle, a dainty thin scarf bound round his arm, sword flashing, carrying with him to meet death or victory the precious colours of the lady of his heart. I laughed to myself at this romantic vision. All the flyers wound silk around their necks so that the collars of their jackets would not chafe. Evidently the scarf had unwound in the course of the battle.

That had indeed been the case. Returning from a raid the flight had been attacked by Messerschmidts. The Soviet planes had been surrounded on all sides, and the scarf around the neck of the Major, the commander of the squadron, had become unwound. The Major succeeded in hitting one plane, but he was not sure about the result; he had gone to the rescue of one of his men. While pursuing the second plane, the Major had discovered a new enemy landing field and now he proposed to the Regimental Commander that they wipe out the German planes on it at dawn.

The Soviet planes were left in a safe shelter (the front was quite close) and we went into the dugout. Laughingly I told the Major about the knight and the beautiful damsel. He raised his eyes to me, still inflamed with the wind and the fighting, and smiled. Now, without his helmet, his face, framed in the blue froth of the scarf, looked older to me. The Major looked to be over forty.

While we were eating, the men discussed the last battle, and someone confirmed that the Messerschmidt that had been hit by the Major had indeed crashed to earth. Then they recalled the scarf that had become unwound and the Major was showered with jokes.

"Some day it'll drag you out of the cockpit like a parachute," said the Colonel. "What do you want with a whole bolt of cloth like that?"

"It's convenient," replied the Major. "Your head can turn round in it like a bearing."

"And Mironov flies with some kind of stocking wound round his neck. Why don't you divide your scarf in half with him?"

"One doesn't tear up an oath, Comrade Colonel," said the Major, half jokingly, half seriously. "I'll manage to pin it up somehow."

"It's a regular talisman as far as he's concerned, Comrade Colonel," laughed Mironov. "The Major sleeps with it, fights with it, goes to the bath with it. You ought to understand: an old airman. . . ."

They had been ordered to take off at 5 a.m. and the flyers began to fix themselves up for the night. I lay down beside the Major. Making himself comfortable, he had indeed carefully folded up the scarf and placed it under his cheek.

A lamp was burning on the table. From time to time the flame shot up from the chimney, and I could hear the sand sprinkling on the wooden boards of the dugout. The aerodrome was under fire of heavy artillery. The flyers, accustomed to this lullaby, were sleeping peacefully and someone was snoring mightily, drowning out the very sound of the exploding shells.

The scarf tickled my cheek. It seemed as if a faint, almost imperceptible fragrance was being wafted from it, and my imagination set to work. Youth emanated from its silken folds, which had most likely rested on frail girlish shoulders. And it seemed to me beyond a doubt that this talisman was the gift of a girl in love with the valour and heroism that was chiselled in the calm features of the Major's face as though in marble. I could picture their last meeting, her trembling lips and tearful glance,

could hear words of hope and pledges—and with all my heart I understood how a man and fighter already going on in years, enveloped in the tenderness of a girl's love, would guard such a talisman with the utmost care and believe in its all-powerful might.

I raised myself on my elbow. The Major was sound asleep. His calm, tired face would not fit into my imagined story. It was the guileless face of a soldier, of an honest airman who had returned to the service from the reserve, and could scarcely have inspired even the most romantic girl with such a sentiment. Most likely the explanation was a different one. I recalled how at supper he had said that when he had been transferred to this regiment he had managed to get leave to go home. He had not found anyone however. The town was in danger, and everyone had left.

I pictured to myself how he had entered the abandoned apartment where everything was familiar, where everything reminded him of those who were near and dear to him, and where everything was cold and empty, everything strewn about in the wanton disorder of a hurried packing, where only the ghosts of memories rose—the memory of a life of peace, of hopes, of family tenderness and warmth, which he would not find again, or would not find soon. . . . I could see him standing in the middle of the room, looking about, his lips pressed tight, perhaps tears of rage and sorrow in his eyes. And then I could see him silently take up the first thing that came to his hand—a blue scarf, a gossamer ghost of the past.

Perhaps I would have thought of several other variants, but the Major stirred and opened his eyes.

"How that devil snores!" he said, seeing that I was not asleep. "It's worse than the firing, I'll swear it is. . . ."

It was Azariants who was snoring, exhausted after the battle. From time to time after a particularly loud snore he would be silent as if listening in astonishment to himself. But then a shell would burst nearby and in his sleep Azariants would answer it with the rasping of some great startled animal, and the music would begin again.

"It's no use, I can't fall asleep," said the Major with a sigh. "Let's have a smoke."

We lit up and soon, lying head to head, we began a quiet conversation, which neither the barrage, nor the explosions, nor the snoring of Azariants could disturb.

In battles and in the constant preparations for them, military men never discuss their feelings. Their feelings lie buried in their souls like precious jewels. But the heart lives and sorrows, and yearns to disclose its secrets, which have been uttered to no one. And so in quiet conversation with a visitor, a chance acquaintance, willing to listen all night, in some such dugout amidst the roar of bursting shells, in the trenches at night before going over the top, in a bunk on board a ship entering into battle, the hearts of the men open up confidently and eagerly. And a new light is thrown on the beautiful and profound depths of their hearts and on their deeds. The curtain veiling the birth of heroism rises, and you understand what hatred for the enemy means.

My romantic guesses proved paler than the truth. It was all much simpler, more terrible and trenchant.

At the beginning of the war the Major had seen service in the Baltic. Coming from the reserve he had immediately been assigned to the defence of a small Estonian town. In this town the old ideas about the Germans still persisted and no one seriously believed that they would bomb peaceful cities. Thus on its beautiful beach the naked bodies of bathers would splash from morning till evening, and viewed from above it looked as if a rosy foam were running on to the sand from the sea. The Major's job was to patrol the sky above the town and safeguard its rest and its children, his eyes keen to search out the enemy. The sky was blue and deep, the sea warm and caressing, the sand hot and golden.

It happened on Sunday, 29th June. On the left he caught sight of a Junkers over the sea and rushed to meet it. But luck was not with him. The fascist gunner pierced his gasoline tank and the Major had to come down. The Junkers got away and the Major could see black mushrooms of explosions

spring up over the town. Small and well-defined, they rose, then went up in smoke.

Then the Junkers turned towards the water, dived down over the beach—and the rosy foam of human bodies gushed into the sea. From all its machine-guns it fired away at the naked women and children. Frantically they tried to take shelter in the water, as if the sea could protect them from the bullets. They dived under, trying to be invisible. But the Junkers made a second attack and the human wave rolled in from the sea and flooded for shelter under the gay umbrellas, tents and awnings, sinking onto the sand like great motionless drops.

Beside himself with rage, the Major kept firing away to no avail at the distant black spot. Finally his motor died, and he came to his senses.

He could land now only on the beach. The Major headed his damaged plane in that direction, but the whole beach was covered with the bodies of women and children. Motionless and terrible in the utter defencelessness of the naked human body, they lay on the sand. Finally he found a clear place at the very edge of the beach.

He jumped from the cockpit, staggering. A bloody mist swam before his eyes. Seeing nothing, understanding nothing, he walked like one lost, not knowing where, until he stumbled. Glancing down, he drew back.

Before him lay the body of a young girl, her head bent to her shoulder. The sun gilded her smooth skin and a light shadow marked her undeveloped breasts. At her waist was a narrow bloody belt extending to the left side of her chest—the traces of rapid, sharp bullets that had penetrated to her stomach. In her outflung hand she clutched a flimsy blue scarf—her only armour and defence—with which she had tried to protect herself from the bullets in her flight.

He had picked up this scarf, carefully opening her still warm slender fingers. And thus, holding the scarf and looking at the beach strewn with the bodies of children, women and girls, he had made a silent oath.

He did not tell it to me. But everyone in whom a human heart beats will understand what he said and remember it all his life.

"I sleep with it, so that even in my sleep I should not forget about hate," said the Major getting up.

He unwound the scarf. Its heavy fringe looked as if it had been chewed up. I looked close. There were sailor knots in it—neat, tight balls—and some of the fringe was braided, in all six knots and eight braids. Still continuing his conversation, the Major began to plait a new braid.

"To-day's Messerschmidt," he said seriously. "The knots are bombers. Only don't you tell anyone about it. They'll laugh and say that the Major has found a new game. . . ."

He fell silent, busily plaiting the silk threads. When he finally raised his head, I was astounded by the expression on his face.

"No, it's not a game at all," he said softly. "Until I knot up every bit of this fringe I will always be seeing that beach in front of my eyes. . . . I never squared it then with that Junkers. . . . Oh, well, what's new in Moscow? . . ."

At five sharp the entire regiment took off to storm the aerodrome which the Major had spotted. One after the other the planes rose into the dark and it was amazing to see the skilfulness with which they formed behind the Major's leading fighter.

An hour and a half later the planes returned to the field, landing in the same way one after the other. The flyers, excited by their bold raid, gathered in a group and were exchanging stories. Everything had gone off perfectly: with the utmost accuracy the Major had led the entire regiment, skimming low over the woods, straight to the aerodrome. The Germans had not even managed to fire. The gloom preceding the break of day had cleared up and everything had begun to explode, crash and go up in flames. Not a single enemy plane had been able to take to the air. In a second and third attack they had finished off all the planes. Altogether there had been nine bombers and eight fighters.

The Major had not yet returned. At last he showed up. He

was flying with the long streamer again fluttering from the cockpit, and apparently was without gas. Somehow he managed to reach the field and make a landing. We ran up to him. The blue scarf hung limply over the side of the cockpit and on it glowed a stain of blood.

"Comrade Colonel," said the Major without stirring. "I think you'll have to lift me out of here. It's nothing, my shoulder. . . . And something in the leg."

While they were running for the stretcher, he reported to the Colonel that he had spotted five Messerschmidts on the left and had flown to meet them since everything had been "proceeding normally" over the aerodrome. And all the time he had kept them off, not allowing them to interfere with the destruction of the target.

They lifted him on to the stretcher and I noticed his alarmed glance. I picked up the scarf from the ground and placed it on his stretcher. I gripped his hand.

"You've got plenty of work to do now until you get well, Major," I said to him in a low voice. "Nine more knots and eight braids."

He smiled at me as one smiles at a child who does not know the rules of the game.

"No, those were not mine. . . . The boys broke those up. I'll just make one braid: I did get one of the five fighters anyway. . . ."

The stretcher was borne off and he went out of action for a time, a knight of vengeance covered with a blue scarf stained with his blood, pure and burning as his hate.

DOWN SOUTH

By MIKHAIL SHOLOKHOV

★

FROM BEHIND the smoking, sombre pyramids of the slagheaps the sun is rising. With astonishing swiftness the violet shadows on the snow grow pale; then the roofs of the miners' dwellings, the windows fluffed with rime, the frosted boughs of the wayside maples and the far-away blue snow-clad hilltops, flame all at once into dazzling rose-colour, and still more intolerably bright becomes the glare from the well-worn, polished road.

East to West stretch the black columns of people moving along the broad highway. A few men in the rear of one of the columns slacken their pace to roll some cigarettes which they light up.

"Who are all these people?" my companion asks. "Where are you all off to, to dig trenches, or what?"

A broad-shouldered, stocky man in a greasy, padded jacket inhales with evident satisfaction the pungent smoke of the coarse, home-grown tobacco before he replies:

"We? The masters of the Donets Coalfields—that's who we are, and we're off to get the pits that were flooded or blown-up working again. See?"

Then the stragglers run to catch up with the rest, and once again, in the clear frosty air, their footsteps merge with the ringing, measured tread of hundreds of other masters of the Donets Coalfields, on their way to restore their demolished mines.

There are old folk and middle-aged folk, and very young folk in the ranks. And if the worker bowed with age but returning to his job seems the embodiment of the Donets Coalfields, past, then the middle-aged and the striplings stand for their present and their future. But the flower of the coalfields' youth will not be found among these marching men: the young and able are far away with Provalov's Division in the West, with the innumerable

DOWN SOUTH

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units of the Red Army, fighting for the liberation of their own Donets Coalfield, for the victory of their great country.

* * *

The rumbling of the Italian big guns is answered by our artillery. The battle, which has gone on all night long, starts with renewed force at daybreak. The German and Italian units in the Donets Coalfield area defend themselves with the fury of despair. It is hard for them to leave the warm houses, to take leave of places so rich in fuel, and flee into the white steppe, where the low-blowing snow-blizzard hisses and the wild blast sears like flame and pierces to the very bone.

Yet flee they must. The thrusts of our troops force them more and more frequently to change their quarters; leaving arms and equipment on the roads, they retreat hastily westward.

On the Southern, more than on any other front perhaps, the polyglot nature of the fascist soldiery is most widely represented. Whom will you not find in the contingents of war-prisoners brought in by our men? Germans, Italians and Rumanians prevail in this scum of disarmed cut-throats who until recently worked their will on the peaceful population of the Ukraine; but there are Finns and Hungarians among them, too. It may be truly said of them, with Pushkin:

*Of faces and dress what a jumble,
Of dialects, tribes and conditions,
From jail, cell and cottage humble—
Drawn here by their "grabbing" ambitions!*

It is precisely plunder and robbery that has brought this flock of rogues and hangmen together under the black banner with the crooked fascist swastika. It might have been of these thieves, incendiaries and murderers, who with their gloomy spirit of man-hating have turned our flourishing regions into "waste lands", that Pushkin wrote:

*... Hazard, blood, debauch and fraud—
The links this dreadful kindred bind;*

*He theirs is who with heart of stone
 Has passed through guilt of every kind,
 Who slays with cool and steady hand
 The weak who may not him withstand,
 Who makes of infants' moans a jest,
 Who ne'er forgives, nor ever spares,
 And like to youth at love's behest,
 To foulest deeds with joy repairs.*

In captivity they undergo, outwardly at least, a striking alteration. See them crowding together in the big room, shivering and blowing on their fingers to warm them. Their unshaven faces are dirty and dull, the look of despondency in their eyes is almost human. The long-unwashed bodies and filthy uniforms give off a heavy, pungent canine odour. The cock's feathers on the helmets of the Italian *bersaglieri* are pitifully bedraggled now. Gone with the wind is the grooming and swagger of these Germans who have grown lousy in the trenches. An Italian officer wearing woollen stockings stripped from some collective-farm woman holds out his hand humbly for a cigarette and mumbles haltingly that he has not had a smoke for fifty days. That is how they look here. But let us hear what someone who saw them in very different circumstances has to say. Old Kolesnichenko, a collective-farmer who only recently escaped from the fascists' clutches, has a habit of raising his hand to the collar of his worn shirt as though even that easy-fitting band chokes him. And he tells us, taking his time over the story:

"... Evening was coming on when a number of their motorcyclists whisked through the village. Then six tanks came by, and after these the infantry—the latter in lorries and on foot. By nightfall a special unit was quartered on us: each of the soldiers had black lightnings painted on the sides of his helmet and looked like the very devil....

"Then it started—and it turns one sick and bitter to think of it. They caught some of our girls and hauled them into the schoolhouse, some of them were literally dragged by their hair through the snow. After they'd abused them all they wanted,

they murdered three of them—Martha Solokhina, Dunyasha Pilipenko and a young married woman from the next village—killed them here in the schoolhouse, pulled the bodies out into the yard and laid them by the steps, one on top of the other, cross-wise.

"All through that night the Germans were prowling about our yard, butchering the fowls and the cattle, and making the women cook for them. They went through every trunk and pantry and store-room. . . . And to hear the cattle bellowing, the dogs howling, and the girls wailing for the dead—you'd think the whole place was on fire. It was awful to go outside even as far as one's yard with a din like that going on, believe me!

"It quietened down a bit towards morning, and at daybreak I went outside my gate. The first thing I saw was my neighbour, Trofim Bidyuzhny, stretched out by the well and the bucket lying beside him. He'd been killed because he went out for a bucket of water, and by German laws civilians aren't allowed out even for ordinary needs at night-time. Next morning they shot another victim, a youngster of twelve. It seems he'd gone up to have a look at one of their motor-bikes—you know how keen boys are on anything like that. A German standing on the steps of the house fired his revolver at the boy and did for him. They wouldn't even let us bury our dead. Think what the mother felt seeing her boy lying there! She'd look out of the window—he was lying by the barn with the snow drifting over him—and after just one glance she'd fall to the ground like dead. Her folks had to keep splashing water over her to bring her round. I saw the dead child when they drove us out to what they called an "assembly". I had to go past the house, and I saw him... the little kid, twisted up and frozen to the ground. The murdered girls were lying outside the school-house with their skirts pulled over their heads and tied with telephone wire, and their legs all in bruises. Anyone who had to pass the school-house went round and kept at a distance. The corpses were only taken up and buried after that unit had left the village."

Absently, the old man took the proffered cigarette and twirled it in his fingers. After a short silence he went on with his story.

"Four of them were quartered on us. The first day they killed the farrow-sow and two sheep. Part of the meat they gobbled up right there on the spot, the rest they took with them, the sheepskins as well. From early morning they were rummaging about in the trunks and the pantry, and picking out whatever suited them. Ay, they took a deal of stuff away with them, and on the last day they got round to my felt-boots. Already dressed for the march they were, they'd started the engines of the lorries and everything, when a big chap with braid on his sleeve pointed to my boots and made a sign that I was to take them off. I couldn't but be sorry to think of parting with the last things I had to put on my feet, so I begged him not to take them. At that this black-guard with the braid went white with rage, grabbed his rifle and pressed the point of the bayonet to my throat. He shouted at me—what, I don't know—and my old woman started crying and wailing: 'Take them off quick, before he kills you!'

"I was in a bit of a fright, and kept silent, and I just couldn't bend down. 'I'm done for now,' I thought to myself. Then the German gave me such a kick in the belly that I fell down on the bench and couldn't catch my breath. I kept opening my mouth as if I was yawning, but not a breath could I draw, and everything went dark in my eyes. . . . But my old woman hopped up to me quick as any young one, pulled off my boots and held them out to the German. He was getting ready for another whack at me, I suppose he was going to slay me, but when he saw the things he had taken a fancy to in my old woman's hands, he thought better of it. He took them, spat in my face and started to put them on. The three men with him were standing in the doorway, laughing. The big fellow got into my felt-boots, stuck his own boots into his sack, and gave a nasty crooked kind of sneer as he went out ahead of the others.

Well, we got rid of that lot, and after a while another unit comes along and acts in the same fashion. The result was that in a few days the village was picked as clean as a whistle."

"A nice sort of army, that!" exclaimed the young lieutenant with the cheerful, freckled face, who had been listening to our conversation.

"Army, indeed! They haven't any army," the old man said sternly. "They may have had one once, but they've certainly not got one now. Leastways, I haven't seen anything of it. I've been in the army myself in my time. I was in the Russo-Japanese war, and I fought the fathers of these Germans, too. I think I know the way things ought to be in an army, but the like of this I've never seen.

"Who ever heard in those days of soldiers being allowed to rob civilians and carry sacks of loot about with them? I'm not going to say we weren't tempted by eatables when we found them, but I'm sure we never touched baby's diapers and dragged the last pair of boots off old folks' feet, or made war on little children, or slaughtered women. But these Germans aren't forbidden anything these days, they can do anything that enters their minds. Then, too, an army should be in uniform. And how are they dressed? Here's one in an army overcoat, another in a sheepskin jacket taken off my neighbour's back, a third in a woman's grey blanket-cloth coat worn over his uniform. . . . Of course, they all have guns, but if it comes to that, so did the evil fellows who used to haunt the highways in the old days.

"I used to have different lots of lodgers in my house: one day one party, next day—another, and all from different countries. 'I'm a Pole,' one would tell you. 'I'm Hungarian,' another would say. The third mightn't say anything, but you could tell for certain by his stealthy eye and the cut of his jib that he was a rogue, that is to say a German. . . . Well, I never believed those who called themselves one thing and other. 'You're lying,' I thought to myself, 'curse the lot of you! There's nothing of the Pole or the Hungarian about you. If you were a Pole, you'd fight for your own Poland, and if you were a Hungarian—for your own Hungary. But you're as like as toadstools growing on the same dunghill, breathing the same stink. . . .

"I saw the following, for instance. A German N.C.O. comes into the house and gabbles something to one of these soldiers who calls himself a Hungarian. And the Hungarian, as I can see plainly, can't make out a single word, but just shrugs his shoulders and spreads out his hands, with the silliest look in his eyes you

ever saw. Then the Hungarian starts to talk in his own lingo, and it's the N.C.O.'s turn to shrug and twitch, and he gets so mad that even his cheeks flush.

"They stand there ready to butt one another like a couple of rams, each of them gabbling in his own tongue and neither able to understand the other. That's the way it is with them, they haven't got a common tongue till it comes to robbery, and then you'll find they all talk the same: give us bread, eggs, milk, potatoes; or else—'*kaput*', they say, and either brandish their bayonets or rattle a box of matches threatening to set your house on fire. Talk about an army: what sort of an army can that be where all of them look as if they'd just been let out of the same prison?"

It was a frosty night. A fine hot coal fire was burning in the stove. The old man took his worn overcoat from the head of the bed, and gruntingly started to put it on. With his arms half in and half out of the sleeves, he repeated stubbornly once more:

"They haven't any army. I'm telling you that, believe me."

It was then that in a staid, respectful manner, the lieutenant said:

"You're right, of course, but they have their own idea, too, that they're fighting for."

The old man paused in the act of thrusting his arms into the sleeves, and then, as though recovering from his astonishment, demanded sternly:

"What idea can you be talking about? They haven't any idea, and I don't think it's the proper word to use about them."

"They have an idea still," the lieutenant insisted, attempting to hide the smile which was lurking in his eyes.

Sitting down on the bed, the old man peered into the lieutenant's face. His reddish-grizzled brows were knitted and his tone was official and rather cutting as he said:

"Perhaps you'll kindly explain this idea of theirs to me, comrade commander, because I'm a man of very little schooling and maybe I haven't understood the word aright. . . ."

"Don't get vexed," the lieutenant said conciliatingly. "Their idea is exactly as you've told us in your story. About five days

ago we surrounded a baggage-train of theirs—over thirty carts. The Germans lay down by them and opened fire. It was all up with them, they had no chance, but they weren't giving in. Alongside me lay a young fellow who had just come out with the reinforcements. When he saw how determined the Germans seemed to be to defend themselves, he said: 'It would seem that these fascists are fighting for an idea of some kind, comrade lieutenant. Look—they don't want to give in.' 'Just wait till we've killed them,' I said, 'and then we'll see what kind of an idea theirs is.'

"Well, we wiped them out neatly and then started to look through the bales and bundles. The baggage-train was going home, and I don't need to tell you what they send home besides wounded. We ripped open one big bundle, it was full of children's shoes, cotton dress-lengths and other materials, women's coats—some of fur, some of the lighter kind—bags of millet, galoshes and all sorts of stuff. We looked in another sack and found much the same thing. Then I called the boy who had suspected the Germans of fighting for an idea, and said to him: 'Do you see what they've got here in these sacks?' He said: 'Yes, I can see.' 'Well, now, you're looking at the whole idea they're fighting for,' I told him. 'And you can stuff this idea of theirs into a sack, and it'll have a calico lining. Understand?' 'Oh, now, I see what they're up to,' he said and laughed."

The old man had been listening attentively to the lieutenant, but when he spoke there was an undisguised superiority in his voice.

"That isn't the right kind of talk, sonny, even though you are a commander. You don't know what an idea is. Now let me explain it to you. The chairman of our collective farm, Ivan Cherepitsa, would say for example: 'I've got an idea it would be a good thing to bank up the weir at Sukhaya Balka and breed carp in the pond.' The village took up the idea, carried it out, and the result was that just before the war we got a ton-and-a-half of carp for the market, without counting all that went to the dining-rooms.

"Another time he'd say: 'Well, citizens, how about building a mill with a turbine?' It wasn't very long before the mill was ready.

Folks from the nearest collective farms used to bring their grain to us to grind. Then again, there was an idea about starting bee-keeping, and others about buying Silesian-breed sheep, and plenty of other things that are good on a farm.

"Now you see what is meant by an idea? It means, my lad, something which benefits the people. And here you go hitching the word on to highway robbery. You should call things by their proper names—robbery is robbery, and that's what it's commonly known as. Do the Germans rob? They don't ever miss a chance, do they? The very word 'idea' is far beyond them, and you can't utter it anywhere in connection with them, lest it get soiled from just being near them. You young folks haven't come yet to a full understanding of many things in life. And believe me—what I'm telling you is right."

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... The enemy is still fighting fiercely, and even mentions a spring offensive, but when spring comes round those who will be doing the fighting are not the Germans who trampled our land last year. Those lost colour, faded hopelessly when they felt the devastating blows of the Red Army. A prisoner of war, Lance-corporal Wilhelm Woitzik, of No. 3 Company of the 160th Snipers' Battalion of the 60th Motorised Division, says:

"The words 'home' and 'back to Germany' have become a sort of watchword with the soldiers."

When asked to give the salient points of the reservists called up in his battalion, this by no means unobservant corporal replied:

"The soldiers of the fresh contingents have one new feature: they are always silent and they smoke a lot."

Quite a curious trait! Well, let us see what kind of an offensive the enemy will manage with reservists of this kind!

ON THE CLIFFS OF NORWAY

By KONSTANTIN SIMONOV

★

"I'll run the first one through with my dirk, and you tackle the second one," our chief said, pressing up against the wall next to me.

"When the door opened with a creak and a tall, red-headed German, his rifle in front of him, came in, our chief crouched down, his legs astride, and, holding on with one hand to an iron spike in the wall the better to keep his footing, ran him through with his dirk. . . ."

Eric Christiansen grew silent for a moment and took a deep pull at his small black pipe. It was a long time since he had smoked and every now and then he would fill his pipe with his stiff, frost-bitten fingers, strike match after match and light up. He was sitting near the round iron stove in our dugout on the Rybachi Peninsula; he was feeling warm, dressed in my jersey and in a pair of pants which one of our gunners had lent him. His own clothes, soaking wet, were drying over the stove.

Christiansen was a tall, gaunt, fair-haired man with a ruddy, weather-beaten face, with knotted arms that could pull an oar for forty-eight hours at a stretch, and with lanky legs that could easily cover the ground. He had tramped the length and breadth of the whole coast from Kirkeness to Narvik.

That night, he, together with Joric Svensen had arrived in a frail little boat, after covering the stretch of sixty miles that lay between the northern coast of Norway and the Rybachi Peninsula, across the rough and choppy Barents Sea, in the face of a gathering storm. Part of the way, with the wind behind them, they had had the sails up but the greater part of the way they had had to row.

He had a good command of the Russian language. Thirty-nine years ago he had been born here, on the Rybachi Peninsula, and many were the catches he had made together with the fisher-

folk who dwelt in these parts. And, yet, although his speech abounded in words commonly used by the local inhabitants, he spoke like a foreigner, because, after all, he was a Norwegian and ever since fifteen had lived in Trondhjem, Vardö Fjord and many other excellent places to which now he could not return without running the risk of being strung up on the nearest tree.

He had landed only that evening, his rugged face covered with quite a growth of stubble, and frozen to the marrow. But for all that he was bent on giving us right away an account of all that he had seen during those last few months when he had roamed, cold and hungry, over the rocky Norwegian coast.

"Yes, our commander ran the German through with his dirk," he continued, taking a pull at his pipe. "The chief had a wound in the leg he got near Vardö Fjord last October. Anyway, he slipped on his game leg and came down on one knee. Well, I leaned over him and ran the second German through with my dirk. After that we lugged both of them into the house, slammed the door to and bolted it. It was a big, heavy door with iron clamps and to break it open would not be easy for them.

"We made a cursory inspection of the house and then all four of us gathered in the kitchen. From where we were we could see that, apart from those first two whom we had sent west without even so much as a croak directly they crossed the threshold, eighteen more soldiers were scrambling out of the big closed car. Two others stayed in the car: one officer and the driver. . . .

"Just then we bitterly regretted that there were only the four of us and that Knut Larsen wasn't with us, because Knut alone was equal to four of them and, together, we could have tackled the whole bunch.

"Yes, I forgot to tell you about Knut Larsen. He was killed three days before we got into that house on the seashore where the events I'm telling you about happened. Knut Larsen was a fisherman from Trondhjem. Our chief was very fond of him, had a high opinion of him, and for good reason too. He met his end on Saturday. Yes, yes, Saturday, Saturday morning to be exact, in the village of Helpao, some three miles from Kirkeness. A forester by the name of Skuul lived there. We often used to

drop in to see him, first of all, because we trusted him, and then again, we had to warm ourselves somewhere. Last autumn, you know, was bitterly cold and to hide all the time in our hut was more than human nature could endure. Well, Knut Larsen went to Skuul's place on Saturday. Two men were supposed to turn up from Kirkeness, tell him the latest news of what was going on in town and how soon the big transport of soldiers of which our people had written to us from Trondhjem was due to arrive.

"Well, the two turned up punctually and all three of them sat around the table; that is, counting Skuul too. They had a bite of dried fish washed down with some wine. Skuul gave them some beer. After they had finished their meal they asked Skuul to leave them for a bit; not that they didn't trust him, but there was no need for him to know everything they knew. Skuul went out. They sat there discussing matters for another half hour or so and were on the point of leaving when Knut Larsen thought he heard somebody pacing up and down under the window. The window-pane was so frozen over that it was impossible to see a thing, so, Knut Larsen—he always liked to see things himself—opened the door and peered out.

"German soldiers had surrounded the house. They stood there patiently leaning on their rifles, chatting and laughing because they knew that the house was surrounded and that it was impossible for anyone to slip out.

"Knut Larsen, however, was of a different opinion. He shouted to those two from Kirkeness to keep close at his heels and, blazing away with his revolver, dashed past the German soldiers. The smile was off their faces in a jiffy; throwing their rifles to their shoulders they opened fire. One of them tried to intercept Larsen and got a taste of Larsen's knife in his chest for his pains. Larsen dashed on. The three of them had almost reached the first cliffs and, in another second or so, would have been hidden from view when Larsen was hit by a bullet in the back. He went sprawling on to the snow. He shouted to the two Kirkeness men to beat it and they did because, had they been killed, too, there would have been nobody to tell us about the transport of soldiers which was expected on its way from Trondhjem.

"Larsen was a very strong man. Turning over he sat up propping himself with both his hands and faced the oncoming soldiers. They had stopped firing because they wanted to take him alive. But he had no intention of being taken alive; he still had a hand-grenade but it was difficult for him to get at it because he could not sit up, only prop himself up with both his hands in the snow. He clenched his teeth, bent over to the left and, for a second, propped himself up with his left hand, reaching for the grenade with his right. The hand-grenade was ready for use; all he had to do was to shake it sharply. Again he propped himself up, this time on both arms, but now, in one hand, he held the grenade. He waited until the German soldiers drew nearer and, when they were close enough, he leant on his left arm again for a second, swung up his right and, sharply shaking the grenade without letting it go, brought it down smartly on to the ice.

"Those two from Kirkeness saw how Larsen died; they heard the cries of the wounded soldiers. And that's how we got to know that Larsen had been killed, and then we also got to know that the big transport from Trondhjem would never reach Kirkeness. . . .

"Well, that's why Larsen wasn't with us in that house on the seashore, and that's why there were only four of us. We came to the conclusion that if we stayed in the house they'd set fire to it and burn us alive, so we went out to meet the Germans just when they were approaching the house. But we didn't all go out at once. Only two of us had revolvers; the chief and I only had our dirks. And so the chief said that the two who were armed with revolvers should go out first and take cover behind the stone wall and keep on firing until they were hit. The Germans would then think that since everything was quiet in the house nobody was there and they would come in through the open door. The chief and I would be waiting for them behind the door and run through at least one German apiece with our dirks and, with luck, perhaps two apiece. The chief was terribly cut up because Knut Larsen wasn't with us.

"Well, the two who were armed with revolvers slipped out and took up a position behind the stone wall. The German

soldiers spotted them almost at once. But the odds were so much in the Germans' favour that they weren't at all afraid. They advanced steadily, firing as they came. Our men returned fire from their revolvers. Three of the soldiers were picked off even before they had reached the wall. After that we stopped looking and hid behind the door so as to be out of sight.

"The firing was still going on from behind the wall while we waited where we were with our dirks in readiness. Suddenly the chief said to me:

"Now, look here, Christiansen! I'm going to stay here alone—and no back-talk, please, because if you start any I'll kill you. I've just remembered that Joric Svensen, Mattisen and two others are waiting for us at the Fjord. If all of us get killed the soldiers will round up the other men who are waiting for us at the Fjord and kill them too, because if we've been betrayed it's obvious that they've been betrayed too. So beat it, Christiansen, and do what I order you to do. Here, wait a tick. Give me that dirk of yours."

"I gave it to him and he gave me his and then he said:

"If ever you see my daughter, give it to her; she's a good girl. And now beat it."

"I left the chief and began to think of a plan of how best to get away. I left the house through the back door, crept along the wall and slipped out through the gate and then again I crept along the outside wall and dashed off as fast as my legs could carry me over the snow.

"I didn't see what was going on in front of the house, I could still hear firing and for the first minute, while I was running over the snow, nobody noticed me. Then somebody did notice me—but not the soldiers who had their hands full near the house, but the officer and the driver who had remained in the car. I glanced over my shoulder and saw the officer taking aim at me. Shot followed shot but only later, when I reached the shore, did I notice that I'd received a flesh wound. The bullet lodged somewhere in my jersey. All night long I tramped along the coast and towards morning I reached the little hamlet on the shore where Joric Svensen and the others were waiting for me.

"I told them all that had happened and we made our way further to a small hut on the shore which had been deserted by its owner some three years ago and had never been occupied since by anyone except our men.

"Joric Svensen waited for the chief to show up in order to decide what should be done with Skuul. The evening before some fishermen turned up from the village of Helpao and told us that it was Skuul who had betrayed Knut Larsen, that Skuul had been seen in Kirkeness and had brought home from there a sack of flour. Only the German commandant had flour. He could not have got it from any Norwegian because every bit the Norwegians possessed had been taken long ago.

"Our chief, however, didn't show up, so we settled the matter between ourselves. After all, what was there to settle? Our party split up; two set off to Helpao to square accounts with Skuul.

"Joris Svensen, Mattisen and I remained, because we had nowhere to go until we had got in touch with the others. We had a small boat but to put out to sea in such weather would have been risky. Nevertheless, we put a small keg of fresh water into it in case of emergency and we would have put some food into the locker too, but we didn't have any. At night a fisherman came from the village and told us that he had been near that house where we had put up the fight with the soldiers. He'd seen the Germans burying five men of theirs, putting crosses mounted with the steel helmets of the killed at the head of their graves. The Germans had taken a long time to dig the graves because the gravel there was very hard and the only thing they had to dig with was their bayonets. They'd been to the village to try to round up some of the men to do the job for them but when they'd got there all the folk had gone because nobody was keen to help them even bury their soldiers. When the Germans left, the villagers had returned and buried two of our men who had been killed.

"Two?" I asked of the fisherman.

"Yes, two," he said.

"I understood then that the third man had managed to get away.

"What did they look like?" I asked, trying to find out whether the chief was among the dead.

"Both of them had beards," the fisherman said.

"But all of us had beards. We'd been roving around for three weeks in the woods without a chance to get a shave and so it was difficult to be sure from what he told me what had happened to the chief. The fisherman didn't know him by sight because he was from a different district—from Trondhjem.

"But after all, what did they look like?" I questioned him again and again trying to get something out of him.

"At last the fisherman recalled that one of them had had a thick wavy beard and had been bald-headed.

"And that's how we got to know that our chief was dead.

"And what's more," the fisherman said, "I've been sent here to tell you that the Germans have placed a cordon around the whole district from Helpao to the sea and are moving in from all directions in an effort to round you up.

"We sat down for a bit to think matters over. How we wanted to smoke; but there's been no tobacco in Norway these past six months.

"We asked the fisherman whether he had any food he could spare. He rummaged around in his pockets and finally brought out two bits of dried fish. We took them and decided that if we had to put out to sea, at least for one day that would mean we'd have something to eat. We had no firearms at all; our only weapons were two knives, an axe and my dirk. It was clear to us that if we waited until the Germans got there we wouldn't have an earthly chance.

"But to put out in our frail boat just then, in such weather, would simply have been courting death too. We decided to wait until daybreak. At dawn the Germans showed up, advancing along the shore from two sides. They moved cautiously, taking cover behind the boulders. They didn't know, of course, that we had nothing to keep them off with. Well, we launched the boat and tumbled in. While the boat was still close to the shore, under cover of the hanging cliffs, the soldiers didn't see us, but directly we pulled out a short distance they spotted us and opened fire.

"It was blowing a real hurricane. The velocity of the wind was so great that, apparently, it deflected the bullets they fired at us. True, Mattisen was hit by a bullet in the shoulder, but he didn't tell us until we'd reached the open sea. And what a sea it was—it was a toss-up between drowning at sea and surrendering to the tender mercies of the Germans. Well, you know, the sea is not a bad place for a fisherman to die in.

"We hoisted the sail but after a time we had to take it down again and row; then we hoisted it again. On the second day a particularly big wave swept the boat and Mattisen was washed overboard. He went down before we could even reach out a hand to help him, so weak was he from loss of blood.

"We reached land on the third day—the two of us—Joric Svensen and myself. Just see what's happened to my hands: they're simply raw, and, after all, I've done a bit of rowing in my time. It's not because I'm not accustomed to it."

Eric Christiansen heaved a sigh as he looked at the hands with which he had had to row for hours on end, hoist the sail, pull it down and row again. He touched Joric Svensen on the shoulder—he was lying on the couch right next to where Christiansen was sitting—and said something in Norwegian to him.

Joric Svensen sat up. He was an old man, small, with a swarthy face tanned by the wind, with cheap steel-rimmed glasses on his nose—the kind usually worn by school teachers.

"If it hadn't been for Joric Svensen we'd never have made land," Christiansen said. "Svensen's not a sailor, he's an old school teacher, but when I was about to throw the oars overboard and chuck everything, he said to me: 'Carry on, my lad, we'll make the shore all right.' He spoke to me as if I were a child, and he surely knows how to handle children. Two generations of Norwegians studied under him in his school and, thank God, they are sturdy men, men who will fight for their liberty."

Our eyes again turned to the teacher. He sat there motionless, his arms clasped around his knees. He had clear blue eyes, a wrinkled face, and if it hadn't been for those eyes it would have been difficult to picture him as ever having been young. But looking only at his eyes it was difficult to think of him as old.

Noticing our glance, Christiansen also looked at the old man. "When the Germans overran our country," he said, "Svensen was on holiday in Oslo. Later on he told us how the whole thing began there. The German consul was very fond of hunting and he always accompanied our King when he went hunting in the woods along the coast. Well, the day the German soldiers came and the King had to beat it to the sea coast, the consul immediately donned a colonel's uniform and, knowing as he did all the roads and byways which the King usually took, went after him with a body of German soldiers. People say that near one hunting lodge an old forester recognized the consul and peppered him with a charge of the gunshot he used for hunting wolves. I don't know for sure whether it's true or not, but it was Joric Svensen who told us about it and he's never told a lie to anybody all his life."

The old man sat there, his body motionless, his head cocked on one side as if listening to our conversation. His head kept on twitching all the time, as though it were nodding in confirmation.

"That's the result of Narvik," Christiansen said. "He was a volunteer at Narvik—he was wounded twice in the head there. He's not so old either. That twitching of his is not because he's old but the result of the wounds he received. He's an excellent shot and even I can't keep up with him when we are out on the rocks."

Christiansen was silent for a moment and then he added:

"When we get back home he'll be our commander. I've made up my mind on that score here and our men over there have also settled it. Yes, I'm certain everybody will agree to it. Most likely they've given us up for dead. To tell you the truth the sea was pretty rough. . . ."

We went out of the dug-out. Christiansen stood there in his thick jersey, his broad chest breasting the wind. From the west, from the direction of Norway, the aurora borealis was rising: it spread over the heavens like a vast sparkling bridge connecting, as it were, the two lonely men standing here on our shores with their country, so near and yet so far, hidden just now from sight behind the grey mountainous wintry waves.

THE MOTHER

BY NIKOLAI TIKHONOV

★

"LET us go and visit him," the mother said, and although she did not mention his name, Olga, the daughter, knew whom she meant at once.

She meant her son, Olga's brother, Boris, the volunteer. He had said that he was going into the army, together with all the men of his year at the institute. The mother had stood facing him—small, erect and worried.

"But you're short-sighted and delicate," she had objected. "Aren't you afraid?"

"Don't worry, mother," Boris had replied.

"You've never done any fighting before, you'll find it very hard. . . ."

"Don't worry, mother," he had repeated, and gone on packing his kit-bag.

. . . Many a time had the mother and Olga gone to visit him at the village where he was undergoing military training. He would come back elated, tired, dusty, and tanned, and they would sit and talk about the city and about their friends and acquaintances. They had never talked about the war, for everything around them had been filled with its breath and action.

Olga was still quite a young girl, and to her these visits to her brother had seemed not unlike the customary summer outings of yore, the familiar country excursions to the villages around the city. They would return, their arms full of wild flowers, to the electric train, and would arrive home in the dusk of evening, to find the city was full of the bustle and preoccupation of war.

But of late, everything had changed. The front was now getting quite near, and Olga was worried. How should they find her brother to-day, when everything had become so unlike those quiet Sunday outings?

They walked across the fields, which already lay in their autumn bareness. The summer villas were boarded up. They met carts and motor trucks coming from the opposite direction. The roads swarmed with refugees, with their children, carrying bundles and knapsacks on their backs. From a ditch a dead horse raised its rigid legs to the sky. Red Army men marched past, their billycans rattling. Somewhere, not far off, the sound of continuous firing could be heard.

They had already left the busy main road far behind them.

They were proceeding along familiar paths, yet everything around seemed strange and unfamiliar: broken fences, an absence of people, and a sense of alarm, of tense expectation, of something sinister. In the adjacent fields, concealed beneath bushes, lay Red Army men with machine-guns. And when they entered the first village it was deserted, completely deserted. Not even a sparrow was to be seen pecking in the dust, not a single hen, not a single dog. No smoke issued from the chimneys, and the tumble-down benches in front of the houses stood lonely and solitary. Villages looked like this only in the white, nights, just before dawn, when everybody was asleep. But nobody was asleep now; this was a wilderness.

Through the silence of this wilderness Olga bravely followed after her mother, who strode steadily forward with a noiseless but confident step.

The second village was in flames. When they had climbed the hillock they involuntarily came to a halt. The flames waved like red manes over the roofs, and there was nobody to extinguish them. Several of the huts had been reduced to matchwood, and this was a pitiful and astonishing sight. Olga pulled her mother timidly by her sleeve. But her mother said quietly: "We must go as far as that copse." And so they proceeded along the village street between the burning houses. Olga glanced in at the windows where the flames were seething. She saw a curtain catch fire and an inner wall collapse, and a shower of sparks poured from the blackened windows. She pinched herself softly in the arm like a schoolgirl. Could she be awake? It was so amazing, these familiar places that had become so novel, so alien and incomprehensible.

Round about, the hills were crowned with woods, and from behind them poured clouds of black and blue smoke. The thunder of guns was borne on the wind from somewhere on the left. The air was filled with flying pieces of wallpaper, straw and tow. Haybarns were burning. An uncanny light-blue smoke rose from them. Embers fell with a hiss into the pond from the roof of a shed standing on its very brink.

When they had passed the village and had descended into a shallow ravine, their road was barred by a dead cow. It lay on its side, its tawny back plastered with a swarm of black flies. Parts of its entrails lay in the road. Farther off stood a cart, with pitchforks and a spade protruding from it. Near its hind wheels, his arms outstretched as though in astonishment, a man lay prone. He was dead. His face was lined with black weals, as though it had been lashed by the terrible blows of a whip. One of the eyes was covered over with some dark mass, the other was open and there was such a look of astonishment in it that Olga was thunder-struck.

Scarcely had they left this gloomy sight behind them, when they became aware of a shrill whistling sound, rising in volume and intensity; it approached so persistently and inexorably that it pained the ears to listen to it. The mother stopped and bent her head. Olga did the same. She knew that this was the wrong thing to do, that they ought to cast themselves down in the road and bury their faces in the ground. But they had to move on, they had to find Boris, and if they were to drop down every time a shell passed, they would never reach their destination and never see him.

The shell burst behind a mound. The fountain of earth it raised slowly subsided. It had hardly settled, when another shell burst near the cart and the dead man; but they had already left these far behind. Then they broke into a run, stumbling over the bushes, for the bursts of black cloud shot with red lightning were now continuous. Olga was trembling violently, her lips were parched, but the mother kept pressing implacably forward, and Olga followed after her, consoling herself with the absurd thought: "They won't hit us. They can't hit us. They mustn't. . . ."

The village in which Boris had lived and taken his military training had simply disappeared. In its place, black pillars protruded from the ground and here and there charred boards lay about in fantastic heaps. Even the trees had been burned down or torn up by the roots and were sprawling by the side of enormous holes filled with greenish opaque water.

"Mother," said Olga, "where are we to go now?"

The mother stood in silence. Olga was seized with pity for this little, tired, pertinacious woman.

"Mother," she said again, "let us go home. You see yourself it's no use going on."

"Let us go forward a bit," the mother replied. "We'll find somewhere to ask. . . ."

They turned once more into the fields, and passed through gloomy copses and wrecked villages. Everywhere now, lying in the grass and in ditches, they saw Red Army men, facing towards the left. Suddenly three of them came out of a small bathhouse. The mother ran towards them and in a voice of happiness said to one of them, a tall, slender, freckled fellow: "Surely you're Pavel, aren't you?"

The Red Army man opened his eyes wide in surprise; for a moment he carefully examined the little woman standing before him, and then said: "You're Boris' mother."

"Yes. . . . I want to see him. Where can I find him?"

"Find him?" echoed Pavel, taken aback. "Continue straight on, towards that hill. But you'd better not go. . . . You won't find him easily, and besides. . . ." He suddenly smiled: "Why, there's fighting going on all round, we're almost surrounded. How did you come to be taking your Sunday walk in this direction? . . ."

"We are not out for a walk," the mother replied. "I must see Boris. . . . I must. . . ."

She said this so earnestly and in such a deep voice that Pavel, who had come from the same institute and belonged to the same battalion as Boris, could only say: "O.K., carry on. . . ."

. . . The mother sat in the high grass, her back propped against the log wall of a bathhouse. Olga sat by her side, with bated

breath. A Red Army man pointed down towards a long marshy field overgrown with scrub, where here and there the bends of winding streamlets glistened. The field merged into a wood, and beyond the wood, on a hill, a village could be seen. The whole landscape was dominated, so to speak, by a blinding thunder. Somewhere from behind, one of our batteries was bombarding the village on the wooded height, while the German guns held under their fire the marshy field and the approach to the hillock on which Olga and her mother were sitting.

"They've only just gone off into attack," said the Red Army man. "You can wait if you like, or not, that's up to you. They've gone off in that direction. . . . It's us who are attacking. . . ."

"Do you know Boris?" the mother asked.

"Of course, I do. He's with them. . . ."

"How does he shoot?"

"He's not a bad shot. . . ."

"Is he a coward?"

The lad, a former student, shrugged his shoulders and looked offended. "If he had been a coward we should never have allowed him into our company. . . ."

They both fell silent. Without a word they sat staring at the village burning on the hill. The roar of voices could be heard from the wood crying, "Hurrah!" or something else—the words could not be distinguished. The wood, illuminated by the flames of the fire, seemed stained in blood. Olga wanted to say: "How terrible!" But instead she said: "How strange!"

The mother rose and walked to the edge of the hill. It was as if she wanted to see her son, to find him in the midst of that wood that was being torn by battle, to see him running with a rifle in his hand towards that burning village. Thus she stood for a long time. If Olga had not known that her mother was not a believer, she would have thought that she was lost in prayer.

Then she said to Olga: "Let us go!" And without glancing around she took the path leading back towards the main road.

"Won't you wait for them?" cried the Red Army man. .

"No," answered the mother. "Thank you for your kindness. Let's go, Olga. . . ."

They reached the road.

"Olga," the mother said, "you're tired, my darling. . . ."

"No, mother. But I am afraid we'll never get out of this alive. I'm frightened being here. . . ."

The mother's thin bloodless lips curled in a smile.

"Nothing will happen to us, Olga," she said.

And then, after a moment's silence:

"I am not worried any more. I was afraid that Boris wasn't fit to fight; that his health was too delicate, that he was too short-sighted. I had to find out. Now I know. Now I know that he is fighting as well as all the others. That is all I wanted to know. Let us go home now. You must be back in time for your night duty, and it will be dark before we get there."

And she set out with her short, rapid stride, small, erect and light-footed. . . .