



M. DMYTRENKO

MYKHAILYK

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MYKHAILYK

E R R A T A

PAGE	LINE	READS	SHOULD READ
9	4 from top	over The the Germans	over to the Germans
28	11 from top	Mikey	Mykhailyk
31	1 from top	in spring	in the spring
32	3 from bottom	ower	over
34	2 from top	heart-rendering	heart-rending
40	6, 7 from bottom	simultaneously however	simultaneously, however,
44	3 from top	Where are we?!	Where are we?!"
51	11 from top	affllction	affliction
55	14 from top	tear-strained eyes,	tear-strained eyes

M. DMYTRENKO

MYKHAILYK

(MIKEY)

A story about a teen-aged boy, a mere child, who served on active duty as an UKRAINIAN INSURGENT ARMY SCOUT

Translated by

W. NICHOLSON SKORKHID

The translation is based on the 1969 Ukrainian (Toronto) edition which was reprinted from the 1949 Ukrainian underground edition.

Illustrations

by

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MYKHAILYK (MIKEY) was first published as an underground edition in Ukraine in 1949. An unabridged version of MYKHAILYK was serialized by the daily newspaper SVOBODA and, subsequently, with minor changes, by VESELKA (RAINBOW), a journal for children, both in the United States of America. Two separate editions in book form were put out in 1960 and 1969 by YEVSCHAN-ZILLIA in Toronto. A third edition was published in 1981 by YEVSCHAN-ZILLIA and THE SOCIETY OF VETERANS OF UPA in Canada and the U.S.A.

FIRST ENGLISH-LANGUAGE EDITION

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The above is a reproduction of the first title page of the underground edition of MYKHAILYK (equivalent in English: MIKEY).

It reads:

M. Dmytrenko

MYKHAILYK

Kyiv 1949 Lviv



MARIA DMYTRENKO

On December 29, 1948, Maria Dmytrenko at the age of 30 was shot and killed by Secret Soviet Police (the MVD) while trying to retreat with a group of Ukrainian Freedom Fighters in the village of Lybokhora near Slavske in the Carpathian Mountains.*

Maria Dmytrenko was her pen-name; her real name cannot be yet revealed. Maria displayed great talent for the fine arts, music and writing, already in secondary school and at the University of Lviv she continued to develop it. But her other talent was her great sensitivity and love for her enslaved Ukrainian Nation, and from her early teens Maria was a member of the OUN and on the editorial staff of such underground journals as "Idea i Chyn" ("Idea and Action"), "Samostijnist" ("Independence") and different bulletins published during the Second World War by UHVR.* Also at that time Maria became an active member of an UPA* fighting unit—combining her two talents—"the pen and arms".*

* Please see "Explanation of Abbreviations".

During her short, but very strenuous and active life she wrote several literary essays, articles and stories. Alas, only two of her books were published secretly in Western Ukraine: in 1948—“Uchytelka” (“Schoolmistress”), a short novel, and in 1949 “Mykhailyk”.

“Mykhailyk” is a true story of one of many Ukrainian young heroes that emerged during our centuries-old struggle for independence. Maria Dmytrenko by this vivid portrayal of a young boy dedicated to his duty and his ideals, continues the Ukrainian literary tradition of homage to heroic youth—begun by Marko Vovchok’s “Marusia” and Borys Hrinchenko’s “Olesia”.

We hope that the day will come when in a liberated Ukraine, many other works of Maria Dmytrenko will be uncovered and published under her real name.

B. Hoshovsky



EXPLANATION OF ABBREVIATIONS

MVD: Ministry of Internal Affairs (Ministerstvo Vnutrennyikh Dyel), the dreaded Soviet Secret Police, responsible for the direct and indirect murder of millions of innocent people, particularly UKRAINIAN, the very first victims of Soviet savagery. From the very inception of the USSR, this secret police force has been operating under various names, the changes in name designed to camouflage the force's barbaric activity, particularly in the eyes of the Western Powers. As a result, it has been known over the years by the victims of its beastly deeds and by the USSR-enslaved nations under such names as the following:

CHEKA: Vserosyjskaya Chrezvychaynaya Komissiya Po Borbe z Kontr-revolutsiyey, Sabotazhem ee Spekulyatsiyey (All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combatting Counter-Revolution, Sabotage and Speculation).

OGPU: Obyedyinyennoye Gosudarstvennoye Polyityicheskoye Upravlyenniye (Unified State Political Administration).

GPU: Gosudarstvennoye Polyityicheskoye Upravlyenyije (State Political Administration).

NKVD: Narodnyij Kommissariat Vnutrennyikh Dyel (The People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs).

NON-SOVIET ABBREVIATIONS

OUN: Orhanyzatsiya Ukrayinskykh Natsionalyistiv (Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists).

UHVR: Ukrayinska Holovna Vyzvoljna Rada (Ukrainian Supreme Liberation Council).

UPA: Ukrayinska Povstanjska Armiya (Ukrainian Insurgent Army).

T r a n s l a t o r

A WORD TO THE YOUNG

World War II enveloped the earth rapidly and explosively. German aggressors invaded Ukraine. Their Fuehrer, Hitler, had plans to annihilate the Ukrainian nation and simply turn Ukraine's rich and fertile land over to the Germans. This is why the Ukrainian Insurgent Army came into being. Beginning in the Autumn of 1942 this army waged a heroic war against the German invaders of Ukraine.

Worn out completely by this war, the German forces withdrew from Ukraine, but they were immediately replaced in their role of oppressors by the forces of Communist Moscow, Ukraine's traditional enemy. Ukrainian insurgent forces mustered in forests and mountains and carried out raids against the Russian Communist invaders. The fighting units of the UPA were made up of the old and the young, of boys and girls, even of children, who served as army scouts.

The combat ranks of the UPA also included the young resistance authoress, M. Dmytrenko. She lost her life in 1948 in a hand-to-hand encounter with Russian Communist forces in the Carpathian Mountains.

It was not until after her death that the story about MY-KHAILYK, a courageous and brave teen-aged boy who had been serving as a scout for the UPA, was made public by an underground UPA publisher.

This story was smuggled out of Ukraine by Ukrainian Insurgent Army couriers. This illustrated English translation is now available in book form so that all children everywhere may get to know in what precise manner the Ukrainian nation has been fighting for its freedom.

I

WHEN Mykhailyk sauntered off from his yard one evening, something pleasantly warm and fluffy brushed past his feet, then, nestling up to him as closely as it was able to, began whimpering and whining in a manner as mournful as could be. Mykhailyk, of course, recognized this fluffy being as his faithful friend, Brovko.¹

“So let him also join the partisans,” he mused...

It was still very early in the morning when this thirteen-year-old lad and his tawny-hued dog were gamboling their way in the direction of a fairly large regional town. Brovko was loping along well up ahead, frequently glancing back, as all dogs do, as if winking at his youthful master with his darkish brows that were hanging thickly over his deeply intelligent eyes. His spirits were in tip-top form. With obvious timidity Mykhailyk plodded along after him. He was in his bare feet and wore white linen clothes. All the while he was cautiously peering from under his once black, but now rusty-looking cap with a broken visor. Indeed, it was well-nigh impossible to tell that he was an army scout.

The town was just then awakening to greet the new morning. Radiant beams of sunlight, announcing the start of a beautiful day in May, were pouring downward in one continuous, all-embracing stream of light, flooding all buildings and ruins, peering glisteningly through windows of homes and rousing their occupants from their deep, sweet sleep.

In this town all members of the Ukrainian underground and practically all their colleagues had been thrown into prison. Arrests went on and on without let-up. NKVD² terror kept raging in full fury.

Commander Siryj³ and his Ukrainian Insurgent Army unit had resolved to teach the Communists a lesson they would never

¹ Brovko: A name of a dog, like “Brownie”.

² NKVD: Please see “Explanation of Abbreviations”.

³ Siryj: Pronounced: Syeeray (“ray” as in “day”).

forget. All he needed was to determine precisely where those who had been arrested were then located, the size of the town's garrison and how it was deployed. The field guide placed Mykhailyk in the charge of Commander Siryj, an eagle-eyed and daring scout. During the winter months this scout had been using Mykhailyk's home as a hide-out and Mykhailyk had rendered him very valuable service on numerous occasions throughout that season.

Fully aware of the importance of his task and struggling with ideas as to how best to perform it, Mykhailyk did not even realize that he suddenly found himself facing the NKVD building. Undecided as to how to proceed, he sat down on the concrete footing of the building's wire fence that surrounded it.

The NKVD building was a fairly large and handsome stone structure, with an orchard beside it, both enclosed with a high wire fence. Chained around the entire range of this fence were shepherd dogs, viciously tugging at their bonds. To Mykhailyk it seemed as though they were all glaring at him, as if saying: "Ekh, if only I could get you in my claws!" Three other dogs were freely running about the yard in front of the building. A sentry in his box at the gate kept yawning without hardly a pause. Coming in and going out through this gate were members of the NKVD: some contentedly plump, or shaggy-looking, some squint-eyed, or pock-marked. All were wearing glisteningly shiny boots and gleaming uniforms. Every man was wearing a native rubakha¹ and a winter kotika,² the latter sporting threadbare earlaps. All were as out of mood and vicious-looking as their dogs. When he suddenly realized that it was these very characters he would have to "tangle" with, a chill ran down Mykhailyk's spine.

One of the NKVD officers called one of the dogs over—the dark-brown dog that was running freely about—and started walking towards the gate. There he met another NKVD officer who happened to be walking through the gate at that very moment. Both officers stopped and launched into a long and noisy conversation. The dog stretched himself out beside them... and waited. Out of nowhere, it seemed, Brovko appeared. For a moment both

¹ Rubakha: A long, whitish shirt, worn over trousers in typically Moscovian fashion, referred to diminutively as "rubashka".

² Kotika: A winter seal-skin cap.

dogs sniffed each other hostilely, but silently. It was obvious how bad temper was gradually getting the best of both of them. Brovko snarled angrily and leaped at the NKVD dog. Two other dogs rushed from the yard into the fight. All the other dogs threw themselves into a most frightening and yelping, snarling brawl. The NKVD officers did all they could think of to break up this dreadful dog-fight, but, try as they might, their efforts were all to no avail. The dogs rolled in what seemed like a coil into the yard and continued leaping madly at each other's throat, tearing fiercely into each other with their fangs. Mykhailyk froze with fear and this put him at a loss as to what to do next. For only a brief moment the dog-fight snarled to a sudden stop, but because Brovko refused to back off and because the NKVD dogs gave every indication of being unwilling to settle for a draw, the antagonists went at it again. The fight was now transferred to an area somewhere back of the building, away from Mykhailyk's view.

II

MYKHAILYK sat down thoroughly dejected. His Brovko had disappeared on NKVD property. Now he would have to go there looking for him, but he was afraid. So Mykhailyk decided to wait... Surely they would not allow a dog to be fanged to death! Nor would they want a dog for a prisoner, he thought...

He waited a whole hour, but still there was no sign of Brovko. Nor was there any sign of anyone, for that matter, for a long while after. This brought Mykhailyk to the verge of bursting into tears because he did not have the heart to leave his very best friend behind. On the other hand he felt a very strong compulsion to go to see the NKVD. Who knows what he might be able to see and learn there? Something was telling him that this was a wonderful opportunity for him to be useful.

Finally Mykhailyk made up his mind. He crossed himself furtively so no one would see and headed for the gate. The sentry stared daggers at him.

"What do you want?"

"My dog."

"Your dog"?

"Yes, my dog. That big brown dog that bit the living day-lights out of all your dogs... That's my dog."



“Oh! So you teach your dog to bite, eh? Alright, come with me, young fellow. Over here... you’ll get a good lesson. Come on! We’re going to see the major!”

Mykhailyk’s heart just about stopped beating. Yet, in a way, he was happy that he was “admitted.” The major took hold of Mykhailyk’s sleeve and dragged him to his office for “questioning.” However, the questioning did not take place for a frighteningly long time.

When they finally walked into the office, the telephone rang. An overfed major was busy screaming into the receiver for a long while about something Mykhailyk could not make out.. Then the major disappeared and Mykhailyk spent a dull hour or so by himself. Nevertheless, he made a careful inspection of the large room he was in. There were strange-looking shelves all around and desks of all kinds. There was also a wooden partition running right down the middle of the room and dividing it into two separate sections. Desks, stools, an assortment of strange-looking boxes and shelves were all on the side of the partition in which there was a wicket. That part of the room in which Mykhailyk was left alone contained only a large bench upon which he was seated and nothing more. Suddenly a large and noisy group of NKVD men rushed into the room with a great deal of shouting and waving of hands, all the while paying no attention whatsoever to Mykhailyk. The subject-matter of their conversation was a certain railroad car carrying sugar.

Some time later the door once again opened wide and the overfed major, breathing with great difficulty, rolled himself in. He was followed by two prisoners who were being escorted, or, rather, pushed into the room with the aid of blows from the fists. Mykhailyk was horrified. Never before had he laid eyes on people the likes of these prisoners. Their skin was greyish-yellow. They looked at no one within eyeshot, not even at Mykhailyk. It was as plain as day that nothing mattered to them anymore.

“Against the wall! Don’t you know?” screamed the major.

Even before the major had finished screaming this order, a sharp blow from the fist of an NKVD escort turned one prisoner right around and he stopped with his eyes to the wall. The other turned around so quickly that it even surprised Mykhailyk. He would never have thought that a half-dead man could move so swiftly. Into the fragrant air of a day in May that was pouring

through the open window, the two prisoners brought the sharp contrasting odour of the damp rot of a dungeon.

For a long time after this major busied himself looking for something among his papers. All this time the two prisoners stood there like two dolls with their noses pressed against the wall.

A feeling of profound sorrow over the plight of these people enveloped Mykhailyk. He wanted to go up to them and tell them that he was on their side, that he was no different from them, that he loved Ukraine as much as they did, that they should try to hold out just a little longer, that salvation would not be long in arriving, that it would surely arrive.

At long last the major found the papers he was looking for and at once screamed to one of the prisoners, then to the other, to sign them. Then he shouted to the escort:

“Now take them over to the Holeshivka!”

“Shall do, comrade major! Permit me only to remind you that Holeshivka has not yet been put in order following the arrests of last week. All prisoners are locked up for the time-being over here in the underground cells.”

“Never mind! Tomorrow we’ll transfer all the prisoners from the city to Holeshivka. A fresh contingent will be sent here after the round-up at Spasivka and Vybranivka which begins tomorrow.”

Mykhailyk just about leaped right out of his trousers with joy and he bent his head down so that no one would see his beaming face. He was simply unable to believe his ears. He heard what he needed to hear. His heart was singing with joy. If only they would somehow let him go away from here!

Dinner was brought in for the major. Mykhailyk watched with utter disgust as the major went about ripping the chicken apart with his hands. A glass of whiskey warmed the major into a happier frame of mind and he began talking to Mykhailyk.

“Alright, young man... Tell me all about what happened with that dog.”

In a trembling voice Mykhailyk began telling him, but the major wasn’t even listening... not at all! He simply stretched himself out in his chair and closed his whiskey-bleared eyes. Suddenly he let out a scream:

“Alright! Now get out of here! Some trick you tried to pull!”

Mykhailyk rushed to the door. When he got there, he looked back.

"What about Brovko?"

"What Brovko?"

"Well... my dog."

"Oh, just tell them that Major Grubin is letting you and the dog go..."

Indeed, both were permitted to leave. Mykhailyk got out of town in such a hurry, one would have thought he had wings. When he found himself in verdant open country, when he took a deep breath of that fresh country air and when the skylarks laughed right to his face, Mykhailyk began breathing a whole lot deeper with much greater ease. He was running with a light and fleet foot, loudly mocking the skylarks. Brovko, downcast, dejected, wretched-looking, with hair torn out, an ear all bitten up and an eye all black and blue, totally unaware of the great service he had rendered, even if unintentionally, trailed behind Mykhailyk with painful difficulty.

III

THE very next night, taking advantage of Mykhailyk's intelligence regarding the withdrawal of NKVD forces for a roundup of people at Spasivka and Vybranivka, Commander Siryj's Ukrainian Insurgent Army troop carried out a raid on the regional centre.

After resorting to every manner of solicitation he could think of, Mykhailyk finally succeeded in obtaining permission to go along. He sat spell-bound on the same footing of the fence beside the NKVD building he had been sitting on earlier and watched the blazing tongues of fire lick their way out of the building's ruins upwards towards a dark night's sky. In the light of the fire he could see members of the UPA propaganda unit dipping their cloths into buckets of paint and painting huge signs on the large building next door: "Death to Moscow!" and "Freedom For All Nations!"

The crackle of gunfire erupted suddenly out of nowhere. Stooping human figures, with guns in their hands, leaped out from around a corner, almost knocking Mykhailyk to the ground. One of the figures dropped an NKVD cap and it rolled right up to the young lad's feet. Other figures rushed in pursuit, with guns blazing. Up a little way from where Mykhailyk was sitting, they

tangled—pushing, shouting, firing. Then, just as suddenly, they scattered and vanished.

Mykhailyk was bursting with curiosity about Holeshivka, so he sprinted right over. On the way up he stumbled upon a soft and still warm body and this made him shudder. Suddenly, the faces of yesterday's prisoners loomed before his eyes. He thought to himself that the body he had stumbled on was probably that of an NKVD agent.

Mykhailyk could hear the rattle of gunfire in the distance at Holeshivka, but, as he came closer, it seemed to die away completely. He saw only column after column of people scrambling up from under the ruins of a Jewish synagogue. He had heard previously about the huge cellars under this temple, so he continued looking around with curious wide-open eyes. He saw grown-up people sobbing, crying, embracing one another, as well as members of the UPA combat unit standing around in a circle, dumbfounded and paralyzed with emotion. How wonderful, how great the insurgents looked! Mykhailyk would never leave them! No! Never! "I only hope they don't send me back home..." the lad mused with a worried look on his face.

One white and two green flares signalled the fighting men to retreat. Mykhailyk went along with the unit out of Holeshivka, first into a grove on the outskirts of town, then into a wood. Every member of the troop was talking about the victory in this battle, about the good news that not one member of the unit had lost his life, that the worst part of this encounter had taken place outside the NKVD headquarters building; that Nazar had shot the captain and the sergeant with one, single burst of fire: Kohut had slain a lieutenant and was in possession of that lieutenant's weapons, plus a bagful of documents: the prisoners in Holeshivka and in the militia's jail had been set free: the ammunition depot had been ignited and was now burned to the ground. Moreover, everyone was talking about Mykhailyk, the hero of the day.

IV

THE NEXT MORNING, after quickly and efficiently carrying out his assignment, Mykhailyk should have been going home. However, along the way the insurgents came upon a Communist military cantonment which had been camouflaged to look like a lodging place for woodmen. No civilian was permitted to come

near it. It was now necessary to determine how many Communists it contained and whether they were indeed woodmen, or, as was more likely, Red Army soldiers. The manner in which the UPA unit would conduct itself would depend upon such information.

After pondering the matter for a while, the commander decided that this assignment would be just the thing for Mykhailyk. This is why, instead of being sent home, Mykhailyk was issued three goats. These were supposed to be running away from him and he was to be chasing them all the way into the cantonment, so he could look around and do a little reconnaissance.

Even this assignment Mykhailyk carried out with full honours. True, the woodmen actually nabbed him near the barracks, but this turned out to be a very good thing for him. The lad observed that the cantonment contained four separate barracks, each with the capacity to lodge twenty to thirty men. The "woodmen" did not have any weapons. The only ones who did were those "who shouted orders to others." On the basis of this intelligence it was quite obvious that this was a penal camp for former Red Army soldiers, all of whom were very carefully kept in segregation, away from the eyes of the rest of the populace. This meant that the unit would be able to set up camp in the woods and keep dropping anti-Communist leaflets around the cantonment.

There were more assignments of a similar nature for Mykhailyk. At first the partisans kept reminding him that in a day or so he would be going home. Such reminders, however, were not making Mykhailyk all that happy. Eventually the unit moved on and, to Mykhailyk's great joy and delight, there was nothing more said about his going home.

V

AN APPROPRIATE uniform was readily found for Mykhailyk and was suitably shortened and fitted. Before long he was also issued a small Italian "Empee".¹ His white trousers were put away so he could have them to wear only on scouting assignments. He went about with the "Empee" slung over his shoulders and the ever-present Brovko at his side.

Brovko was learning to bark in a low tone of voice and never to roam about the terrain without a good reason, yet, in the event

¹ Empee: An Italian automatic gun.



of the slightest danger, to run at once to his teen-aged master. Brovko was taught all this by Mykhailyk and by other partisans who were also devoting themselves to teaching Mykhailyk. Both Mykhailyk and Brovko possessed partisan characteristics, were eager to learn, and there was nothing in the whole wide world that worried them. For this reason they were so quickly "glued" to the troop that no one ever again gave the slightest thought to getting rid of them.

Many a night Mykhailyk would return to camp from a scouting assignment completely worn out. He would be given a rousing welcome, then would go to see the commander. The commander was a tall and slender man and always regarded the lad with a good deal of fatherly concern. Mykhailyk, in turn, had some fear of him. Now and then the commander detained him for long periods of time, questioning him about all sorts of things and simply joking around. However, Mykhailyk was not all too pleased with this kind of treatment. On such occasions he felt ill at ease and did not always know how to respond properly to his commander's jokes. Quite often he knew that his responses were hideously inappropriate. Despite the fact that he looked up to the commander as a good and strong and kind human being, his only wish during such interviews was to get away as quickly as possible.

On the other hand, Uncle Andrij,¹ his section leader, was totally different. He was stout to begin with, spoke in a low, gruff voice and rarely asked Mykhailyk about anything. Still he was always giving him apples and kolaches.² True, Uncle Andrij often knitted his brows when Mykhailyk ventured out on a lark, but Mykhailyk was not afraid of him. However, whenever Mykhailyk returned to camp all worn out, Uncle Andrij would immediately spread a blanket out for him beside the fire and say: "Eat and lie down!" Mykhailyk would then eat his soup with great gusto and lie down.

Overhead the stars would twinkle in dead silence. The trees would gather their tops to form one huge heavenly canopy. From time to time a gentle breeze would come from nowhere and the trees would gently rustle, as if breathing all of it in—in deep, deep breaths. In the camp there would ordinarily be some quiet

¹ Andrij: Pronounced "A" (as in "awning"); "drij" as "dreey". Hence: "Andreey".

² Kolach: A yeast-bread roll.

conversation, interspersed with low laughter, now and again with a song rendered softly in true partisan fashion. When this happened, something benign, something sublime would come to life deep within Mykhailyk. The fire would crackle and hiss out sparks. Strange images would flicker in the glowing flames: everything nearest would be red and warm; everything at a distance black, mysterious, lightly silvered. And uncle Andrij would be there beside the fire, looking like he was covered with paint. Mykhailyk had heard once, some place, that there were people somewhere in this world called Indians who had red skins. Later, when uncle Andrij would go for a walk in the woods, he would turn as black and as stout as a grizzly bear. At such times Mykhailyk would cuddle up closely to Brovko lying beside him, wrap his hands around his neck and fall fast asleep... like a child.

Quite often Mykhailyk's partisan colleagues would take him along on a night's reconnaissance expedition. They were already well aware of how he could be of service to them. With his small, nimble body he would be able to crawl quickly through any kind of opening, find his way into an enemy position unnoticed, creep without a sound, run swiftly and get himself up the tallest tree, upon a roof, or into a loft—all without the slightest difficulty.

The reconnaissance party would walk with guns cocked, to be ready at all times for adventure or battle. Mykhailyk was armed also and had to conduct himself like a real partisan. These were extremely happy moments in his life: he could see that he was not taking second place to any of his colleagues. He was a true Ukrainian partisan.

VI

ONE STAR-SPANGLED night Mykhailyk, along with his colleagues on patrol, joined a combat unit preparing for an ambush. The partisans were walking in single file along ditches on both sides of the road. Suddenly on the horizon there appeared a faint, unsteady light... then another... and still another... just like three little red stars. They kept growing bigger and bigger until, finally, they loomed out of the darkness onto the road in the form of automobile lights. The partisans kept their eyes trained on these vehicle lights without making a sound and, when they came close enough to them, they scurried for cover into a field of rye in a spread along the road. The rye was still very short and

Mykhailyk had a feeling his backside could be seen from the road, but he noticed other partisans lying there in a similar position and he began to feel a good deal more at ease. The vehicles drove by. The Communists failed to notice the partisans. The unit moved on until it came to the spot where it was to go into ambush. A few partisans took cover under a small bridge, others in some scrubby brushwood. Lying on his stomach, Mykhailyk found it unbearably difficult to remain in this position. Moreover, he was wondering how everything would turn out and when, precisely.

The partisans allowed many vehicles to go by, as well as some kind of Communist unit and an old man who, obviously late and frightened, rumbled along with his empty wagon in a very big hurry. The insurgents were fully aware of whom they were after! They were waiting for a column of vehicles returning from a big round-up of people in one of the southern regions. A staff of officers would be in that column...

Suddenly, out of the horizon, like a string of brilliant diamonds, a long column of vehicles broke into view. Mykhailyk's heart was beating furiously... It must be them... A whisper ran through the ranks: "Attention! Wait for your signal!"

The column moved on at a leisurely speed. The first big vehicle went by. Then... dead silence! Another vehicle revved by... then another... and another. Fifteen vehicles... seventeen... After that it looked like it was the end of the column. Mykhailyk was disillusioned! Why was there no signal? Was it possible... really possible... there would be no action?

Two more lights approached from the road... Again there was a whisper: "Attention!"

The first low-bodied vehicle, polished to a glistening shine, came rolling down the road. Purring along silently behind it was another...

There was a sharp report of a pistol, followed almost instantly by the rat-tat-tat of machine guns and automatic rifles. The vehicle spun around sharply and burst into flames. The one following rammed into it. The third in line, its wheels skidding, came to a rather slow and grinding stop. Mykhailyk's eyes fell upon a somewhat corpulent man with a shiny, hairless head. He was the captain and he tried desperately to leap out of his vehicle, but Mykhailyk, without giving it a second thought, let loose a burst of fire from his automatic...

Someone tugged at Mykhailyk's sleeve:

"Hurry! We're retreating! The Reds are coming back!"

Mykhailyk took to his feet. On the edge of the forest, where a muster of the unit was taking place, Mykhailyk, clinging to a thick-trunked pine-tree, watched as the Reds—those, at least, who were able to make it back—poured out of their vehicles like ants. They were shouting, sending up flares, scurrying aimlessly hither and thither. On the road two vehicles were burning themselves out.

The partisans hastily headed for the forest. In the darkness, Mykhailyk used his hands to spread away hard-to-see-through branches that managed to get into his eyes and scratch him, tenaciously clinging to his cap, to his collar and to his sleeves. So as not to be left behind, he had to follow quickly on the heels of the unit ahead which always seemed to him to be somehow disappearing from his view.

A few days after this, village girls brought food over to the troop's camp and spoke about the solemn funeral that was held at the regional centre for fourteen NKVD staff officers, casualties of the partisans' ambush.

VII

AMIDST PAINSTAKING difficulty, discomfort and experiences, the partisans saw the summer go by.

Looking squarely into their eyes was a cold autumn with its usual accompaniment of long and gloomy nights. All of these nights Mykhailyk was obliged to spend on the march because his unit was engaged in a long series of raids. Once, just before dawn, after dragging itself into a forest glade following a tiring, dark and rainy night, the troop was given orders to set up camp. Totally exhausted, the troopers fell to the ground at the very spot where they happened to be standing and hastily wrapped themselves in blankets or whatever rain-proof garb they had close at hand. Only the sentry kept watch. Brovko, as usual, cuddled up to Mykhailyk who, in turn, snuggled up under the arms of the stout Uncle Andrij. Sorrowfully twitching his dark brows and sputtering out the abominable rain, Brovko, nevertheless, faithfully performed his duty as a sentry.

Then a change of watch took place.

Within an hour patrols came rushing in, panting for breath, to report that a group of Reds was approaching. The freedom

fighters were ready in an instant. The commander inspected the ranks. His unruffled, resolute, even though restrained voice permeated the profoundest depths of the freedom fighters' spirit. The commander knew and foresaw everything, as if at that very moment he were creating a victory. There could be no mistake, there could be no despair when the commander spoke, when he issued orders!

Mykhailyk was lying beside Uncle Andrij. Both were listening gloomily to the approaching staccato of gunfire. Once Mykhailyk even saw a few dark, wretched-looking figures darting through the thinly-wooded grove. Up until now he had never been in a really big battle, that is, apart from the one in which the communist captain and his men were ambushed. He knew that a freedom fighter was fated to struggle and that the one big and dreaded battle would surely come someday. With all his heart he was waiting for that very moment, yet he was afraid, afraid about himself. How would he handle himself in a hail of bullets? Would he be able to take it under such conditions? He was uncertain, uncertain because he was a mere teen-aged boy, a teen-aged Mykhailyk.

At long last all of this was to come about! Even though Mykhailyk was dead serious about it all, his heart, nevertheless, trembled furiously and his face now and then turned feverishly scarlet.

All Mykhailyk remembered now was the initial burst of gunfire... All around everything was dead quiet... The whole unit was lying in wait... holding its breath while the Reds were moving up closer... and closer... with an ever-increasing barrage of fire. They were allowed to come as close as possible. Mykhailyk distinctly saw two of them... in dark "rubashkas"... moving up closer with automatic rifles at the ready. Mykhailyk was trembling from head to foot. It even seemed to him that something must have happened, that someone must have forgotten himself and the Reds had come all the way there to get them!

Suddenly there was a crackle-crack-crack of a freedom fighter's salvo. Mykhailyk saw the Reds flying in all directions and dropping to the ground in an effort to hide behind trees. His ears were splitting from the shrieks of gunfire and the shouts of "Glory!" and "Hurrah!" He also shouted "Glory!" but only because he wished this cry to be heard! He was so desperately eager to hear it! To him it meant victory!



Someone shouted "Grenades!"

Mykhailyk hurled his grenade and shouted to others: "Grenades! Use your grenades!"

Ivanko, the tall, slender machine-gunner, kept mowing the Reds down. Still they kept coming... But Ivanko kept waiting... Suddenly he let loose a volley of fire and the Reds came tumbling down, side by side, like rye in waves with the wind! But... what is this? Ivanko is bleeding from his chest... What's happened to Ivanko? He stooped and fell to his machine-gun... The Reds were shouting and coming closer and closer... Mykhailyk leaped out of his position, impatiently pushed Ivanko to the side and placed his hand on the breech of the machine-gun. He was now a machine-gunner... "Now take this! Take this!"

The field of battle thinned right out...

Following a furious partisan assault, bodies of the dead and abandoned weapons lay strewn all over. The good old earth was badly wounded, was badly trampled! It was impossible to distinguish what was mud and what—blood! The battlefield belonged to the partisans!

VIII

TOWARDS NIGHTFALL the victorious unit of freedom fighters was marching triumphantly into a village. In smart columns of three, with song on their lips, the men simply melted into the village street. What was one battle? What were frowns of fortune to them?.. The street instantly came to life... Doors creaked... Fences screeched... People rushed through gates in droves...

"The army is coming! Our army!"

"Come on, boys! Come on! You're our boys!"

Somewhere a borshch was in an eager boil, but with no hostess around, it finally boiled over with a menacing hiss. Somewhere an infant, forgotten in her cradle, was screaming her head off and, while still waiting for her mother to return, was making a desperate effort to get her tiny footsie into her mouth. Big-eyed Krasa,¹ thoughtfully watered by her owner, watched in sheer wonderment as an abandoned milk-pail was tossed about in the wind

¹ Krasa: A name, quite common in Ukraine, given to a milch cow by her owner.

on the greensward. The horses at the treadmill came to a halt; the geese, all agaggle, fled to the pond; the gates rattled; and... there was no end to the singing: "Freedom fighters! Freedom fighters are coming!" Sedate-looking men-of-the-house shook their heads and straightened out to stand at attention, to bring "old times" back into memory and to ponder on those of the present. Housewives brought their aprons up to their eyes and sobbed as though someone had done them a beastly wrong. Carried away with the spell of all of this, the children could no longer hold out and pranced right into an ecstatic dance.

"Freedom fighters! Our freedom fighters are coming!"

Song continued to pour out from the very depths of their souls, songs summoning all to battle, songs urging all to rise in revolt! You... and you... and you! You are all needed in this battle! You who are white-haired. You, young maidens. You, householder and housewife. Even all of you children. Each and every one of you... because you are all—Ukraine. To arms and do battle! Join the uprising!

"God Almighty! These are our children marching!"

"O! Have we ever reared them properly. Just look at them... how great they look!"

"And what wonderful darlings they are. Look! They are all like one!"

"O, look how they're all keeping time! Look! No other army marches with such ease, such grace!"

"And their weapons... what weapons! Each trooper is carrying either an "Empee" or a "Finka.¹ Look! Look! They even have pistols at their sides!"

"There's a rumour they wiped out all of those maziars".²

"See! Tomorrow you'll be able to go into the bush to get your wood without fear of any kind. But if you have any kind of complaint about any kind of wrongdoing, you had better take it to the officer commanding. He'll sort it out."

"O, my poor, ill-fated children—no home, no food, not a single moment of peace! Who in this whole wide world is in the least concerned about your well-being? Who is going to wipe away your blood?.. What suffering, what torture you are going through... O, those poor children of ours!"

¹ Finka: A communist army automatic rifle.

² Maziars: Grease-monkeys, unbelievers.

"You there... If you were accepted, would you go?"

"You fool! Who needs the likes of me? 'Grow up!' they tell me."

"Those heathens, those tramps... that's who ought to be done in!... O! Will Stalin ever carry a heavy sin with him to the next world... steeped in blood he'll carry it!!!"

It had already been filtered through to the people that the unit would rest up in the village and in all likelihood would have supper there. In response to this rumour, householders and housewives went among the partisans and took them away in groups to their respective homes. One stout woman walked up to Uncle Andrij's section, took one look at Mikey and threw up her hands in sheer wonderment.

"O, no-o-o! A mere child and he's with you?! What in the world is this poor little child doing here?! O, Holy Mother!"

At this point she broke into a mournful, sobbing wail and quickly brought her apron up to her eyes. Mykhailyk blushed and made a depressingly wry face.

"Now don't you go crying, auntie... Don't cry! There's a war on! You can't expect me to be whiling my time away with old gammers podding beans by the stove!"

The stout old lady numbed. "Look how clever this young thing has turned out to be!"

Uncle Andrij threw a proud glance at his minion. Only his long whiskers twitched with gratification. Mykhailyk and Uncle Andrij were taken to the home of this woe-befallen, stout old lady.

This particular night was not one of the happiest nights in Mykhailyk's life. The home was overrun by housewives and every one of them expressed her sympathy for him, every one of them crammed him, like they would a spoilt child, with boubliks¹ and other delicacies and broke into a deeply emotional lament over him. Mykhailyk was so embarrassed with all this attention, he could have buried his head in sand and fled from all of them a hundred times over had it not been for his partisan pride. However, even though Mykhailyk stayed on under this barrage of attention, his partisan pride was deeply entrenched upon. Moreover, even his voice refused to be of any service to him. To his utmost disgust, he turned completely hoarse and, instead of speaking normally, he merely crowed like a young rooster.

¹ Boublik: a bun, or roll, shaped like a ring.



At long last all the women left and the stout old lady of the house who had been playing hostess to Mykhailyk prepared a bed for him to sleep in for the few short hours that were still left for him to rest. The bed was clean and soft, but Mykhailyk felt as if he were suffocating because he kept drowning in his downy pillows. He felt as if the ceiling was taking his last breath away. Moreover, his greatest fear at this time was that any moment more stout old aunts might dash in to shed their tears over his "plight." This, after all, was the night when the partisans were in the village and not a soul was asleep! Mykhailyk called back to his memory the dead silence and the star-spangled canopy overhead, way out there... in the bush. He had a feeling that he was now a true partisan.

IX

IT WAS WELL past midnight when the lad was summoned to his commander. Mykhailyk stretched all of his slender body to attention in front of his leader, but was in no way able to report to him by word of mouth. All he was able to manage again was some sort of rapturously thin rooster-like crow. Mykhailyk's face turned as red as a beet. The commander took one look at him and bit his lip so as not to burst into a laugh. With some effort, Mykhailyk brought his features back to their more serious nature.

"Mykhailyk, I hear you have made quite a name for yourself today. You fought like a true partisan. But, Mykhailyk, you are still not big enough for that sort of action. I have noticed for a long time that you have been exposing yourself to efforts far beyond your strength. Our marches are not the sort of thing for a thirteen-year-old like yourself! Nor are the dangers that come with them! Nor the battles! In the summertime—yes, it was an entirely different matter. We were always able to find some useful task you could perform. But I have seen how much strength this autumn has taken out of you. For example, even those great big, ugly boots you had a mind to tear to pieces in frustration."

Mykhailyk smiled.

"To put yourself through all that torment, Mykhailyk, before you're of age, is impossible! Time will come when you will be able to prove yourself to Ukraine. We're going into a severe winter—who knows what awaits us? Mykhailyk, I want to leave you in some village for the winter. Even in this one... because you'd

never be able to make it home on your own at this time. In spring the sun will shower all of us with its warmth and the larks will burst into song. Then, if you still wish, you will be able to re-join us."

Mykhailyk's heart went faint. He recalled to mind this day's battle... a summer filled with adventure... the patrols... Uncle Andrij... and all of those great missions of the freedom fighters about which the commander had so much to say. Mykhailyk also remembered the sobbing "aunt" and her stifling house, and remembered how tears suddenly welled her eyes. Prayerfully he looked at Commander Siryj.

"My friend, commander! I will NOT be left behind... I can't allow this to happen! I'll fight and fight... with the rest of you... As you were saying... for Ukraine!"

"Child! This is impossible! Just think!"

"I've already thought! I've been thinking about it many times. Look, all of you are on the march... I'll just simply get sick. The mere thought of being confined inside a home makes me sick! Think of it!... I'm getting hoarse already!"

This was the only possible argument he could have won.

The commander was deeply moved by Mykhailyk's attitude towards the entire affair and, as a final effort, unable to handle the argument any longer, he burst out into a real healthy laugh.

"Well, if the comfort of a home makes you sick, you had better come along with us. But... watch it young man. If at any time in future you should even as much as whimper... remember, you'll get it right on your bare skin and with my own bare hand... in my own tent! Get that straight...!"

Mykhailyk, made very happy by such a "threat," grinned from ear to ear.

"No, my dear commander... I won't cry! No! And I won't get it on the backside either. Never!"

As though he had wings, Mykhailyk flew over to Uncle Andrij to get ready for the coming march.

Two or three hours later, when Mykhailyk and his freedom fighters were leaving the homes of their hosts, they were shocked by the sight of the first snow of the season that was settling gently upon the ground. They were unprepared for this kind of shower.

When dawn broke, the Carpathian Mountain Range suddenly burst forth in a display of all its God-created glory, its end supposedly lying somewhere down the way along its glorious stony

march! The mountains stood there—distant, alien, mysterious, already snow-capped and completely wrapped up in fog. The mere sight of these sombre-looking, unfathomed giants sent light shivers through Mykhailyk. Would he be able to cope with them? What about his commander?... That was all he needed—the embarrassment of not looking after his commander, or obeying his orders...

X

THE CARPATHIAN MOUNTAINS showed no sympathy whatsoever for Mykhailyk in the wintertime. A cold, extremely chilling wind, blowing off the tops of trees, bit savagely into his whole little body with a frost-maddened and snow-bound pincer-like grip. He felt as if his feet were logs of wood gone mad, as if sharp stones of enormous size were weighing heavily down upon his tiny feet, as if a treacherous abyss was opening up under his frail young body and swallowing him up into a fate unknown. The large patches on Mykhailyk's trousers were very definite proof of the kind of roads he had been trodding. His dark, weather-beaten and sun-burnt face also provided ample proof that he was not living in a warm abode.

Even at the very beginning, when the troop was stationed in one particular location, things were not all that bad. The troop had its own kolybas,¹ maintained their own relationships, carried out group sorties against enemy positions, read and studied. From the villages people came with food and even brought along their milk cows.

Quite often, comfortably wrapped up in his own and Uncle Andrij's blankets, and covered with snow, Mykhailyk would open his eyes to a dawning day, get to his feet and, with his frost-crimsoned fingers, break up the ice cover of the water in the bucket, all the while thinking that things were not all that bad, that he was handling himself pretty well, just like the older people; and, just like the older people, he kept fighting on. At one time, when Mykhailyk was "still small" and listened to people talk about his nation's struggle for freedom, he was afraid that before he grew up, the struggle would be over, Ukraine would be free and all of this would come about without him. But now, standing over a fire in a forest glade, he merely smiled, for he knew... he

¹ Kolyba: A hut, a shanty, a shack in a forest. "Kolybas": plural.

truly knew... that none of this could ever happen without him... ever!

Around the time of Epiphany in January the communists were successful in gathering a good deal of important information concerning the underground freedom fighters in these Carpathian mountain areas. Armed with such intelligence, the enemy rushed a large contingent of its forces into the area. The freedom fighters were then forced to move from one position to another to avoid direct confrontation with the overwhelming forces of the enemy and give their foe a mere tug here and there, in this manner to keep their own strength unscathed, avoid a deadly battle with their adversary and... wait for Spring! Mykhailyk's unit was now again on the march, without let-up, day and night, in full battle order!

Quite often Mykhailyk would sink into snowdrifts up to his belt, would be unable to feel his hands or feet because of the cold; would try desperately to catch up to Uncle Andrij, or to his partisan colleagues. Once, when almost completely drained of strength, oblivious even of shame, he made his entrance into the camp of the freedom fighters on the shoulders of Uncle Andrij. However, at nights, when a huge fire, ingeniously put on with real logs of enormous size, was in its full blazing glory, Mykhailyk seriously pondered the fact that the difficulties and all the hardships he had been experiencing lately were in no way able to get the better of him... in no way!

For two weeks the position of the freedom fighters' unit was unbearable. The squad was pursued by Soviet forces who, with their superior army training, were ten times the strength of Mykhailyk's party. NKVD battle units were stationed all around all villages. All forest trackways, footpaths and streams were under constant surveillance by enemy troops. The freedom fighters kept leaving traces of their whereabouts in the deep snow through which they had to trudge. For this reason it was well-nigh impossible to rid themselves of their enemy pursuers.

The night before, the troop's scouts reported that the enemy had encircled the company with a massive menacing ring of soldiers and that, under the best of conditions, irrespective of the troop's clever manoeuvring, the enemy would be able to force the partisans into a hopeless battle within a few days.

One evening the troop received orders to dismember and fight its way in groups through enemy positions to designated

positions. Members of the squad bid each other farewell in the most heart-rendering fashion imaginable, in a manner over which only the most callous, the most heartless, the most soulless human being would not shed a tear. They stood at attention and faced their commander. They knew full well that this particular member of the squad and that member... and that... every one of them... might never reach his assigned destination. The unit, however—come Hell or high water—would be there! Every member of the unit who could still breathe, could still pray—would be there!

XI

THE COMMANDER, along with Uncle Andrij's squad, went into retreat. At first, Commander Siryj's presence made little Mykhailyk very ill at ease. Time and again he experienced a feeling that the commander had his eyes on him, that he must always keep doing things differently and better... just like the commander. Filled with fear, Mykhailyk fixed his gaze upon the commander's very long legs. It was because of these very long legs that Mykhailyk often fell behind and got lost.

Following a two-day march, the commander dispatched Uncle Andrij and his party to some old huts to fetch the provisions which were buried there in the ground. Only the commander, Mykhailyk and a freedom fighter on sentry duty were watching the camp fire. The sun was saluting the horizon. All around them a dead silence reigned.

Suddenly they heard the strident voice of the sentry: "Stop! Who goes there?!" Then... there was a crack of gunfire! Mykhailyk fell to the ground, fully believing that he was shot, but the commander gave him one sharp tug and both ran with full breath down a footpath. Bullets whizzed by, striking and embedding themselves in the trunks of trees. The commander kept wheeling around and firing. Mykhailyk was barely able to keep up to him. Then they turned off the beaten path and raced along an icy, snow-covered crust that kept breaking up under their feet. The shouting suddenly died down... Not a soul was in sight... Mykhailyk and the commander burrowed themselves against trees. For some unknown reason the commander kept his hand pressed to his side!

Ten... fifteen minutes went by. Mykhailyk listened, hardly drawing or exhaling a breath, as if he had never listened to any-



thing before and he heard the sounds of feet crunching through the snow. The commander heard these crunching sounds also, so they moved on, Mykhailyk well up ahead, the commander behind. Again they stopped... The commander looked up towards the sky—evening was gently pushing day away... Again came the sound of the crunch... Crunch!... Crunch!... Mykhailyk ran... the commander followed, barely dragging his feet. They came upon a footpath that connected one of their former encampments with a creek from which they used to get their water. The path wound its way treacherously downward.

“You are wounded, comrade commander!” Mykhailyk exclaimed with terror.

“It’s nothing! Get into the water, Mykhailyk! Over there to the right! So you don’t leave any tracks behind! Make sure you walk through water only!... Understand?!”

Mykhailyk leaped from the path into the water and looked back. The commander, looking strangely unlike himself, stood on the bank, erect like a soldier. Mykhailyk ran back.

“I’ll go after you, comrade commander!”

Without looking behind them, they trudged on, plodding forward, wading through the creek, tripping and falling, entangling their feet in a mass of stones and rotted logs. They were soaked to the skin, with hands and cheeks bleeding from scratches sustained along the rugged trail. However, not even for an instant did they forget that by merely touching the snow cover by hand, or by foot, meant leaving a track which, in turn, meant death! Consequently they took every precaution not to leave the slightest trace behind.

They kept going on, tramping along, toiling on and on and on, but at a much slower pace. They were gradually losing whatever strength was still in them. Up there.. way up above... the stars were already gloriously sparkling, a sure sign that night had come. Mykhailyk, driven by some compelling force, kept giving the commander a helping hand, even to the point of almost collapsing himself, but, nevertheless, pulling Siryj along. They had to get themselves away as far as possible from danger and both were much aware of this emergency.

Mykhailyk took the “Finka” from the commander and slung it over his shoulder in such a manner as to have his own hands free. This heavy, unweildy weapon kept pulling Mykhailyk to the left or to the right, or completely throwing him off balance. More



and more often the commander dropped to a squat and drank water. And Mykhailyk kept crouching down more often now. His strength was beginning to ebb away...

"Mykhailyk, it's hard for you to keep dragging me along! Look!... Wade your way alone through this stream to the river... and I... I... will wait for you here..."

"No, comrade commander! I've already had my rest. Let's keep going... let us go just a little farther!" Mykhailyk pleaded.

With fever-burnt lips the commander fell to Mykhailyk's issue bottle. Then, after bandaging his side with a towel, he pushed himself along. The stars above twinkled smilingly as they always did without the slightest alteration, without the slightest concern over what was happening down below.

The long, endless road finally showed mercy upon them. First, after a good deal of wavering, it gave them a beautiful, sun-blessed winter morning. They no longer had to ford the stream. They proudly walked up to the ridge where a wild, untamed wind was blowing relentlessly in all of its fury, thereby covering up all their tracks. Perfect!

Down below in the valley, Mykhailyk caught sight of an ancient fir-tree. Its thick, snow-capped branches drooped all the way to the ground, thus creating a massive canopy. O!!! Would it ever be ideal under that pavilion!... Mykhailyk looked around for the commander. He found him far, far behind. He could see his leader stumbling against something and falling. Mykhailyk brushed the snow off the branches of the fir and spread a blanket out on the ground underneath it. He looked around once again and saw his commander crawling and leaving a bloodstained trail behind him. Mykhailyk felt as if his heart had been fixed in one massive vise: no way... in no way... would he allow the commander to die! The freedom fighters... Ukraine... were depending upon him! Thousands... millions... were depending upon him! No! He would not allow the commander to die!

He ran up to his commander and tugged at his arm.

"Comrade commander! Get under this fir! It's sheltered under here! We'll rest a bit and I'll make a fire... I'll bandage you up, comrade commander!"

Siryj looked at Mykhailyk, his eyes bristling with emotion and fire:

"You are a true partisan, Mykhailyk!"



Mykhailyk was overwhelmed with rapture by this appraisal. From his pocket he drew out some matches that were soaked through and through and, naturally, because of their saturated condition, he was unable to light them, but suddenly he remembered that he was not allowed to light them! He had forgotten! Actually it was not the matches he was looking for, but a bandage! Quickly drawing a bandage out of his pocket, Mykhailyk suddenly felt that he was frozen stone cold. His clothes were soaked, his boots swished and swashed embarrassingly. His hands trembled from the cold and from exhaustion. What in the world could he do about the commander's wound?

The commander lent him a hand. The two comrades went about bandaging it the best way they were capable of under the circumstances, and finally both fell to the ground completely exhausted.

XII

MYKHAILYK was awakened only by the cold. The sun was already high in the sky. The commander was lying on the ground with his eyes shut and saying something in a low, raspy voice. Mykhailyk was overtaken by alarm. What if the commander died out here? He kept staring at Siryj's face which he liked so well. No!... He would not let this happen! He didn't want to live without the commander! All of a sudden he was overcome with the insight that this death-like pale man with the severest of human features, had at one time filled him with nothing but fear, but eventually had become very close to him, like a brother, a father, a friend whom he must now snatch from the clutches of death. The commander symbolized to him that other Ukraine that must be saved at whatever cost...

Mykhailyk tried to move his hands under his blanket, but they were so swollen and in such unbearable pain that he had to relent. The skin on his hands had turned crimson and so thin that, it seemed, it would burst at any moment. Simultaneously however, his feet complained that all was not well with them either. The lad felt that his feet were so big that he could not fit them into his boots. Then one foot even ripped through the boot-leg and oozed out like overdone dough from a yeast bucket. Mykhailyk was now totally overcome by fright. In the condition his feet were in it didn't seem to him he would be able to get very



far! Did this really mean death?... Now?... After fleeing from that hail of bullets, must they now... die?! Whatever the cost, he had to get himself and the commander out of there...! Mykhailyk was not familiar with that particular terrain. He didn't even know exactly how far the village was from where they were... But the commander knew!... He most certainly knew!... It was pointless looking for his troop! Surely to God they would be accepted with open arms if somehow they could make their way to the village... Suddenly, as if in one of his sweet dreams, the village loomed before his eyes... No!... He would not die! No!... He would not allow his commander to die either!... No!... Not ever!...

Mykhailyk stared at the commander's pale face. They would both go together, if need be. The commander might just get to his feet again! But where exactly is the village located? This latter wearisome thought caused him even further mental anguish.

So he wrapped himself ever more tightly with his blanket and waited for the commander to open his eyes again. It would be a long time until nightfall arrived. Again, like a deceiving mirage, the village appeared before Mykhailyk's eyes, as well as a home... a bed... food. All of a sudden Mykhailyk got the feeling he was hungry. There was only one slice of bread in his bread pouch. It was a pity that the commander had lost his.

Mykhailyk was just about to open his bread pouch when he heard a rustle in the nearby shrubs. He calmed down at once and placed his fingers on the "Finka," ready to shoot, when suddenly the bushes opened up and out of them emerged his good old faithful friend, Brovko, sort of winking with one eye.

Brovko whimpered and threw himself at Mykhailyk. Mykhailyk allowed Brovko to cuddle up to him and lick him to his heart's content.

"Oh, here's good old Brovko! They've forgotten about him! With Brovko here, no one will die!"

Brovko sniffed the commander and, going silent, sprawled out a short distance to his side.

"Yes, Brovko, we have quite a chore ahead of us," Mykhailyk sadly addressed himself to the dog.

Mykhailyk felt much better having done this. However, that thick slice of bread he now had to divide into three parts. Brovko was also hungry.

The commander awoke out of his sleep when the sun was well past the noon mark. In his unconscious state he seemed to



look around, then sat down with a bit of a moan and simply brought himself up to his elbows.

"What's happening to us, Mykhailyk? Where are we?! asked the commander with a startled look in his eyes.

Mykhailyk quickly told him everything, all that had transpired.

"My comrade commander! You know we can save our own lives! All we have to do is get to the village! And you're the one who knows which way to go and how far it is from here!"

"Oh, my child! It's about twelve kilometres from here... You might be able to get there... And you must get there... You're still young!... I'll tell you which way to go. You see... I won't be able to make it!... But don't worry... At least one of us will get there. It's better that way... Better than for both of us to perish out here...!"

This statement simply numbed Mykhailyk. He wanted to voice his disagreement with that kind of manoeuvre, but the commander interrupted.

"Don't be afraid... This is the way it has to be. What would your mother ever say if I dragged you, a youngster, into the grave with me?"

Mykhailyk could not resist.

"But if I left you here, comrade commander, would my mother praise me for it?"

Siryj smiled:

"Don't be afraid, Mykhailyk... I won't die. Chances are someone will come along and find me here... Or, you'll go and gather some people together to rescue me."

"No, my friend commander," Mykhailyk broke in. "I'm no child. I know... I really know that you could die by then. No!... I won't leave you here! I..."

And Mykhailyk broke out crying.

The commander realized that the lad would not leave without him. Seasoned warrior that he was, he now felt a kind of tenderness, a softness in his heart, for the boy. Furtively, he wiped something away from his eye and resolved to use whatever strength he had left in him to keep going, in order to save the child.

"Mykhailyk! We're going to leave tonight," he said finally.

Mykhailyk jumped with joy, without even giving a thought to his wretchedly worn-out hands and feet. Brovko kept bounding hither and thither, his tail wagging furiously. All of this raised

Mykhailyk's spirits to greater heights. He looked at the sun: it still wasn't time. He covered the commander just a mite better; wrapped himself with a blanket—just a mite more comfortably; put his hands around Brovko's neck just a little more tightly; put down beside him and snuggled up to him so closely that he could feel his heartbeat; and dozed off to dreamland.

XIII

WHEN MYKHAILYK, numbed from head to foot, managed to open his eyes, the sun was already disappearing in the twilight. He looked uneasily at the commander who was lying there with his eyes wide open and wild-looking. In a low tone of voice he was whispering something unintelligible. His cheeks and ears were aflame. Mykhailyk gazed at the commander agonizingly and with a broken heart. He was unable to get to his feet by himself, so, despite all his pain, he bit his lip, just so he would not break out shouting. Finally he fell on all fours and crawled... slowly... at first stretching out his left foot, then his right... twice reminding himself that he was a freedom fighter and that he must act like one, that he was a warrior with a firm resolve. Then he rose to his feet. They were burning and felt like needles were continuously going through them and tearing them apart... Multicoloured insects seemed to be swarming all around him. He would have fallen off his feet, but he just happened to be hanging on to a fir-tree. He took one pace... then another, and... still another. To Hell with those miserable feet! Let them get a taste of what it's all about! One more pace... just one more...! And he felt a lot better!

"Comrade commander," Mykhailyk whispered, his hand gently touching the dangerously ill patriot. Night is about upon us. Let us go."

"Where?... Who will be going...?" asked Commander Siryj with a happy smile.

Mykhailyk shuddered. He realized that the commander did not understand a word he said and gave him just a little firmer tug.

"We'll go with you. To the village... It's not far already. Get up... Get up!"

On hearing the words "Get up" the commander opened his eyes wide.



"Mykhailyk... it hurts! Don't touch it!... I'd like to tell you exactly how it hurts, but I honestly don't know how... And it's bleeding... just won't stop bleeding... You don't know what it's like, Mykhailyk!... I'm all wet there... soaked with blood... Your mother doesn't know a thing about this. I'll take my body to the next world... I don't want to, but I will... And you, Mykhailyk, you go on alone!... Go, Mykhailyk! A little stream will flow up to me... I'll drink from it... and I'll get better!"

"Comrade commander! Don't talk like that! You just have to get up!"

In desperation Mykhailyk began pulling the commander by the sleeves.

The commander resisted helplessly, complained and doubled up with pain. Then he smiled again... very strangely.

"Comrade commander! Unless you kill me, I won't leave you!" Mykhailyk cried out and threw himself, weeping uncontrollably, at the commander's chest.

In a moment the commander looked up in sheer amazement.

"What happened?" he whispered in a strange sort of tone.

"Comrade commander! We must get going!... Get up!"

"I can't..."

And so he slowly and wisely began pondering over the situation that they were in. The result was that they did, indeed, start to move on. It could not really be said that THEY moved on. It would be more appropriate to say that they dragged themselves along, even crawled on all fours! The lad was barely able to stay up on his swollen feet. The weight of his own and of his commander's weapons alone was far greater than what his feet were able to carry. As a result, Brovko was weighted down with blankets, bread-pouches, and raincoats, but this was hardly a remedy for what ailed him. The biggest burden was still the wounded commander to whom no amount of personal effort, however heroic, could restore his former health and vigour. He clenched his teeth and dragged himself on... and on. It seemed he had no strength whatsoever with which to struggle against death. Every step he took magnified the intense torment he had to endure, so much so that his only wish was to lie down somewhere in final rest, so he would no longer feel any pain or suffer in such a dreadfully agonizing manner. Only Mykhailyk's eyes, gleaming with anxiety and fixed upon him imploringly with affection, and, at the same time, with an expression of stern command, put him in

a state of embarrassing perturbation. And so he... walked... and he sat... and he stumbled, clung to the trunks and branches of trees and crawled on hands and feet. But, when he eventually saw himself falling headlong feebly into a bottomless chasm, he saw what appeared to be the hot palm of a hand pulling him, dragging him into some sort of difficult situation, into a real struggle.

However, Mykhailyk's vital powers were gradually draining away. In the deep ravine that was blocking their way, the lad, attempting to pull up the commander who had fallen off his feet, found himself on top of his leader. Out of utter exhaustion and pain, he was no longer able to get back on his own feet. They were swollen and had grown heavy and he felt he was sinking into a strangely soft, peaceful slumber.

Mykhailyk was unaware of how long he was lying there. Somewhere close by a dog barked. From a distance another dog responded... and another. Mykhailyk shivered and smiled. Could it be a village?

"A village, a village..." he kept whispering while tugging at the commander's jacket.

None of this, however, was of any interest to the commander. He was totally unconcerned, was actually in a state of unconsciousness. Mykhailyk took the commander under his arm and dragged him. He crawled on his hands and feet, stopped, and crawled again. Without halting he dragged the enormously bulky and helpless dead weight of the commander's person, much like a tiny insect drags a piece of wood a great deal larger in size than its own whole body.

A thick black fog that had veiled everything all around them was beginning to turn grey. Roosters were crowing in the village. Beyond a turn in the road, through the fog, a house came shyly into view.

XIV

THERE WAS a gentle scratch on the window of Aunt Dotsya's home. Dawn was just breaking and Aunt Dotsya was already up and about. She was standing in the middle of the house and praying in a low voice, frequently crossing herself and bowing ever so reverentially.

A thought raced through her mind: "Could it be the Communist soldiers are coming out of ambush?"

“Who’s there?” she asked without approaching the window.

“Your people... Let me in! Aunt Dotsya, let me in...”

“So whose kind of people are you?” began Aunt Dotsya, peeking through the window... And she didn’t finish.

“Saints in Heaven!... What is this?!”

“We’re from the troop, aunt,” Mykhailyk, leaning against the wall, barely uttered.

He put the commander down in the snow. Aunt Dotsya threw her doors open wide. Brovko slunk through between her legs and sat right in the middle of the room, firmly convinced that this was the end of their journey. Aunt Dotsya pulled Mykhailyk into the house.

“Hide here before someone sees you. Who are you people?”

“We’re from the troop, aunt, from the mountains. We know your patrol commander Khmara,” Mykhailyk mumbled with some difficulty.

His head was swimming... he could easily have fallen to the ground...

A thought flashed through the lad’s mind: “Aunt Dotsya doesn’t believe us...”

He continued:

“We fought a battle at Sokilnyky. Did you not hear? Kruk is the patrol commander there...”

Again Mykhailyk saw what appeared to him to be a multitude of multicoloured insects before his eyes. His feet were giving way and he felt as if he was falling off them.

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When Mykhailyk came to, he felt very comfortable. He was lying on pillows and under a feather bedcover, except that he had a dreadful rattle, a rasp, in his throat and pain in his hands and feet. He would not have awakened had someone not placed a cold hand on his forehead. When he awakened he saw only two eyes flooding with tears.

“Is it you, mother?” he rasped.

“He’s conscious! My God! He’s conscious!” the woman joyfully cried out, even gave Mykhailyk a joyful start. “No child! I am not your mother. You are in my home... in Aunt Dotsya’s home. Just stay in bed and be quiet... just as you would have to in your mother’s house. Just stay in bed!”



Mykhailyk looked up as if he wanted to remember something, then looked all around and noticed a little girl sitting in a corner, her big beautiful eyes fixed intently upon him. She was eyeing him humbly, without saying a word. Mykhailyk recalled an owl he had once seen. He was seized with dislike for the girl. Some girl!!

Mykhailyk preferred to remember other things...

XV

SPRING WAS in the air. Mykhailyk rose from the bed for the first time since he had been placed in it. He had survived a serious bout of pneumonia and practically lost his frost-bitten feet. In addition he had had trouble with his hands, but youthfulness and Aunt Dotsya managed to outdo the affliction. Although he remained pale, even worn away almost to a shadow, Mykhailyk was still alive and would go on living.

Now he was faced with a different kind of problem. He was hopelessly separated from his unit, and no one, either in the stanytsia¹ or in the kushch² knew anything at all about its whereabouts. Mykhailyk only knew that the wounded commander had been picked up without delay by some couriers and taken away on a sleigh. No one was able to learn what had happened after that, whether or not he was still alive and active, or otherwise. Aunt Dotsya was very good to Mykhailyk. She took as much loving care of him as if he were her only son.

"May God reward my son for this with his munificent blessings!" she kept saying to herself, then pausing long enough to think about her own son who was also in the U.P.A. Only the quiet little girl was very unfriendly towards Mykhailyk. She was afraid of him and just kept staring at him like an owl might have done.

Aunt Dotsya kept mentioning Mykhailyk's mother, the poor soul, who was most surely worrying herself sick. When he was high with the fever, Mykhailyk frequently called for her. Now he wished to let her know about himself—somehow.

¹ Stanytsia, ² Kushch: Both are underground terms, probably borrowed from the seventeenth century Cossack military system, "stanytsia" meaning a village which acted as a military post in time of war, whereas a few stanytsias constituted a "kushch", ranking higher as a commanding post in underground administration.

One Sunday, aunt Dotsya went to church. She left the house spotlessly clean and quiet. Spring sunlight was simply pouring in through the windows. Stretched out lazily on a windowsill, a cat was purring away. A white butterfly, thinking it was summer already, tried desperately to get out through the window into the great outdoors.

Out of a box Mykhailyk selected some paper, a pen and ink and laid them all out before him. Turning his head to the side, he undertook to write a letter.

"Dear Mother! First of all I am letting you know that I am alive and well. My posada¹ is like the late Popkov Ivan's or my late uncle Vasyl's² used to be. I have come to like it very much, mostly because I know that I am doing the things the way the best of workers do. At times it was hard for me, Mother. If you were with me I would have cried. But this way—no! I was deathly ill, but worst of all, I lost my director. I lost him and don't know if I will ever see him again. He was good to me, just like my own father. I don't know what in the world I'll be doing without him. I am now working for a housekeeper. When I was sick she looked after me, just like you used to, Mother.

Write and tell me, Mother, if those uninvited guests who came to us in swarms like flies are giving you any trouble over me and which of our boys are still living, which have suddenly died; for instance: uncle's son Myron, or Stefko of the meadows. I have nothing else to write about except that I'm asking you to wait until I come to see you with my director and all of our other boys. But if I do not come, don't cry, Mother, because better men than I never return.

With these words, Mother, I wish you the best of health and ask for your blessing.

Your son."

XVI

THREE WEEKS later the swallows came and with them a letter for Mykhailyk.

"My dearly beloved son! When I heard at the time that your director was in the village, a thought flashed through my mind that you flew after them, but I was unable to learn a thing. Oh!

¹ Posada: position, job, occupation...

² Vasyl: William in English.

My beloved son! You are still so very, very small and my very, very only! I really don't know how you manage to keep up with them with your tiny little feet or carry that heavy inkstand with your tiny little hands. I bathed that whole letter of yours in tears, but mostly that part in which you write about some kind of illness. What kind of illness, my child? And how much of you is left after that bout? And that aunt of yours who took you in... go and tell her that I don't even know how to thank her. Let the good Lord bless her little children. And about that director of yours... When he comes around, let me know at once. I would like to know exactly where to send my thoughts and prayers. Behave yourself, my son! Look after your health! And don't misbehave among them. I don't want to hear an ill word about you. I am looking forward with tear-strained eyes, to the moment that will mark your return...

"Over here there's not much new. The boys are well, with the exception of Fedj Dolishnyj, the poor soul. When those Demons of Hell pinned him against the wall, he decided to dispatch himself to the next world. And Onuferko's boy did the same thing. Ivan, the one from the other side of the road, is treating the guests to so many pranks they are at a loss to know what to do about it. Everything we had... horses, cows, a heifer... they took away from us. But, don't you worry about a thing. Just so long as you are alive and well, my son, don't you go worrying about any of this...

"Best regards to you from aunt Olena; uncle's wife, Palahna; your father's brothers Maxym and Ivan... And I wish you the best of everything and with my motherly hands... bless you! May God keep you in His care.

Your Mother."

Watching the swallows flitting about the thatched roof of the house, he read the letter once and put it down upon his knees. He then repeated the process... and again. Everything would go well and easily for him, if only... Well, at any rate, he was at least able to walk around and run about. Even his hands were eager to help the aunt with something, with anything. The letter he received from his mother he planned to put away in his breadbag. What a good mother!... However, none of this was making Mykhailyk any happier.

What comfort was good health, the Spring, his kind aunt and every other little thing to him?! Last year he was even younger, but he was with the partisans. Could it be that this year he would be left behind, would never again be able to rejoin them all?

It was a sad, dismal Spring for Mykhailyk. He didn't even care about the swallows, had no desire to be well again and was no longer able to look at the aunt's ill-mannered daughter. Mykhailyk hated ugly-natured wenches.

When night laid on its cloak, Mykhailyk went out to bring in some water. When he was still at the well, it seemed to him that he saw someone walk into the house. With his bucket filled with water he walked up to the door and was absolutely struck dumb: it seemed to him that he heard very distinctly the voice of... Uncle Andrij.

"I was told at the stanytsya that there was a boy here inquiring about our unit..."

Mykhailyk listened no more. He flew through that door with such force that the door posts shook as if hit by a hurricane.

"Uncle! Uncle!"

This was all he was able to get out of him...

Uncle Andrij embraced Mykhailyk as though the boy was his very own son.

XVII

IT WAS the twentieth day of April. A beautiful, early spring was blessing everything in sight, everything within its wide reach. In the groves hazel bushes were beginning to sneak their verdure into the wide open world and shoots of countless spring flowers were bursting forth to reach up and bow to the everlasting, life-giving, God-blessed Sun. And the birds—they were so unbelievably happy! So happy, so overcome with joy, there wasn't song enough left in their melodious throats to express it! The dry leaves of the year before, withered and decayed, here and there overpowered by fresh, new growth, just rustled under the footsteps of a lad, still pale, but gradually regaining colour with the aid of spring's blessings, marching onward with an "Empee" slung over his shoulder. He was followed by a handsomely built dog.

"Halt! Who goes there?" he was suddenly intercepted by a sentry who was posted behind a tree.

"A crane from the southern paradise!" came the lad's reply.

"Go, bison!" replied the sentry.

The sentry and the boy looked at each other for a very brief moment. The former was a young man, probably a youth of about seventeen, big, dreadfully inexperienced, and covered with freckles. He looked light-mindedly at Mykhailyk's frail body.

"Now what do you think you'd be doing in this camp?"

"Precisely what you are doing!" Mykhailyk fired away at him and went off without looking back.

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Mykhailyk was standing at attention in his file in a forest glade where his underground unit had assembled to celebrate the Feast of Spring according to Ukrainian church custom. On a staff right in the middle of the assembly, a blue and yellow ensign was fluttering in the gentle breeze. Beneath it, decorated with ever-green, a huge trident was wreathed by young people ready to take their oath.

Commander Siryj, Mykhailyk's commander of some days past, read the oath. But Mykhailyk could not take the oath—he was still underage!!! Nevertheless, he was a partisan... body and soul! He could feel in his heart everything his comrades were feeling, those comrades of his at attention to the right and to the left of him.

The commander read the order—a recital of names, and names, and more names.

"...for gallant conduct, under the severest of conditions, for bravery in actual battle, for saving the life of his commander... he is hereby awarded The Bronze Cross of Battle Merit as a scout of an active battle unit—MYKHAILYK."

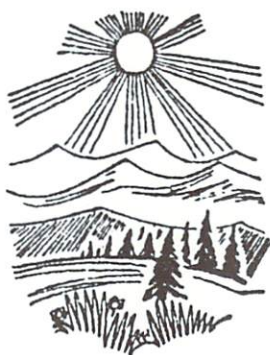
Blood rushed to Mykhailyk's head. He marched out to the front and snapped to attention like a guitar string pulled tautly. For a moment the commander and Mykhailyk stood staring at each other. Mykhailyk's eyes misted in tears. The commander's



soul burst into life with the aid of a tiny, insignificant, tear-drenched spark. The ensign kept fluttering in the azure sky...

Mykhailyk merely glanced at the big, freckled young lad. His chest straightened out, as did all of those present in the company and his eyes glistened, as did the eyes of all his fellow freedom fighters.

He and everyone in attendance were friends... were comrades in battle.



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