A Little Touch of Drama

Valerian Pidmohylny

Ukrainian Classics in Translation

Edited by George S.N. Luckyj, University of Toronto

No. 1

Valerian Pidmohylny

A Little Touch of Drama

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by

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With Introduction
by

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1972

Ukrainian Academic Press

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THE TRANSLATORS' PREFACE

Forty years after its first publication in Kiev in 1930 Pidmohylny's novel *Nevelychka drama* (here translated as *A Little Touch of Drama*) now appears in an English translation. Some explanation for this delay may be in order. Originally the novel was serialized in a Soviet Ukrainian magazine but did not appear in book form. In fact, with the rise of Stalinism, it was proscribed and thus remained very little known in the Soviet Union. It was first published in book form in Paris in 1957. Hence it belongs to that rather large body of Soviet literature which remained submerged for several decades.

This was not the only reason for its obscurity. The novel was also ignored in the West because by and large only Russian literature of that period was of interest to the Western reader. The minority languages of the U.S.S.R. were regarded as either curiosities for linguistic studies or as conveyors of ethnic and nationalistic cultures with no universal appeal. This image was reinforced by the unwitting acceptance of Soviet charges of "bourgeois nationalism" as the main sin of Soviet Ukrainian literature and also, paradoxically, by the claims of Ukrainian emigres who proudly declared that this was in fact so. As a result, much of Ukrainian literature of the 1920's, which was not at all political in its aims, was ignored, except by students of politics. The discovery of this literature, rich in poetry (Tychyna, Rylsky, Bazhan), prose (Khvylovy, Yanovsky, Pidmohylny) and drama (Kulish) is still to be made by students of literature. This translation of Pidmohylny's novel is an attempt in this direction.

Born in 1901 near Katerynoslav, Valerian Pidmohylny never completed his studies at Kiev University because of the revolution and the civil war which ravaged the country. In the 1920's he became a teacher, but dedicated most of his time to writing. He became known for his short stories and above all for his novel *Misto* (The City) which came out in 1928. He also translated French literature (France, Maupassant, Stendhal) into Ukrainian. Pidmohylny was one of the leaders of the apolitical group of writers "Lanka" (The Link). In a public literary debate

held in 1925 he declared that the first duty of a writer was to write so that "his work should be interesting to read," that it be "minimally artistic." Pidmohylny's last two novels certainly fulfilled this demand. They were attacked by official Soviet critics for their "political immaturity" but it is precisely in this that their merit lies. Pidmohylny was arrested in 1934 at the beginning of the long reign of terror in which hundreds of his fellow writers later perished. He was deported to a concentration camp where he most probably died. After Stalin's death, when some writers were posthumously rehabilitated, Pidmohylny's works remained banned and they are not available even today to Soviet readers. The present novel was announced for republication in Ukraine in 1969, but has not yet appeared.

While adhering closely to the original text the translators have tried to recapture the sardonic quality of the novel. Footnotes with explanations of difficult phrases or names have been kept to a minimum. The ironic overtones of the work are perhaps best conveyed by the chapter titles which range from quotations from Shevchenko to allusions to cheap operettas and romances. All this was part of the overall design which we have tried to recreate.

A DISTURBANCE IN THE PROTEIN

A slightly abridged translation of the article which appeared in *Ukrainska literaturna hazeta*, 1957, No. 9 (27). Yury Sherech is the pseudonym of Professor George Shevelov.

Nevelychka drama (here translated as *A Little Touch of Drama*) was the second and last novel written by Valerian Pidmohylny. It was first published in book form in Paris in 1957, twenty-seven years after it was serialized in the Kiev magazine *Zhyttia i revoliutsia* (Life and Revolution) in 1930. When he wrote the novel the author was 28 years old. He had become well known for his first novel *Misto* (The City) which appeared in Kiev in 1928. This was a solid, many-sided work, rather in the vein of Balzac and Maupassant. The reader was given life-stories of all the heroes, scenes of Kiev from the downtown to the suburbs, the parks, the boulevards, restaurants, coffee houses and cultural institutions, a panorama of the city, a cross-section of different segments of society—students, small shopkeepers, intellectuals, artists and bohemians. In comparison with *The City*, *A Little Touch of Drama* is a very different work. The action is also set in Kiev, but the city no longer interests the writer. We know that Marta Vysotska lives on Zhylanska street and Liova Rotter on Arsenalna street in Pechersk, but these are only names, signposts, not images. As in a play the action centers on one spot—a room. Most of the time it is Marta's room; sometimes it is the room of her rival Irene Markevych. Only once does the author lead his heroes for a short time to St. Andrew's church but even here he does not show us the church itself. "They went up the wide steel stairs to the tiled square around the church which stood on the slope of a hill. Through the narrow passage between the church and the balustrade they reached the north end of the square which overhung the ravine. The space at the back of the church was also tiled and their footsteps echoed loudly in this deserted corner." We do not get a picture of the church here, but a picture of its solitariness. This is also but a framework for the action of the two main characters.

The City was a social novel. *A Little Touch of Drama* may

be called a chamber novel. There the author sought a wide background, here he tried to delineate his heroes against an abstract, black backdrop. The details of daily life have ceased to interest Pidmohylny. A careful reader can collect many hints of it—the mention of a vocational school, of a local trade union committee, a co-operative, or of the "Ukrainization" program. But these are only passing references, of no direct interest to the author. He does not stop to explore them and for the reader they are about as valuable as telegraph poles to a passenger in a train.

If we can trust the logic of the plot, *A Little Touch of Drama* is about love. Or rather, about the varieties of love. Five men are in love with Marta: Liova Rotter, a salesman in a co-op store; Davyd Semenovych Ivanchuk, an unemployed co-op worker; Dmytro Stainychy, an engineer from Dnipropetrovske; comrade Bezpalko, chief of the statistical section of the Tobacco Trust. Marta is indifferent to all four. She gives herself to the fifth man, Yuri Slavenko, a professor of biochemistry. Not because he is a professor. Status motivation has no importance here. Nor does logic. If logic did play a part then Marta should have chosen Liova, since his love is unselfish, or Dmytro, who is honest and wants to start a family. Liova is, therefore, the embodiment of platonic love in all its purity, Dmytro of the practical and utilitarian aspect of love. Ivanchuk represents a purely animal, sexual desire. Bezpalko is almost redundant in this scheme of the types of love since he combines some features of both Dmytro and Ivanchuk. He appears in the novel not because of ideology (as all the others do), but rather for reasons of plot, as we shall see later.

However, neither platonic, family, nor sexual love finds a response in Marta. She responds only to an irrational passion. This is represented by Slavenko. She forms a love relationship with him and the break-up of this relationship ends the novel. The other contestants are left to be annoyed (Dmytro), to take revenge (Ivanchuk and Bezpalko), or to forgive (Liova). They are integral parts of the plot: Bezpalko fires Marta from her job (that is why he is in the cast), Ivanchuk is responsible for her eviction from her room, Dmytro brings Marta the news of Slavenko's betrayal, Liova saves the situation by finding a new room for Marta. But they take no part in the love plot; they remain static. Only Marta and Slavenko are active. This makes the novel even more a chamber work. It is a novel about two people and it takes place between four walls.

Both of them are odd. Marta has some sort of simple biography, but no character. The only thing we know about her personality is that she is deeply and devotedly in love. Slavenko

has a character but no biography. He was a student and has become a professor. We do not know anything else about the course of his life. The actions of both hero and heroine are reduced exclusively to their love relationship and we are told that this relationship is not individual, but that millions of other lovers behave, talk and sigh as they do. Isn't this a paradoxical situation–to remove the objective world, to move the other characters more and more off stage in order to be left with people with no faces or rather with deliberately unclear faces? Can one trust the logic of the plot? Is it really a novel about love?

Something else increases our doubt. The novel is full of philosophizing. For a novel about love or the varieties of love there is indeed too much philosophizing. Most of it comes from Slavenko's mouth. He talks about the redundance of art, about the practical qualities of modern man, about the nature of science, the essence of a nation, the role of love in human life, but most of all about protein and about reason. His pronouncements lead to no passionate controversies, no one tries seriously to counter or to reject them and no one takes them seriously. They sound like sermons and at times they bore us. Sometimes the other characters begin to think aloud too, in a kind of monologue. Liova is the author of a short soliloquy about the role of logic in life. Even the shallow and vulgar co-op worker, Ivanchuk, at one point delivers a philosophical tirade about the role of reason. It hardly fits his character. In the end none of this is enough and the author himself begins to talk directly to us. He offers us a seven-page tract on what life is from the biological point of view (metabolism, transmutation of substances), what biochemistry is and what proteins and amino acids are. Is this a theory about protein or a novel about love?

Slavenko's interest in protein is clear; he is, after all, a biochemist. But if we know nothing about the entire biography of Yuri Oleksandrovych could we not do without the history of his research?

Apparently not. Slavenko's experiments with proteins are closely linked with his philosophy. The evaluation of this philosophy is the crux of the novel. His starting point is this: "The world's population is growing and each newborn creature must be fed and clothed ... Mankind will perish if it does not concentrate all its powers on the higher, rational sphere of activity." But life is short and nature is full of pitfalls which hinder the activities of reason. Instincts pull man towards self-enjoyment and thus towards love and aesthetic and national atavistic feelings. "Human life is short and finite, our work is endless and limitless .... Not one wasted hour, not even a

wasted minute returns." – "I am happy," continues Slavenko, "that I live at a time when and in a country where reason is sharply opposed to everything weak, pointless, sensual, in all of which we are richly endowed by nature." And finally, "the new man will be indifferent to the colour of his clothes, to the taste of food, but he will know the pleasure of rational satisfaction."

The problem of love is solved simply. "One must put an end to these foolish things. I must satisfy the normal, physiological craving, with which, alas, nature has lavishly endowed me, but no more than that." Art is questioned on a theoretical basis: "Art arose as the result of a lack of understanding of nature and life. This lack of understanding is transferred by the artist into a work of art, which solves nothing but leads to an illusory satisfaction which is communicated to those who react to this work." The new man will have no time for art; he will be "like a chauffeur, cheerful and armed with practical and technical knowledge."

No one in the pages of the novel contradicts Slavenko's sermons. Ideological swords never clash and the biochemist's doubtful doctrines resound in a vacuum. At first this silence is hard to understand. Later it is counterbalanced by the fact that Slavenko himself *falls in love.* Opposition to his theories comes not from other theories but from the action of the novel. His defeat on the field of love leads to defeat in every other area. Slavenko forgets about his research; he is happy in Marta's embrace. He exchanges sweet nothings with his beloved and desires nothing else. He begins to appreciate art. He tells Marta: "Life is glorious, everyone secretly hopes so, and you express this clearly and openly. This rings in every line of poetry too, whether poems praise or condemn life. That's why poetry takes hold of us although it can't stand up to rational argument."

At this point the reader begins to feel that everything is clear. Pidmohylny has shown the conflict between reason and emotion and the triumph of the latter. Don't let's be hasty. This is only half way through the novel. The central conflict of *A Little Touch of Drama* is between the rational and the irrational, whether the latter is love, art, or a feeling of national identity. Now we know why no one opposed Slavenko. The author wanted him to contradict himself. The rational versus irrational will show itself best, in the author's opinion, not in a confrontation between Slavenko and, let us say, Liova, but between Slavenko and Slavenko. But it is too early to talk about the victory of the irrational. Let us read on.

Later on, the story becomes rather trivial. The squall of passion passes over. It did not last particularly long. Slavenko returns to his research on protein and to his plans to build his

life on a rational principle. He decides to leave Marta and return to his earlier philosophy of life. The love episode now appears to him as a sheer waste of time, an empty adventure with nothing original or new in it. It was simply a temporary disturbance in the protein, the substance which forms the basis of human existence. Slavenko marries Irene without being in love with her, simply to solve his sexual problem in the most economical fashion.

Ukrainian readers, brought up on Kvitka's tale "*Serdeshna Oksana*" (The Unfortunate Oksana) and Shevchenko's poem "*Kateryna*" (Catherine) now return in thought to Marta. Poor girl! Seduced, degraded, abandoned. The author seems to agree. Yes, Marta is deserted, quite alone. To make matters worse she is fired from her job and evicted from her room. She is without work and without a roof over her head. A modern Catherine? And has not Slavenko behaved as badly towards her as the Russian officer did to Catherine? So this could be a new variation on an old theme—the seduced Ukrainian girl, the seduced Ukraine!

Let us not jump to conclusions. A new room has been found for Marta and she will get a new job since she is well qualified. The novel ends with Marta falling asleep. She does not throw herself into the lake but sleeps soundly. If the disturbance of the protein was normal so was the ending too. Passion and suffering is everybody's share in life. The little dramas, such as the one between Marta and Slavenko, may be matters of statistics, as are coal production, falling meteorites or car accidents.

So as to stress the normal character of this disturbance in the protein, which is called love, the author forces Marta to seek an original ending to her love at a time when she still believes that Slavenko loves her. She thinks there are three possible endings to love, all three so well known: "marriage, one person falling out of love or a mutual exhaustion which leads to quarrels, reproaches and curses." At last she finds what she considers a new solution: deliberately to renounce happiness at its height, and voluntarily to part from her beloved. She does so, only to find herself doubly defeated. First, she finds a similar solution in literature, in Ibsen's *Love's Comedy*. Secondly, even worse, she later learns that when she decided to give up love voluntarily Slavenko had already been thinking of leaving her and so "one person falling out of love" had already happened.

So, in the end was Slavenko right? Everything can be explained in terms of protein and its fully predictable reactions. One of the small disturbances is what we call love—and one of

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So, in the end was Slavenko right? Everything can be explained in terms of protein and its fully predictable reactions. One of the small disturbances is what we call love—and one of

the larger ones, death? "Death doesn't come from elsewhere. It's always right inside us, waiting for the right moment to seize its rights .... It doesn't have the mysteries created by human fear and imagination. Metabolism ceases, there comes a moment of stillness and solidification, then the protein begins to decompose—and this is a simple, well known process." And so only reason can explain the nature of things and can offer the possibility of a peaceful transformation of life and society on earth. Everything must be placed in the service of reason.

If it is wrong to identify Marta with Catherine or Marta with Pidmohylny it is equally wrong to identify Slavenko with the author. Pidmohylny shows the futility of Slavenko's theories through Slavenko's own words. Slavenko himself admits that even if he succeeded in developing synthetic protein this would not solve any of mankind's problems. This is even more emphatic when he admits the futility of the very rebellion of reason, a part of the universe, against the universe, that whole to which it belongs. "Our explanations are inadequate and in the final analysis they don't explain anything. The large X which we try to solve always yields a smaller x and so on until instead of one large X we have an infinite series of minute x's, all equally resisting any understanding." The hypertrophy of the rational, as represented by Slavenko, also manifests itself as a disturbance in the protein. The difference is merely that Slavenko's disturbance is not as common as the one which is known as love. True, it is more widespread in our day, but it has been known before and affected some individuals. This is the second little drama, that of Yuri Oleksandrovych Slavenko.

It is at this point that we first meet the author himself. How changed he is from the short time earlier when he wrote *The City*. Even there he showed an inclination towards irony and scepticism, but these were overshadowed by his keen interest in life, people, the apparently boundless variety of their emotions and reactions. The spokesman for scepticism in that novel was the poet Vyhorsky, a background character, who said: "Life is so simple that in the end it seems mysterious. Calm yourselves! People, as well as numbers, have a fixed row of digits, in different variations, of course." Now the feeling of bitterness and disenchantment has engulfed Pidmohylny. Despite his twenty-eight years he has become aged and dispirited. Perhaps he sensed the dark valley of coming decades prophesied by another Soviet Ukrainian writer, Ivan Dniprovsky: "Our beautiful planet is lice ridden .... There will come a reign of that species with no end in sight." People have become for the author the formulae of chemical reactions and his bitter scepticism is only lightly covered with thin irony and the mathemati-

cal composition of the novel which leads from four ("Four in a Room apart from a Girl") to two ("Two in a Room apart from a Girl") and finally to one, from the intoxication with love, ridiculed by the chapter subtitles taken from cheap operettas and romances to complete isolation, parodied by an allusion to the classical Ukrainian subject of the seduced girl ("Oh Lord, Why Do You Punish the Girl?").

If it were not for this irony, if Pidmohylny did not hide behind his characters, he could have taken as the epigraph to his novel the well-known lines from Lermontov about life being "an empty and stupid joke." But Lermontov still realized the tragic quality of life's situations; for Pidmohylny there are merely "little touches of drama."

Was this novel an anti-Soviet work? Not in a political sense. First of all, because the author in this novel ignores politics. It is a philosophical work. The author professes a kind of agnosticism. Any attempt to identify Slavenko with Soviet ideology would be naive. Yuri Oleksandrovych could not care less about the class struggle. He also ridicules materialism: "A materialist science. That's daring! Science is neither materialist nor idealist, it is simply science. It is impartial and can't be answerable for the direction of its conclusions." Slavenko admits the existence of God but is himself indifferent to it since God cannot be known by scientific methods and, he might have added, does not in the end have any influence on the processes of protein.

Pidmohylny's novel is not directed against the Soviet regime as such but against a much wider phenomenon, of which the Soviet system is a part. It is directed against the technological civilization of our time. It is anti-Soviet because it has an independent spirit, because it is full of irony about the religion of reason and of progress. It demonstrates the limitations of reason and the absence of progress and to these two new religions opposes its own bitter agnosticism.

Pidmohylny's work has nothing to do with political pamphlets. But it has a lot to do with Ukrainian literature. Its place is among the intellectual, ironic novels of the late 1920's with which Ukrainian literature greeted the technological era and its political prelude in the U.S.S.R.—the terror of the 1930's. Yohansen's *Podorozh doktora Leonarda* (The Journey of Dr. Leonardo) and Domontovych's *Doktor Serafikus* are novels of this type.

As literature, *A Little Touch of Drama* is inferior to its predecessor, *The City*. It is too symmetrical, too mathematically structured, too enclosed. *The City* has a wider horizon. Yet, from the point of view of the universal, not merely

Ukrainian literature, *A Little Touch of Drama* may be more significant. *The City* in philosophy and structure belongs to the tradition of Balzac and Maupassant. A noble tradition and a most valuable contribution to Ukrainian prose. Yet from the point of view of European literature it belongs, all the same, to the past. *A Little Touch of Drama*, despite all its limitations, is more original in contemporary European terms. I would call it a pre-existential novel. The experimental, enclosed quality foreshadows Sartre's *Huis-clos.* In its identification of life with jelly-like protein there is a premonition of the later existential concept of the human body as a heap of slime. The agnosticism of the work anticipates the idea of human alienation.

Yet these features must not be exaggerated. The main existential idea—of grappling with life, despite its ugliness and doom, is absent in Pidmohylny. Perhaps it had not yet been developed and perhaps it would have been absent even if he had been able to continue writing. Still, the names of Kierkegaard and Keyserling do not appear on the pages of the novel by accident. Pidmohylny's work is a small, unnoticed, and yet quite distinct link in the development of modern literature.

— *George Shevelov*

AN IVY ALL ALONE IN THE WORLD

To spend my girlhood deep in love
I'd like to live like a free bird,
All choices open to my heart
Which knows best what it craves.

(from a very sentimental romance)

There will come a time when this woman
will feel like a girl. The knowledge
of love's pleasures will remain in her
like the memory of a forbidden book
read long ago. She will be reborn
for a new life!

(from a very good novel)

The dense forest within which she walked with a sharp tremor in her heart and a tense body full of desire, was still and damp. Not a rustle, whistle, or crackle was to be heard; the heavy forest was dead and heartless behind the veil of the mounting air. She could not hear her footsteps on the ground and, as it were, floated further and deeper into the thicket while stern tree trunks seemed to step aside in front of her in an endless avenue leading to where she craved to go with her easy walk. She came to the edge of the forest. The invisible sun, somewhere behind her, cast a wide ray across the steppe and on a hill nearby she saw a church. She stopped and her heart stirred wildly in anticipation, nailing her to the spot with its every beat. For a monk was moving solemnly down from the church on the hill. Now he raised his bearded face and the short space grew with every stop, hiding the church and horizon. She waited with hope and fear, feeling his approach as if it were a storm. Now he was raising his hand to her breasts and at that moment from behind his horrible body there sounded thousands of bells stretching out in an endless piercing sound which enveloped her like a wave, plunging her into darkness.

Marta suddenly opened her eyes and automatically reached for the alarm clock which shook the entire room with its sharp, familiar, ugly ring. Her fingers eagerly tried to seize the cruel

knob of the alarm, this early morning assailant of her young sleep. Enough, enough! She knows that it's half past seven and time to get up, to wash, have breakfast and run to the office. But the alarm clock's zeal has spent itself and a pale February morning was looking at the girl from behind the transparent window curtain.

At that very moment Marta felt cold. She was lying on her back, uncovered, with an eiderdown and a blanket crumpled at her feet. She remained lying there for a moment, then slowly sat up in bed, pressing her hands against her face, to disperse the remnants of sleep. The shivered as she clearly felt the cold and began to get dressed quickly.

Last night she hadn't lit a fire in her room although four logs, the daily ration, had been brought in and lay together near the stove. She had come back late from the theatre, in a bad mood, so she was too lazy to start a fire and had gone to bed quickly, dissatisfied, with an indefinable weight on her breast which pressed gently but obstinately. It was a sort of spiritual boredom, a slight, unpleasant feeling of inner disorder as if some stray matter had fallen between the cogs of her soul and was slowing down their normal rhythm. But she soon fell asleep and, as always when she was sad or disappointed, sleep came to her gently and willingly.

She didn't even ask Liova to come in. But he wouldn't be offended. In fact, she was tired of his dropping in, which had gone on for two years, his silent obsequiousness, colorless language and his imperturbable humility. Just think—she had turned him out of her room, called him a fool publicly, forbade him to see her for months and he had taken it all. Not once had he grown angry. Once, quite a long time ago, he had said that he loved her and it was an unforgivable mistake to have allowed him to say so in one of his moods of self-pity and loneliness. An unforgivable mistake.

Now she had her shoes on and a rough wool dress which served as a housecoat. She opened the door energetically and went to the kitchen where it was even darker and colder with its frosted windowpanes. The young woman stopped here for a while and listened, although she knew that at that time the kitchen was usually empty. Her neighbour, Frau Holz, a German woman, had left to do her shopping half an hour earlier and the family of the co-op worker, Ivanchuk, would begin life half an hour later. This was what forced Marta to set her alarm for half past seven, although she would not be late for work if she got up at eight. She had a lively temperament and all her daily tasks she did surprisingly quickly. She was ready in seconds, swallowed her breakfast, paced about gaily and her coat and hat put

themselves on automatically before she left the house. She was just the same at work so that her immediate supervisor, the manager of the statistical section of the Tobacco Trust, an unfriendly and taciturn man, once called her "an exemplary worker."

And yet every day she had to miss half an hour of sleep for several serious reasons. The point was that Marta loved to wash herself in cold water and then to dry her body with a rough towel till it was all red. This gave her encouragement for the entire day, otherwise she felt tired, lazy and unpleasant just like somebody used to cleaning her teeth every morning who one day doesn't do it. Water was her greatest passion in life. She had grown up near the Dnieper, in Kaniv, where the river is wide and full. Her father, a village school teacher, was very fond of fishing and she herself, like a boy, had been his ardent assistant when she was a small girl. It was then that she developed a special attitude to water, as to a special, elemental force of life and the source of all craving and power. So to her, winter, which stopped the flow of the great waters, always seemed dead and evil. Thus to her daily ritual she secretly added the inner one unnoticed by any outsider, a voluptuousness which often forms the deep substratum of human habits, a voluptuousness born in old, forgotten days, out of youthful undeveloped desires, turning habit into the steady ritual of living, elevating it to the main trait in a personality. She imagined water always to be cool like an evening stream, when in the dusk boys and girls go together to the river bank and swim in the water a few feet apart. As a teenager she had felt a joyful pang of shame and daring when she ran from the place where she undressed into the river, hiding herself in the water from the piercing eyes of the boys. There was a web of prohibition spun around it since her father did not approve of her communal evening swims.

All this happened very long ago, or it seemed very long ago, since youth in its impetuosity marks the past with peaks and gaps. Afterwards, her father died, but he did this honourably, since in 1927 she had already gone through the commercial vocational school and had a not at all bad job in the office of the Tobacco Trust. She was lucky, because after two months' work as a dull filing clerk she had been promoted, because of her ability, of course, to a clerical position in the statistical section of this huge institution with a salary of 60 rubles per month.

Her flat on Zhylanska street she had found eight months ago and was, on the whole, pleased with it since her room was warm and the rent was five rubles a month. The low rent she owed to her neighbour, the co-op worker Ivanchuk, who had

pleaded for her with the landlord, the former owner, who lived in a different house across the yard. The only drawback of the room, and even this was relative, was that it was too large for one person. The co-op worker had remarked on the day she moved in:

"This room has some spare space. When you get married you can find room in it for your husband."

Marta was friendly with Davyd Semenovych and he often visited her in the evening when, after putting his four-year-old daughter to bed, he was left alone since his wife worked during the night shift at the People's Food plant. Davyd Semenovych thought it his duty to complain continually about this, but he couldn't do anything about it since they could not afford to have a babysitter during the day and could not manage without his wife's salary.

As a matter of fact, Davyd Semenovych was a former co-op worker, now unemployed. A year and a half ago he had lost his job as a result of cuts in personnel which were never restored. At first he took all this quite cheerfully since he couldn't imagine that his unemployment would last long; this would simply be unnatural. But as time went on his hope began to dwindle, and he grew bitter. He started to imagine that behind the mechanical working of the decree which took his job away, there lay hidden deeper reasons. He spent much of his free time unravelling them. First of all, he thought he had been fired because he was honest, since not only did he not steal himself but he wouldn't let the others do it.

"I was in their way," he muttered mysteriously. Secondly, he was convinced that he had been dismissed because of his independent character.

"I didn't bow down before them and I never will," he said proudly. "I'm not a slave!"

All this he said rather quietly, only among friends. Indeed, he had come to the conclusion that nowadays there was no such thing as a co-operative movement, especially if its finest representatives were deprived of their jobs, and that the Soviet government was one of the saddest sights on earth. This last remark he made to Marta alone and pledged her to secrecy.

Sometimes, he was given small errands by his former contacts, sporadic trips into the countryside, mostly of a speculative nature, but none of these could satisfy him after a steady job and a salary. As time passed the co-op worker's anger subsided and what was left was sheer annoyance, shame and hatred for everyone. If it wasn't for his wife who worked, Davyd Semenovych would probably have found himself in jail for fraud. Were he a wiser man he would have turned into a

prominent pessimist, but he merely became a grumbler, dull and coarse in his expressions. All the same, Marta liked his grumbling and his malice, she often laughed at him and he became a frequent visitor to her room. She liked to have this domestic malcontent near her; he reminded her of an angry animal always snarling through a toothless mouth. Sensing her interest in him, Davyd Semenovych tried all the harder but didn't have the courage to beef in front of strangers because he was afraid. Instead, whenever he found Marta alone he made up for his silence by making coarse jokes about her visitors all of whom he called "creeps."

All this continued to amuse Marta, but she noticed that Davyd Semenovych tended more and more often to drop into the kitchen accidentally in the morning just when she was getting washed. This was another reason why she had decided to use the communal kitchen half an hour earlier.

Marta dressed quickly and while she did so managed to drink half a bottle of milk, cut some bread which made up her breakfast if one doesn't count the cup of tea which she usually had in the office. The need to be respectably dressed forced her to save on food and confine herself to simple, cheap but nourishing items. Now she was quite ready for her socially useful work, but her alarm clock indicated that it was too early to start. So, she sat at the table and opened a book.

As often happens to people romantically inclined or to those dissatisfied with some aspect of their existence, a book became for Marta a point of departure for her own thoughts. Her large bluish-grey eyes, filled with the elegiac beauty of youth and the secret hypnotism of love, slowly and almost solemnly rose after following a few lines on the page and sank into the circumference of her room. She sat in this position for five or ten minutes, not yet in a dream, but feeling a dull and tender ache, like regret for a great loss or an unclear presentiment of it. It was that sorrow, which enchants by its stillness, by the softness of the first encounter and contains the joy and the fear of anguish, which tempts and envelops one with its beautiful void, miraculously transforming longing into deep satisfaction. It flares up and subsides, grows louder and softer like a distant echo, it pulsates in tune with the heartbeat and creates all around an atmosphere of nightmarish happiness. Only then does the drowsy disarmed fantasy lead to daydreams.

Suddenly an unbidden thought came into Marta's head and she quickly got up. "What rubbish," she thought. She didn't want to wait any longer and, putting on her coat, she walked on out to the street.

The one-storey, shabby building on Zhylanska street where

Marta lived had its main entrance boarded up for the winter. This was to ward off the cold, thus lightening the lodgers' budget by a few logs. The poverty-ridden house and its lodgers were for Marta a good school of independent living. Indigence is the mother of thrift and self-denial, two very necessary virtues for a girl earning sixty rubles a month. Marta's needs were few and sometimes she had to save for six months to get something she wanted–a pair of shoes, a dress or a hat. The youthful idealism of her views was combined with a practical outlook, the knack of always having a new dress, even though it might be made from an old one, of keeping her shoes in good repair, of not tearing her stockings and avoiding stains and holes. The theatre and the cinema were much too luxurious for her. Some of her wealthier boyfriends who would sometimes take her there left her after awhile because she seemed to them too aloof, and those who were more faithful, like the co-op worker and Liova, were financially worse off than she.

Marta never sought the wealthier ones; they came systematically on their own. She abused them for their self-confidence, but she exploited their favours with naive shyness until she disappointed them with her behaviour. She was always annoyed by their eagerness, their pleading seemed ridiculous to her and not long ago, ten days or so, she had had a decisive talk with a young man who had showered her for a long time with theatres and candies. He called her "a heart of stone," cruel, incapable of love and left her, as many had before him. The next day Davyd Semenovych carefully dropped in and seeing Marta alone asked slyly:

"You all alone?"

"At least you have come to take pity on me."

"So you chewed him off. Ah, the creep . . . ."

That night she and Liova went to the theatre like the Germans: each paid for himself.

Marta walked along snowcovered streets shielding herself from the frost in her short, fur-collared coat and quickly counted in her head: "It is now the middle of February, March, April–altogether two months and then spring! Only wait a little longer and it will get warmer, the ugly, cold snow will thaw, the trees will burst into bud and life will be different–life without an overcoat," she thought. "Later on there will be the river holiday." Her future for the rest of the year seemed good and she gaily entered the Tobacco Trust.

She was the first to come to her section, since it was a quarter to nine and her co-workers usually came five minutes before nine. A letter was waiting for her on her desk and she had something to do for this spare moment.

Dnipropetrovske, Feb. 19, 1928.

Marta,

I'm reminding you of myself as I promised. This is to let you know that at the end of February I shall be in Kiev to wind up my affairs there since I am settling down in Dnipropetrovske. But there is one more thing to be settled in Kiev. You can guess what it is. I ask you very seriously to remember what we talked about, to consider it practically and to give me your reply. My intentions have not changed and I ask you to take them seriously.

Dmytro

Marta could not help smiling. What a stubborn boy! He was the only one of her boyfriends who had talked not of love but of legal marriage. Three months ago he had disappeared, after finishing the Polytechnic with a diploma and going to a post in Dnipropetrovske. What gave him the right to approach her so directly?

At that moment two hands were laid on Marta's shoulders. She shuddered, but said:

"Comrade Vorozhiy, drop your silly jokes."

"How did you guess? I can't surprise you," laughed Vorozhiy, the accountant in her section, letting her go.

"A letter—who's it from, Marta?"

He took Marta's arm, pressing her elbow hard and tried to snatch the letter with his other hand.

"Let go!" she called out, angrily. "Once and for all, please don't touch me. I'm sick of it."

"Please, not so loud, comrade, or else people will hear," Vorozhiy implored in confusion. "There, I've let you go."

Marta could not restrain herself. She reddened and yelled at him:

"You know how to annoy people, but you're scared of them! Brute! I warn you, once more and I shall report you to the trade union. What is this? Everybody can insult you, be on familiar terms with you."

"I wasn't familiar with you," protested Vorozhiy.

"Then you will be tomorrow, if you aren't told off!"

"Please be quiet!" The accountant was upset.

"I'm kind to you and you make a scene."

"What's up? Good morning," said the typist, Lina, who had just come in.

"We've quarrelled over the weather," mumbled Marta.

"The weather's fine. But why such a noise?" asked Lina.

"Comrade Marta is always excited when she talks about the weather. Maybe she's afraid of catching a cold." Vorozhiy rubbed it in. "A real member of the intelligentsia," he thought to himself.

"So, that's it."

Lina, a gentle and unattractive girl, looked surprised at Marta and began to spread out her papers near the typewriter. Conscientious in her work to the point of pedantry, reserved and quiet, she betrayed her presence in the office by the clatter of her typewriter. Generally the statistical section was very quiet and businesslike, indeed exceptional in the busy life of the trust. Office workers would say 'quiet statistics.' The reason for this was to be found not in Lina's temperament but in the director of the section, Bezpalko, a reserved, businesslike man. He was one of those whose authority is never questioned and even the madcap Vorozhiy fell in with the severe atmosphere of the section. They all knew that comrade Bezpalko, apart from managing the statistical section, was a big wheel in the affairs of the trust and that this he owed to his great experience as an economist. Some even wondered why he was not in a better and higher job. The answer was sometimes that this was because he was not a Party member and sometimes because he was a bit eccentric and a rabid hunter.

He came in sharp at half past ten. Tall, with a high forehead, greying hair, handsome once upon a time, he was a fine figure of a man. With a brief greeting to his three co-workers he sat silently behind his desk.

During the break, when everyone had a cup of tea, Lina came up to Marta and said with some embarrassment:

"Comrade Marta, I want to ask you a great favour. Can you come with me after the break? I've already asked comrade Bezpalko for permission for us both," she added quickly. "You see . . . I want . . . I have to register today in ZAHS* . . . I'm getting married. If we go after work we'll be too late."

"Are you really getting married?" asked Marta with surprise.

"Is that so peculiar and impossible?" blushed Lina. "It's true, I'm not good-looking, I know . . ."

"No, no, not because of that,"—although this was precisely why she was surprised. "It's just that it's so odd to see someone for several months and not notice anything. And yet that person has had a very important experience. So when you get to

* Marriage registry office

know about it it seems strange . . . No, I'm so glad. Congratulations! Who is he—this choice of your heart, 'The sovereign of dreams'?"

"There's nothing like that about it. What do you mean? It's a very practical thing, nothing more. We've wanted to get married for some time and now there's an opportunity. His parents are moving and they're leaving us their apartment. He's working and so am I. So we'll be able to manage."

On the way to the ZAHS Marta felt some awkwardness. She had nothing to do with her friend's big event but she had to play an important part in it. In modern terms she was to act as bridesmaid, a part sanctified of old by tradition and ritual. To bridge the gulf between them Marta said:

"You know why there was a scene this morning? That man Vorozhiy pesters me when I'm alone. He's not bad, but what nerve!"

"Really? You attract them. Do you have many love affairs?"

"No. That is, I'm not in love with anyone," was Marta's stern reply.

"Yes, it must be nice for a girl," Lina was continuing her thought, "but one can live without it. The main thing is to get on with living."

Two young men were waiting for them in ZAHS. One, the bridegroom, in a deerskin coat, was quite elegant, with a pipe in his teeth. He introduced himself to Marta, smiled pleasantly, but paid her no attention.

They had to wait a little, while the couple ahead of them registered their separation, petty-bourgeois, who had quarrelled fiercely over the division of their property. They had divided the most valuable part before the girls came, but now they fought over two pairs of chickens and three jars of preserves. The man had a right to these.

"You took the pillows," he said. "All right, I'll sleep on the stone floor, but the chickens and jam are mine according to law."

"And what about the gramophone? You forgot that."

"Why not divide it?" said the official. "Chickens to one and jam to the other."

"I agree," said the woman. "I'll take the poultry—let him take the jam."

Her husband suddenly showed great generosity: "I'll give you one jar of jam as well, as long as we part in peace. Do you want the raspberry?"

After this Lina and her fiance came up to the wicket and gave all the necessary brief answers. They all signed the papers

and so two human beings were sanctioned by the state to become Adam and Eve.

The bridegroom's witness left as soon as they reached the street and the three of them were left together. Marta was itching to ask the couple if they planned to have a church ceremony as well but she was too shy to do it. They were, after all, strangers to her. The fact that Lina had asked her, without knowing her very well, suggested that they regarded ZAHS as a pure formality.

"They'll get married in church," thought Marta. "Then they'll have a reception, will invite guests. Oh, what hypocrisy!"

"I must be off to my trade union meeting," said the bridegroom.

"And I must go the library," responded Lina.

They walked along together for some time.

"You walk so slowly," Marta remarked.

"Our path is long," joked the bridegroom.

"Do you mean your life's path?"

The conversation came to a halt. At last Marta was thanked for her "kind assistance," as Lina called it, and then she went to get something to eat at a cheap, unappetizing canteen. Later she had to go to a class in typing for she wanted to improve her qualifications.

Marta's mood was ruined. This marriage ceremony had left a nasty taste in her mouth. Why? Was she jealous, as if one could be envious of such trivialities?

"They'll be happy, no doubt about it," she thought. And although she had no desire, open or concealed, to break up their happiness, faced with it she felt a little hurt.

FLOWERS FROM AN UNKNOWN KNIGHT-ERRANT

Marta returned home around seven in the evening after a day's work. She felt tired out, not so much from work as from a dull inner excitement. "I hope nobody comes," she thought on the way, planning to start a fire, settle down in front of it, read and simply daydream.

In the kitchen the co-op worker's wife was finishing her last domestic chores before setting out for work. Tetiana Nechyporivna, a plump woman, was always calm to the point of indifference. In her serene attitude to life there could have been great wisdom if it were expressed in philosophy rather than in everyday life. This woman, because of her unruffled nature made everything stand still in ease and quiet comfort. She was a creature of seclusion, symmetry and balance. Marta liked to imagine her surrounded by a crowd of children to whom she would bring peace and relaxation. Yet Tetiana had only one child, a daughter Ada, and when Marta asked why she didn't have more, Mrs. Ivanchuk quietly answered:

"It's impossible. We can't afford them."

The co-op worker told everybody that his wife worked in the People's Food Trust, but this was not exactly true. More precisely, Tetiana was in charge of a buffet at the Karavaiv Baths and this job was a constant source of annoyance to the co-op worker because he believed that working in a place like that was beneath one's dignity.

"Good day, or good evening," she answered Marta's greeting. "There's a surprise waiting for you in your room."

"I don't want any surprises; I want to sleep. I'm dead tired," said Marta.

"I don't believe you. At your age you should just go on dancing," remarked goodnatured Tetiana.

Turning on the light in her room, Marta saw the surprise: a large basket of white chrysanthemums, decorated with wide cream-coloured paper bands. It rose unexpectedly in front of her as if moulded out of snow about to melt—still, solemn and humble. It looked as if it had come from some distant messenger, bringing her beautiful greetings from far away.

For a moment Marta stood quite enchanted, her heart beating joyously, overcome by the soft flowers. Was this strange encounter to make up for her recent frustrations? She unfolded in front of the flowers, growing light like their gorgeous blossoms, her eyes reflecting the white glow of the chrysanthemums.

"Lovely, lovely!" she cried.

Suddenly she was curious: who were they from? Who could have sent her this smile of love? Without taking off her coat she came up to the basket and rummaged around in search of a card. She found nothing.

This was the third time she had received flowers like this. The first basket had come about five months ago, the second two months ago and now this one. She thought she could explain the first two. She could guess who their senders were, probably boyfriends who wanted to intrigue her. But now she could not guess. She was alone now; all her admirers had left her, disappointed, and the new ones had not yet arrived to be disappointed. She did not, of course, count Liova and the co-op worker, her only companions in life.

Now she tied all three baskets together with one string and concluded that they had all come from the same person. She felt frightened, as if someone had been watching her for a long time, hiding behind her back and watching her every movement. What did he want and who was he? She imagined someone very severe, stepping into her footprints and carrying within him dark desires, perhaps right now wandering around her flat, waiting for her to appear.

She shuddered and took off her coat.

After lighting the fire Marta let her fancy roam more freely. From disjointed fragments she had preserved from here and there she sewed up a cloth of desire. Entangling reality with dreams, she moulded a male figure, felt its proximity, and unspoken words. This figure, seen with her still eyes, breathed on her with fire and slowly changed into a legendary giant, into a nightmare of restless feeling.

Someone knocked on the door.

"Who's there?" Marta called out, frightened. Liova appeared on the threshold. He had come in through the side entrance which stayed open late.

"Couldn't you stay away one evening?" Marta blurted out, not hiding her disappointment.

"I just dropped in for a second," he said with a worried look. "You yourself asked yesterday . . . here's the book."

"Well, take off your coat without introductions . . .," she said. "Wait, I'll just wash my hands."

"You have flowers," he said when she came back.

"Yes, flowers! That's something for you. Some unknown admirer has sent me a third basket. Quite unknown. A distant knight-errant. Don't just stand there,"—Liova was tall and thin—"you fill up the whole room. Sit in your usual chair. That's what I like—to send flowers to someone unknown. That's unselfish, generous. And you've known me for so long and still . . ."

"But Marta," Liova started to mumble, "you told me yourself . . ."

"Yes, I know, I told you not to," she stopped him. "It would be ridiculous if you bought bouquets out of your salary. But you could pinch a single flower and give it to me."

"It's winter now, Marta; there are no flowers."

"Don't find excuses."

"And then, one flower—it's so sentimental, so out of touch with our times. It's different to give a whole basket."

"Out of touch with the times. Why are you so afraid to be out of touch? Everything sincere is good any time. Any why is giving a basket different?"

"Well, the size and the price."

"At last you've said something funny!" she cried. "But, Liova, we have to wait a whole year to hear you tell one joke."

He smiled sadly.

"A third basket means something," said Marta pensively. "Three is a magic number and now the unknown knight-errant must appear, having declared himself three times."

"Yes, that would be very much to the point," Liova said impulsively.

"Do you have any ideas about my unknown admirer?" she asked looking steadily at him.

Liova felt uneasy.

"Marta, you always suspect that I . . ."

"I know what you're thinking. Maybe it would be just as well if the unknown admirer did appear," she said. "Liova, you can't imagine what a predicament modern women are placed in by knights-errant like that. In the old days a girl could dream of princes. Although it was a waste of time she could still dream about them. Yet without dreams what is our youth worth? Let's take you—you work at the co-op, you sell sausages, if I remember rightly, and how can you manage without dreams?"

"I love my dreams," answered Liova hoarsely.

"You see. But nowadays it's so difficult to dream. We can still do it, of course, but it's no use. There are no objects for our dreams. And so dreams become rather foggy. For instance, you could dream about the people's commissar. But you know that

a people's commissar is a business-like person. You can see him, in fact there are photos of him and his speeches are printed in the newspapers. No, you can't dream about a people's commissar. It's something quite different."

"Yes, it is," Liova agreed.

"Or, there's a song about falling in love with a GPU man. That's simply ridiculous. It's a parody of dreaming . . . One of my friends got married today. Such a nice girl, only rather unattractive. She and her fiancé waited a long time until they could move into an apartment. So they got married. So simple—they couldn't get married since there was no apartment. The most important thing, she said, is to go on living. That's not life. We must have illusions."

"You're right, Marta," remarked Liova. "Long live illusions!"

Marta moved impulsively to the flowers and pressed a large chrysanthemum to her cheek.

"Oh, how cold it is and damp," she called out, letting the flower drop.

Liova was watching her anxiously. She sat opposite him and said in a sombre tone:

"Liova, shut the stove. It's all burned up and now it will be cold again. Come and sit near me," she said when he had closed the stove. "I don't feel too well these days. Some neurasthenia. Sometimes I'm quite depressed. I feel as if I'm locked in a narrow circle. Outside there are a lot of people, possibly very interesting, certainly very interesting, but I don't know them. We can't know everybody, but it would be nice. Although, then again, I wish I didn't know anybody."

"You should fall in love," Liova suggested seriously.

"How dare you say that!" she exclaimed. "You only show your contempt for women. There's your male attitude. You've learnt nothing from the revolution. What egoism and arrogance! Men may be depressed—that's all right—but a woman must fall in love and everything will be fine. So that's what you think! Men will create, direct and offer women an opportunity to fall in love with them. Why didn't you simply say: get married. You weren't brave enough to say it. What rubbish. How dare you think so? How many times have I told you not to mention love. This is a precondition of our friendship. If you can't keep it, don't come again."

"How beautiful she is," Liova thought.

Because of the hopelessness of his feelings for Marta he began to feel pleasure in humiliation. His constant visits could not help but annoy her just when she wanted to be alone and so her annoyance became his secret pleasure. So Liova became a

voluntary scapegoat for Marta's bad moods, the object of her anger. Sometimes she would even turn him out. Liova would walk away then full of satisfaction because he had utterly humiliated himself. But after a while he would long to see her again and would appear at the right moment.

Marta calmed down and asked:

"After all, who can I fall in love with?"

Liova hadn't thought for a moment that it could be he. He livened up:

"What do you mean, Marta? You have so many chances."

"Wait, what chances? I exclude all students—after all, I'm a graduate. These boys just want to have a girl on the side—their main interest is finishing school. That's natural, but I exclude them. Writers are looking for material—that's rather mean. The managers are too proud, the engineers too professional, all taken up with their plans and factories. Bookkeepers, teachers, administrators—they're all wrong. I want," she burst out suddenly, "to fall in love madly, just as they write about it in novels. Yes, just like a novel!"

Liova nodded.

"But he must love me madly, too," she continued sternly. "He must forget everything, leave his work, friends, duties, everything. He must forget everything, begin something new and unique . . ."

"Marta, you talk so wonderfully."

Liova's eyes gleaming; he bent down as if he were about to fall on his knees in front of the girl.

"It should be like a play," she went on feverishly. "The curtain goes up and everything is bathed in soft light. Groves appear, secluded, with tender grass. A stream flows by. It's so still in the evening you could almost walk across it. You enter, go deeper and deeper, grow lighter and lighter, finally become weightless and you begin to swim . . . Liova, bring me my knight-errant."

"Why not find out who sent you the flowers?"

"Must it be the same one?" said Marta pensively.

Liova lit a cigarette and sank into deep thought, tugging nervously at his sideburns with his left hand. The sideburns, although sparse, made his face original in these days of clean shaving. They were somewhat old-fashioned, reminiscent of the times when any growth was considered a sign of manliness and the braid was a standard part of womanly beauty. Now, when scissors and razor have changed human faces, sideburns cause a stir. Liova let them grow because his former wife had liked them. Later, he simply kept them, though they made him look not like a lion but a bit like a poodle.

The silence was broken by Marta.

"I told you a lot of rubbish," she said coldly. "You'd better go home."

"I can introduce you to a friend of mine."

"What for? Excuse me, Liova, I'm going to lie down for a little while, I'm so tired. Who is your friend?" she asked, lying down on the bed.

"A doctor."

"Are you crazy? Doctors carry the smell of drugs with them. Besides, he may want to cure me."

"He's a doctor who doesn't treat anyone."

"How's that?"

"A research scientist, a professor," Liova explained. "No, he's quite young, about my age," he added, blushing. "I forget what his field is—but he doesn't practise."

Marta was silent, her eyes closed.

"We met at the front, in the Red Army. That's where he had to be a doctor and cure people. I was his nursing assistant."

"What priceless occupations—sausages, nursing . . . were you ever a vet?"

"You shouldn't judge people by their occupations," Liova protested vehemently and then gently added, "I told you, Marta, it isn't important what a man does. To judge anyone like that is barbarous." He was ashamed at his own words and added, "Excuse me, all I wanted to say is that it's wrong to look at people from that angle. Have I offended you?"

"Not at all, " Marta answered dully. "Go on, I'm listening."

Liova felt encouraged. "Marta, I can tell you a lot. I don't consider myself very wise or intelligent; on the contrary, I read very little and sometimes I feel quite ignorant. But I don't think education is that important. I know it's arrogant to think like this but still I think so sometimes . . . I think a lot, Marta. Is that ridiculous? Everyone lives as best he can—so an old sage said and it's true. When you understand this you understand everything. Everybody lives as best he can—that's well said, Marta. You, and your neighbours and everybody—they all live as best they can. They can't do anything else."

"Well, what can you do?" she asked. "It's obvious we can't change our lives. That's a poor thought, Liova. No, your theory is wrong; no one will buy it." "And yet," insisted Liova, "everyone lives as best he can, and always did. There is nothing sad in this, Marta. Everyone has great possibilities. Great men are those who reach their possibilities."

"So everyone can be great," Marta laughed.

"Yes, everybody. Don't you feel yourself that you're

capable of greatness? Only you don't know how to achieve it. The most important thing is to know yourself. Life forces us not to think about ourselves. Yet you, Marta, are a whole world, a great, splendid world. And so is everybody. What we see and feel in people are only fragments of what, perhaps, is the worst in them. That's why it's impossible to judge people by their occupations. You are a clerk, a typist—that's unimportant. That's for statistics, for your boss, but for the world you are something new and different . . ."

"Now your argument isn't sad anymore; it's cheerful. To feel like a world—no one will turn that down," she said. "But this world is ephemeral, Liova. It's only good in one's own room, to dream about flowers from an unknown admirer. I can't forget how cold these flowers were."

"But your heart will warm them," Liova assured her. "Don't think that in talking about the heart I am some kind of idealist. What's it matter if your soul is only a couple of reflexes, but you feel it right inside you? What if sounds are air tremors if you hear music? These are empty definitions, Marta; they explain nothing. That's all a lie—excuse me, I wanted to say they aren't true," he added in confusion.

Since Marta did not say anything, he continued: "Man is weighed down by many things. Each of us is full of the past, superstitious. We're all in a certain framework—family, society, profession, nation, class. Only when we shed these do we become human beings."

He looked at her. She was lying down, with her eyes closed. He stopped short. For one brief moment a happy smile changed his face completely. His eyes were aflame, phosphorescent like the sea. He pressed his hands together and said almost in a whisper:

"You don't know your power, Marta. I can feel it. You breathe warmth—you are a fire of happiness. The frozen ones, the crippled and the dulled come to you and stretch out their hands. They shed their daily yoke and come to you. Marta, you must recognize your power and let others feel it. You are a real sovereign of this earth; all you see belongs to you."

"Give it up, Liova," she said slowly. "I'm only getting 60 rubles a month."

"Everything," he whispered in ecstasy. "You only think it doesn't belong to you, but it does, Marta—you don't know your own power. And my love knows it."

It was with a great effort that Liova squeezed out the last sentence and then he was suddenly wide awake. His long body swayed on the chair, all out of balance.

"Please don't turn me out," he said imploringly.

"I won't," said Marta. "But you'd better go home all the same. You're so excited."

He obediently put on his fur coat and picked up his hat. Then he asked shyly:

"May I introduce you to my friend?"

"If you like," Marta said indifferently, getting up. "I'll have one more friend, Liova. Here's the book. You go now, Liova. I shall read."

He bowed silently and left. As always he shut the door carefully behind him and stopped in thought on the porch. Fine snow, which had started to fall during the evening, covered him in seconds, melting on his sideburns and small beard. His tall unbending figure stopped for a while and then, with long strides, he passed from the courtyard into the street.

Liova lived on an unfamiliar little street, Arsenalna, which was difficult to find in the bypaths of the Cave Monastery and was always confused with Arsenal street, an avenue famous in the history of the revolution, south of the factory of the same name.

Arsenal street is long and wide, while Arsenalna is lined with one-storey houses surrounded by the inevitable gardens and tribes of cats and dogs. Because only workers, labourers, laundresses and carters live here, all leaving their houses for work during the day, the animals clearly outnumber people in the street. Behind low fences there are houses a bit like the ones in a village, consisting of a kitchen and a room, where the mistress of the house will inevitably wipe the dust off the chair with her apron before asking a visitor to sit down. Nowhere does the city seem so far away as here in this city quarter and people must be either very indifferent or else very self-centered if they voluntarily choose to live in a dump like this.

The story of the sideburned Liova might be an example of the utterly obscene influence which personal moments exert on human life. He was born in Kaniv into the family of an assistant doctor and he became one himself. He served one year in the tsarist army and came home in 1917, when he fell passionately in love with the daughter of a local accountant, who had finished four grades of high school. He married her and they settled happily not far from their native village, he practising his profession.

His life promised to develop in a straight line to an old age, enhanced by his lively temperament, simplicity of life-style and devotion to duty. But late in 1919 a unit of the Red Army which happened to pass through his village drafted him into its ranks, tearing him from his family nest, separating him from his beloved wife and propelling him into the revolutionary struggle.

At the front Liova Rotter remained cheerful and gentle, fulfilling his duties most conscientiously, but secretly dreaming of his wife whom he now came to worship. In his loneliness he made her into a cult and during the long hours of night he thought of their future reunion and read her short letters over and over again.

After six months he received a long letter from her. In it the accountant's daughter wrote that medic Rotter had ruined her youth by shutting her within four walls, that he had treacherously seduced her although she was not in love with him, that she had high aspirations and that at last a generous man had appeared who had made her see all this and won her love forever. So, she had decided to follow this extraordinary man and she cursed Liova for wasting the best years of her life.

Liova, who was then 23, was more than astonished by this letter. He was stunned, overwhelmed and ruined. He could not understand anything. First, his wife had never shown any dissatisfaction with their marriage or with him. On the contrary, she had been very affectionate, happy with her life in the village—the village intelligentsia had seemed to satisfy her social aspirations—and suddenly this. Liova felt an acute pang of surprise. Secondly, he didn't think his wife was capable of writing such an overblown letter ending with a curse. Later, he came to the conclusion that the letter was dictated to her by this extraordinary man who had come from nowhere and stirred in his wife higher aspirations. Liova never learnt who he was because when, after a year, his wife returned to him in tears saying that that exceptional man had simply cheated her and then left her alone, medic Rotter refused to speak to her, throwing her out in a fit of great rage which was quite frightening to him. In another year the poor woman, so beautiful and so full of aspirations, died of typhus.

Actually, neither her appearance as a fallen woman nor her premature death had made any great impression on Liova; he simply could not get over her letter. For him it was a spiritual catastrophe, the complete devastation of his being—all the stranger, since it happened during the war when conditions do not favour personal experiences and make people careless in matters of love.

However this may be, medic Rotter received a deep wound from this marital betrayal which scarred his later life. Suddenly, he showed great bravery at the front. Great opportunities opened up to him in the medical-administrative field but he refused to exploit them. He remained the same brave and gentle youth, although when left alone he fell deeper and deeper into introspection, concentrating more on his own inner self. Al-

though he felt that he was rising above all the others, in fact he had sunk into the kind of icehole which may easily be encountered in life. It seemed to him that he was freeing himself from all kinds of bonds, that he had been purified from thousands of superstitions and had entered into a new, clear perception of life, to a detached evaluation of it. All around him foundations were falling down, contradictions arose, thunderstorms of the future roared and in this chaos, in the midst of blood and strife, passion and fear, and unforgettable events, Liova Rotter secretly, a stranger to everyone, went doggedly along his own path, delving into strange ideas which ceaselessly flooded his mind.

He was helped in this by old books which he devoured eagerly. These were books of human wisdom, often used in those days to roll a cigarette, dusty and yellowed works, in which human minds tried to explore everything, creating in their thirst and restlessness many contradictions. The medic religiously studied these books which were destined for the garbage heap of history. He even noted down the glimmers of his own thoughts, placing like a motto on his notebook the words of Soren Kierkegaard: "Who is the happiest if not the unhappiest one, and who is the unhappiest if not the happy one, and what is life if not madness and faith, insanity and hope, a delayed blow on the scaffold, and love like a thrust into a wound."

It must be admitted that this sentence was not a bad beginning for his own meditations, which were more or less as follows:

"Who is the strongest? He who, while alive, has conquered life in himself."

"Life's joys may be compared to a large piece of bacon in a deep hole of suffering."

"Our birth is pain and death an agony. Everything between these two poles is dreary."

He never shared his views with anyone and he never read his aphorisms to anyone, although sometimes he wanted to tell them to his friendly comrades of whom there were many at the front. Yet he knew they might not understand him. So Liova kept it a secret, enjoying himself among the pleasures of his own underground thoughts. He kept it a secret too from Yuri Slavenko, a young doctor who came to the Polish front in 1920 straight from his medical research. They almost became friends, mostly because the medic volunteered for all the most difficult and most dangerous work in the front line. But their relationship quickly broke off when, at the end of the war, Slavenko immediately returned to his research work at Kiev University

and medic Rotter, after demobilization, decided to do more research on his own personality.

According to Liova's theory, occupation and place of work did not matter at all. So he changed jobs ten times after 1920 until in 1927 he came to Kiev to sort out sausages in one of the many co-op stores. By now he was a mild ascetic who understood life and had forgiven men, having renounced the desire to correct them—the best possible type of ascetic. He would have led his selfless existence in peace of a higher order if he hadn't met his father's friend, an old teacher from Kaniv, with whose daughter, Marta, Liova fell suddenly, madly and hopelessly in love—the love of a man far removed from real life and people, concentrating solely on world problems. It looked as if a second catastrophe had befallen him, a second wound which would utterly destroy him.

Liova was quite upset walking home. It seemed obvious to him that Yuri Slavenko should be introduced to Marta. "He is interesting and bright; she may fall in love with him," he thought. But a moment later he was overcome by a doubt. Perhaps the scientist wouldn't have anything to do with him?

They had met about three times since the war and he was even invited to visit. He would call on him. In any case, he would, he must try. Liova trembled with excitement. The young scientist was the only friend whom he was not ashamed of introducing to Marta. Why didn't he have more friends like that? So he must place all his hopes on this one. "I simply must do it," he said to himself.

As Liova was covering the distance from Zhylanska to Arsenalna, Marta sat deep in thought in front of the warm stove. Then she suddenly turned and knocked on the wall. This was a signal for her neighbour, the co-op worker, who soon afterwards appeared.

"Davyd Semenovych, tell me something interesting," she asked him plaintively.

"Sure, I'm always ready," laughed her visitor.

THE BEAUTIFUL SIREN–IRENE

A middle-aged woman, tall, thin and very old-fashioned in appearance, the wife of a well-known doctor, professor Markevych, came quietly up to the door of her dauther's room and knocked.

"Irene, may I come in?" she asked softly, opening the door a little.

The apartment was absolutely still. The professor had finished seeing his patients and his office was close to the ornate entrance, at the opposite end of the dining room, where a lamp was lit under a wide shade, casting light only on the table and a little space to each side. The oak chairs opposite the wall looked as if they were made of some dark stone while the pictures, copies of Aivazovsky, barely shone in the gilded frames, hung symmetrically, and the long redwood clock ticked softly, its huge balance accompanying the dull light over the table.

"Come in," her daughter replied.

Maria Mykolaivna stepped inside and immediately closed the door behind her so as not to let the heat out, for the temperature of her daughter's room was always five degrees higher than that of the rest of the apartment. Irene loved warmth and could not bear the cold, so she had an extra portion of firewood for her stove.

She was half lying on the sofa, reading and did not raise her eyes from the book. Her mother sat down beside her and said in Russian:

"It will soon be seven o'clock."

"Well?" asked Irene, finishing her sentence.

"And today is Thursday."

"Yes, I know," Irene said putting the book on one side. "You're more worried about it, mother, than I am."

"I must say," her mother spoke a little plaintively, "it baffles me a bit. He has been coming to see us for six months. I know you have nothing against it. On the contrary, he's a perfect match, handsome, has a good position and, unquestionably, a bright future in front of him."

"I know," Irene interjected. "We've talked about it before."

"Forgive me, Irene, but I can't understand why things are going so slowly. Surely these things happen quickly nowadays."

"What do you mean?" asked Irene.

"I'm afraid something is going to happen. Don't forget that people think of you as engaged—that's quite important. Last Thursday he didn't come at all."

"He had a meeting," her daughter answered slowly. "And on Saturday night we went to the theatre together—if you really want to know."

Maria Mykolaivna shook her head. "Don't forget that you're twenty-nine."

"The point is, mother," Irene spoke sharply, "that he's working on a big project now. He must have peace to finish it. That future you've talked about depends on it. If I thrust myself at him I should only antagonize him. You know scientists—their work comes first. We have to remember that. I must show him now that I support him and forget about my own interests. Once he finishes his work . . ."

"This may last a year."

"Maybe two. You're quite single-minded, mother."

"I'm only thinking of you, dear. Then, there's the problem of the apartment. The housing co-op wants to squeeze us in. The room we set aside for Yuri Oleksandrovych is in danger of being taken. Perhaps we should suggest his moving here for the time being?"

"The room can be used by a relation or somebody else," answered Irene. "I don't want to talk about it any more."

"Don't get upset," Maria Mykolaivna got up. "You know what I went through with your first marriage. I can't help getting worried." She went out to serve tea.

Irene lit a cigarette and sat down. She decided she wouldn't change. The blue tweed skirt and white English blouse made her look slim and casual. Let her tinted auburn hair stay a little untidy—it would give her a look of carelessness and simplicity. But she would use some strong perfume, since perfume accents the body and makes its ambience so desirable. It creates a bond between the body which exudes it and the body which inhales it, enveloping emotions with soft and warm visions, leading to the recognition of the dream of love as a subtle and distant reality.

She turned on the light near the triple-mirrored dresser and put out the light above the sofa. For convenience, each piece of furniture in her room had a light near it—the sofa, the dresser, the mirror, the bed which was hidden behind an Oriental screen, not to mention the hanging lamp in the shape of a pale pink lantern. Irene never allowed two lights to burn at the same time.

She had inherited her mother's extreme thriftiness, transforming it into her own pedantry. Her room was cosy and warm. She looked after it herself and the ash from her cigarette never fell anywhere but into the seashell ash tray. A strange order reigned among the carelessly arranged antique figurines on the shelves, where small Chinese dolls stood next to odd Hindu deities. Thirteen ivory elephants stood on a special little table, ranging from a large one a decimeter tall to a tiny one no bigger than half a finger.

"Everything's all right," Irene was thinking, looking at herself in the mirror.

She was in her thirtieth year but because of her extreme care and the general perspicacity which overruled her passions, she was in her prime. In three to five years she would seem plump, but now this roundness was to her advantage. Her youth had begun rather sentimentally when, as a pretty and spoilt girl, she fell in love with a second lieutenant and became engaged to him according to all the religious and traditional customs. In 1919 when the lieutenant volunteered to go to the front far away from his fiancée and from Ukraine, Irene swore not to go to any parties, not to amuse herself until he came back. She kept the promise for an entire year, which went completely against the grain and then one week she met a healthy, clever young man who worked in the Supply Corps. Irene followed him for two years to all kinds of places, villages and towns where her lover had to work. He kept her in great luxury although times were not at all good. In the end he was executed by the revolutionary tribunal and Irene was not too sorry, for she was tired of the nomadic life and rather hopeless. She decided to go back to her parents' house which was a cold and hungry place at that time of "military communism" and she had now become a lot more cheerful during the first months of the NEP.*

Irene had no bad memories of her vagabond years. She justified her behaviour by her youth and by circumstances and she was sure that this was her contribution to the revolution. In spite of her adventures she came back an experienced, mature women whose looks alone hinted at her flightiness. Her adventures had had a good effect on her; they had helped to stabilize her and moreover she had retained her good reputation since her mother had kept the secret very well, pretending that her daughter was visiting an aunt in Siberia, where she said there was no famine, and her young daughter could survive the

* New Economic Policy (1921-28), government policy based on concessions to private enterprise.

upheaval much better.

Irene could easily support this story for in their travels she had in fact visited Siberia. Even her own father, who was very much under his wife's thumb, was not really very clear what Irene was doing during those three years. In conversations with her mother all this period figured under the euphemistic heading of "first marriage."

After this Irene had another adventure but even her mother could only guess at the details. Two years ago in the room which was now to be offered to Slavenko, a medical student had lived. After a while he had left.

In the meantime professor Markevych had seen his last patient, taken off his white coat and washed his hands for the last time. He had then picked up his stethoscope, shoving it mechanically into his pocket, leaving on his desk pieces of paper and cards bearing patients' names, as well as half a dozen pencils which he used for writing prescriptions. He came up to the rows of glassed-in bookshelves, a product of the Ukrainian Forest Trust, which were filled with books. He stood there a minute, deep in thought, but then waved his hand and gaily left his office.

A maid was cleaning the floor in the waiting room after the patients had gone, and the professor asked: "Well, have you finished, Pelahia? That's good."

A samovar was bubbling in the dining room. Irene came out of her room and was setting the table for tea, her particular job in the afternoon.

"Good evening, my dear. How are you? Well and good, I trust."

He kissed his wife's hand and she kissed him on the head. His daughter kissed his hand and he kissed her on the cheek. This was a daily ritual too, whenever the professor was at home. This time he gave his daughter a hug and said, "How are we, Irene, darling? You look so lovely."

His elder son had died in the imperialist war; his second son, having supported the White side during the revolution, was killed near Kiev in 1919 and now his daughter was his only heir, the sole object of his fatherly affection.

"Thank you, father," answered Irene.

"Well, let's have some tea," he called out. "Irene, is everything ready?"

Tea was the professor's favourite drink and, indeed, this was his only time of relaxation. He had to lunch in haste, hounded by duty, but in the afternoon he could take his time and drink, as a rule, four cups of tea, always very hot. That's why there stood on a tray an attractive bowl containing glowing

embers which were tossed into the samovar by tongs to keep it boiling.

"Yuri Oleksandrovych will be here in a moment," said the mother. "Stepan Hryhorovych, please wait a minute."

"Yuri Oleksandrovych! Oh, I haven't seen him for a long time. A wonderful talker," said the professor. "And what a brilliant mind! But Irene—please, watch the samovar, don't let it go cold."

And, indeed, after a minute, the bell rang and Slavenko appeared. He was a tall, dark young man, his hair neatly trimmed, with a long energetic face. He greeted everybody, kissed the ladies' hands and gave the professor a firm handshake.

"Oh, strong man," called out Stepan Hryhorovych. "Splendid, we can have some tea now. Do sit down."

"Tea in your home, professor, is beyond comparison," said Slavenko. "The aroma and clarity are unequalled. Whoever makes it must know the secret," he added, looking at Irene. "I can't even dream of tea like that at home. My 'slave' treats me to a drink which can give you a tummy-ache."

"Ha," laughed the professor. "And I bet you it's cold."

"That's what comes of being a bachelor," remarked the mother.

"Mother," said Irene, "pass the sugar. Yuri Oleksandrovych, help yourself."

"Thanks," he said, picking up his cup. "I can't refuse a good cup of tea. I'm quite thirsty."

"Have you just finished your class?" asked Irene. "Help yourself, father."

"Irene, you are wonderful," said the professor.

"Not really," answered Slavenko. "Actually I've just finished a class, but it was a class in Ukrainian,* if you can imagine it."

"Really?" the professor was surprised.

"Yes, for the last three months."

"I don't envy you," said Irene.

"I don't envy myself," said Slavenko, laughing. "But what can you do? I treat it entirely rationally. Once I had to learn political science which for me and for biology is a waste of time. Now it's Ukrainian language and I'm not sure if, for society's sake, we shan't have to learn cookery next."

"When any cook can govern a state," said Irene.

"No, you don't understand. The problem of the cook is an

* "Ukrainization": official policy of encouraging the use of the Ukrainian language in Soviet administration and public life.

acute one in our society. It's natural. We live in a certain environment and we must pay for it."

"Maria," the professor suddenly turned to his wife, "I forgot to tell you, we have to pay a thousand rubles more in income tax."

"We must protest against it right away," she said quietly.

"I have no doubt," continued Slavenko, "that the language problem will have to be solved, at least in the field of science, in the near future. It's very strange, but after a few centuries of progress we must admit that the medieval use of Latin is, for us scientists, a progressive ideal. Of course, we should like to have a new, simplified and concise language which would satisfy our rational demands. Modern languages, among them our Russian, are spoilt by literature, overburdened with synonyms, inadmissible in scientific work. I am very much interested in Esperanto; I'm learning it along with Ukrainian."

"I'm against Esperanto," said the professor. "Irene, may I have another cup?"

"That's strange, professor. You must have understood me. In my own field there is almost nothing in Russian. I had to learn German, English and French. Last year I worked on a project for the Silk Trust, and on top of it I had to learn Italian."

"You see how they press us. A thousand rubles tax. A thousand rubles!"

Yuri Slavenko smiled politely. "Yes, that's a shame," he said to the mother. "Perhaps what's worse is that some material security has become a disadvantage with us. If you have 500 rubles, earned by honest work, you begin to feel awkward, begin to keep this great treasure a secret. We haven't got over the psychology of war communism yet; we dress worse than we can afford, we try to manage quite modestly and every year we seem poorer. Decent clothes are regarded as a luxury and I know some who still wear Tolstovkas*."

"Because every good-for-nothing can tell you to your face that you are a NEPman**," remarked the mother.

"A psychology of beggars prevails in a socialist country," said Irene.

"Did you say something, professor?" asked Slavenko.

"Your tea is getting cold."

After the first cup, which he drank quickly, the professor

* A type of shirt worn by Tolstoy and his followers.

** A derogatory term for one who took advantage of the NEP policy, often synonymous with "speculator."

took a rest, picked his teeth, smiled, murmered "splendid" and became quite playful.

"And yet, in spite of all the drawbacks of our time," said Slavenko, "I must say categorically I am in its favour."

"You want to be elected to City Council," said the professor, laughing.

"Father, don't joke," Irene reprimanded him.

"You're wrong," answered Slavenko. "I think public duty is the great burden of our age. But I can see some virtue in it. The period of the so-called dictatorship of the proletariat is the period of reason's fight for supremacy."

He paused for a moment, as if allowing the others to take in the impact of his words and then he went on in a firmer voice with overtones of self-assurance, the voice which he used to lecture to his students.

"Once one understands that, the whole problem of how comfortably off one is appears in a different light. The domination of matter over man is the greatest evil, the biggest obstacle to the rule of reason. In order to overcome this power we must compromise it, underrate it psychologically in front of society. When you don't get intense pleasure from buying a suit but feel a little ambivalent, that's the first blow against age-old materialism. It must be broken. Mankind will perish if all its powers are not focused on the higher, rational spheres of activity. The new man will be indifferent to the colour of his clothes and to the taste of food, but he will possess the pleasure of a rational existence. The new life will demand strict streamlining of all material and emotional needs. Statistics will take over. People will no longer be interested in satisfying these needs because they will reach a higher plane of existence. Their lives will be more spiritual than material. This is what I call progress, which is conditioned by strict economic laws. The world's population is growing and each newborn creature must be fed and clothed. The growth of population and our limited resources—these are the factors which lead to the victory of reason, or, as they have now, to communism."

"Stepan Hryhorovych, you should be ashamed of yourself," called out his wife, "if only for our guest's sake!"

The famous doctor, whose patients came from all over the Soviet Union, in a fit of great abandon had hit his wife right on the nose with a pellet of bread.

"Ha, ha," he laughed. "Irene, can we have some more sugar?"

"So, you are a fierce communist?" asked Irene gently, passing the sugar.

"Indeed," said Slavenko. "I feel quite fitted for life in a

communist society. Unfortunately, this is a matter of the very distant future, though we can see its spirit even now. First of all, the masses who up to now have lived like animals have been enrolled in the service of reason. Science has been freed from all kinds of idealist superstitions and has been given the clear and noble goal of serving the people in their struggle with nature. True, some pseudo-sciences, for instance literary history and others like that, have suffered a little for they have been reduced to a secondary role in relation to the pure sciences which create useful values. To tell you the truth, I don't understand how literature (and I don't mean scientific literature) could become the object of research. Of course, you will disagree, Irene—you read novels and love art."

"Yes, our tastes are rather different."

"Irene doesn't read too much," her mother remarked.

"I can quite understand that and excuse it too," said Slavenko.

"Our writers are squealing," said the professor helping himself to his favourite cake, a Napoleon. "One of them is a patient of mine. Has stomach trouble. A splendid fellow, he tells me that they are swamped by some orders . . ."

"The reason for the despair," said Slavenko, "which has overcome the best writers lies in the fact that neither literature nor art is capable of fulfilling social demands."

"Yes, that's what he said, social demands," agreed the professor.

"Social demand means to reflect the spirit of our age," Slavenko continued, bowing slightly in the direction of the professor. "This demand can only be fulfilled by science. After all, art was the result of a misunderstanding of nature and life. This lack of understanding is transposed by the artist into his work, without offering any solution, creating only an illusory satisfaction for those who respond to it in one way or another. To recreate misunderstanding, not to destroy it, as science does, is the chief attribute of art. Of course, it appeals to our backwardness, to the lack of organization which we have inherited from the pseudo-culture of the past. Isn't that so, Irene? We are the intellectuals who have digested the so-called bourgeois civilization, which is merely a step towards a true civilization. It's quite difficult to understand why some people support a theory of new art, art for the working class."

"These writers write such dull stuff," said Irene. "I don't support their theories either."

"They can't write any other way. This doesn't depend on their lack of talent but on quite objective reasons. They are victims of a dismal tradition and they make their attempts with

feeble weapons. The new working class, or to be more precise, the new breed of men, which is growing in accordance with the general laws of evolution, especially in accordance with eugenics, must be characterized by a high degree of spiritual organization which excludes art. The working class, the new men, were brilliantly described by Keyserling in one of his works. The new man, according to him, is a chauffeur, a being simple, cheerful and equipped with practical, that is technical, knowledge."

"They say in the West it is fashionable to have a chauffeur," remarked Irene.

"You see, there are very deep reasons for this. I entirely agree with Keyserling's definition because it so well describes the nature of the working class as the bearer of new ideals, since the chauffeur type includes everything progressive, from the factory worker up to the scientist; but it also narrows it down, by excluding the bourgeois elements of the working class which, we must admit, are considerable and are mostly shown in an appreciation of literature. For men of this higher order art is as big an anachronism as tea cup reading."

"Ha, ha, ha," laughed the professor.

Myria Mykolaivna smiled too.

"And I'm glad to say," continued Slavenko, "that even within art itself there is now some contradiction. Some artists have understood the uselessness of art in our time and are suggesting that it may be reduced to the role of a sport. I heartily welcome these pioneers, since only sport and science can regenerate mankind. My remarks about art may appear to be too general because they are based on fragmentary evidence, but they spring from my concept of the new man and the leading role of reason in our age. Just notice how we love to organize our time, leisure, work and you will understand the primacy of reason. Rationalization—not only of industrial production, but of our entire life—that is the goal of the epoch. In this we are following the great French Revolution, in the footsteps of the great Robespierre who raised the cult of the goddess of reason over the guillotine. Of course, we reject the trivial attributes of this cult—we have simply outgrown them—but Robespierre's effort, even if childish in comparison with our big drive, represents . . . How shall I put it? You must help me to express this poetically," he turned suddenly to his young hostess. "I wanted to use a musical term, which means the beginning of an opera."

"An overture," said Irene.

"Thank you. Yes, it represents an overture to the great opera of reason. Such thoughts as these make it possible for me to bear the discomforts of our life, which come mostly from

our conservative psychology."

"Yes, we all bear them very well," remarked the professor.

"But I can't bear them, I can't," cried Maria Mykolaivna, remembering the loss of her sons, for which she blamed Bolshevism, although one of them had died before the revolution during the "imperialist war."

"You are too emotional, mother," said Irene coldly.

At this moment Pelahia appeared on the doorstep.

"They have come to fetch you, Stepan Hryhorovych," she said.

"Yes, yes," he called out. "I forgot, I have a consultation at eight. You see, I haven't even finished my tea. Yes, I'm coming," he called out to Pelahia. "Marusia," he turned to his wife, "find my notes on gastric disorders, from last year; tomorrow I have to lecture on it."

"Your wife is wonderful," said Slavenko saying goodbye to him.

"Yes, she could even deliver my lecture for me splendidly. I'm coming, I'm coming!" he called out again and ran, or rather rolled, out of the room since he was fat and shortlegged.

"A wife should help her husband. That's how I was brought up and that's how I brought up my children."

"Mother, go and see that father doesn't forget something," said Irene.

"Yuri Oleksandrovych, do you want some more tea?" she asked when they were left alone.

"No, thank you," answered Slavenko. "I should like to ask you to play something."

"What do you mean? An enemy of art—you like music?"

"Everybody has his weaknesses, Irene."

In the drawing room Irene sat at the piano and Slavenko sank into a soft armchair.

"May I smoke?" he asked, reaching for his leather cigarette case. "Yes, please do," answered the hostess, opening a music sheet of Chopin's waltzes.

Slavenko did not understand music and felt no great need to listen to it. But in professor Markevych's home he showed some respect for music for two important reasons. First, it pleased Irene; secondly, it prevented him from talking to her alone. He felt that their relationship had reached a stage when it should be made more explicit, but he was putting this off, although as far as he was concerned he had decided what to do. Irene, he felt, had also made up her mind, but there was a silent understanding between them not to mention marriage or, even more, love. Again there were two reasons for his delay. First of all, his project was not quite finished and apart from that he

was still reluctant to change his bachelor way of life. He thought of marriage as a real worry. Of course, after a while everything would settle into a routine again, but he would have to break old habits and this appeared to him an insurmountable obstacle.

Yuri Oleksandrovych could well imagine how his daily routine would appear after marriage. He knew which room he would occupy, knew where to put his books in it, but still the reluctance to change his way of life held him back. He would certainly have to assume some family responsibilities and he would have to get used to them. Everyday, for instance, he would have to see and talk to her parents, who did not interest him at all. But it would be even more difficult for him to take Irene away from her parents and to find a new apartment. "Well, there is no way out," he thought. "I'll finish my project and I'll get married."

In fact, Yuri Oleksandrovych had solved all his problems except that of sex. When he was a youth he had satisfied it like so many others, by masturbation, and he felt fear and contempt for women. Later, when he got a little more mature, he overcame this habit, since it was injurious to him, and for some time lived with his maid, who made no demands on him and did not stand in the way of his research in which he had made rapid progress. On the contrary, she even helped the young scientist by satisfying his desires. However, unforseen circumstances compelled this maid to return to her village and he was left without a woman.

He then decided to bypass the whole problem of sex. "I am not so young now," he thought to himself (he was then twenty-nine). "My life is set and filled with work and I shall try to do without this nonsense." He followed a strict daily routine, physical exercises, cold baths and in this way managed to get through a whole year. However, this new regime did not still his desire, but on the contrary increased it, to the point of extreme danger. Yuri Oleksandrovych grew rather depressed and dissatisfied with himself and he developed into a restless sleeper. Sometimes he had nightmares. "What the hell," he thought to himself. "Such a trivial detail interferes with my work." In a fit of lightheartedness he quite suddenly tried to seduce his new maid who came in the morning to clean his room and make tea, but he was sternly rebuffed.

Completely put out by this, Yuri decided to ask advice from his old mother who who lived by herself in Podil, and to whom he sent some money every month, but whom he visited about once in six months, keeping his distance from her. The old woman was overjoyed to see him and was pleased to see

that he trusted her in an affair like this, for she positively worshipped her son. She heartily approved of his frankness.

"Yes, I understand," she said. "You must get married, that's what."

"I think it may be the most rational advice," he answered, walking up and down. "But to whom?"

"I don't know the women of your circle."

"I don't know them, either. I thought, though, that it might be better if I were to marry a cook, a simple girl, with no pretensions, who wouldn't interfere with me. Surely there must be one somewhere here, in Podil. Don't you think so, mother?"

"Of course, there would be less trouble with a simple one. But you will have children and you will have to entertain."

"We'll see about the children. But as for entertaining guests, that's a good point; it would be awkward. We are still surrounded by superstitions. Well then, mother, I'll look for one myself."

He thought about it quite a lot but he could think of no better scheme than to attend concerts and social events in the House of Scientists where his colleagues brought their families. That is where he had met Irene, whom he liked and considered to be a suitable choice for a serious, clever and attractive wife. She met his advances with silent consent and Yuri Oleksandrovych felt greatly relieved. Now he had an answer to his aroused desires and, as often happens, they subsided at the prospect of future satisfaction.

"She is really quite interesting," he thought, looking at her profile through a veil of smoke. It would be good to come to her now and to put his arms around her. But then he would have to talk about marriage. Let's postpone that.

"You are not asleep yet?" asked Irene.

"Asleep? I'm overcome by your music."

She played Mendelssohn and Tschaikovsky who sounded the same to Slavenko. Then she turned to him and asked: "Are you in a hurry?"

"Unfortunately, I have only five minutes left," he answered, looking at his watch.

"Then I will play you Grieg's symphony another time," said Irene, sitting next to him. "How's your work going?"

"I'm quite satisfied with it," answered the young man. "A series of tests will be completed in a few days. It was delayed a little because our laboratory is poorly equipped. The next series, linked with this one, will begin at once. After that I shall take a break, Irene; I must attend to some personal matters."

"How long will the new series take?"

"At the most, six months."

"I won't keep you, Yuri Oleksandrovych, though you know I like your company." She got up.

"I like yours, too," answered Slavenko. "But science is a severe taskmaster, Irene. In order to master it we must become its slave, sacrifice all our time to it and also all our thoughts. We have to make sacrifices for it all the time. It is wrong to try to make any compromise between science and life. We shortchange ourselves and don't enrich science."

"If you are so busy, you don't have to come to see us so often," said Irene warmly. "Don't feel that you have to. You can always phone me."

"I treasure your kindness," said Slavenko, kissing her hand and taking his leave. "Believe me, Irene, since I have met you my work is going better; I have peace of mind, something I didn't have before. You've become my good fairy whom I don't want to lose."

After he had left Maria Mykolaivna quietly entered the drawing room.

"He didn't say anything?" she asked sadly.

"He told me everything I need to know," her daughter replied.

FOUR IN A ROOM, APART FROM THE GIRL

The professor of biology's room on Piatakov street showed all the signs of being inhabited by someone devoted to scientific research. In this kind of order, obviously created by a man, the most important thing was purposefulness, however poor its aesthetic appeal. The bookcases were different sizes, shapes and colours, some standing glumly along the walls, bulging with books like pregnant women, others slim and tall, showing only one row of books. Some were carved and made of oak, others were of plain pine, and a couple were American ones. About a dozen kinds of glassed-in cases were also there, obviously acquired by accident. True, all of them, regardless of their differences, protected the books inside them from dust. An overflow of books spilled onto the windowsills, making the room darker, and even onto the table which was so perfectly clean as to make one think that perhaps it was never used. The table, although full of books, seemed deserted because it had no inkwell. Slavenko wrote exclusively with an indelible pencil, sharpening it from time to time with a special gadget which looked like a miniature machine for shelling corn. Various scraps of paper and notes were stuffed into the drawers. Among them were bills for small expenses for the past few years, documents, and letters, kept in their envelopes, containing addresses—all this so well arranged that the owner could easily find what he wanted. It had taken the scientist some time to train his new maid to keep this order in his room. In spite of the incident when he had tried to seduce her, she had stayed with him; it was not the first time that sort of thing had happened to her and she got good pay for very little work. She learned to clean the room so that nothing was disturbed or moved from its place, for if this happened, Slavenko's mood would be ruined for the rest of the day and he would lose his peace of mind.

The walls, papered a dark brown, had no pictures, ornaments or photographs but were also free from cobwebs. A wide sofa was a little too large for the room, but was very comfortable to sleep on.

"Yes, you have convinced me," said Slavenko, sitting at

the table, his legs outstretched, "you have convinced me. In any case, I'm glad you dropped in. Sometimes I feel this silly need—if you'll excuse the expression—to see old friends again and sometimes even to make new ones too. It is silly, because everyone is equally dull and limited in their personalities; their relationships spring mostly from biological needs, and old habits and traditions. There is a tradition of going to parties or giving parties. All this is sheer laziness, believe me, my friend. People have nothing to do so they go to parties. What a farce! Social occasions like that don't enrich us at all. Just think, why the hell should I bother to meet the German chemist Abdelgolden, a prominent research worker in his field? All I need to do is read his books. If we could collect all the human energy wasted at parties and in so-called social contracts, if it could be directed to some rational goal . . ."

"But surely people must relax," Liova said from the sofa.

"The relaxation should be absolute. What sort of rest is it to waste energy on empty talk, to tire the brain with problems which don't and won't affect us. I won't even mention those times when people get together simply to get drunk. Sleep—that's what offers the most complete rest for man. But, descendants of animals as we are, we're still atavistic enough to waste time, though future generations will overcome that too. That's why you've convinced me. But I'm not quite sure why we must visit this particular girl? Why not simply go for a walk?"

"It just occurred to me," said Liova. "You won't regret it. She's a clever and interesting girl."

"If I took an interest in girls my work would go to blazes. But I must question her being clever. The very word 'girl' denotes something underdeveloped, stupid and limited. If she's clever I'm not sure that she's a girl. Still, it's in her favour that she is a Ukrainian. I must practice my Ukrainian somewhere, since I've learnt it. It's strange; we're asked to learn a language you don't hear on the street and nobody speaks."

"She speaks Ukrainian beautifully," said Liova gleefully.

"All right—but on one condition: that it won't be more than half an hour. I believe in your wish to provide me with relaxation, but you mustn't detain me. Altogether you came at the right moment. The last series of my tests has been very successfully completed. I'm taking up nucleoproteins. By the way, where is this Bisecrice, this Mademoiselle Pompadour living?"

"Very close, on Zhylanska, four blocks from here."

"That makes it easier. Let's go. Oh, hell, today I should be going to the Markevyches. But I don't feel the slightest desire to drink his dull tea."

Slavenko left a phone message with Markevych's maid, Pelahia, that he would not be able to come.

"You see, you've forced me to lie," he said to Liova. "But my approach to lying is rational: I don't want to go so I'm ill; that is, I choose a suitable excuse which requires no further explanation. A lie, widely used, is useful for all of us."

"How time flies," he said taking Liova by the arm as they walked along the street. "Do you remember our field hospital on the Polish front? That was a long time ago. The devil take it, we're much older now."

"Yes, we are old, Yuri," Liova remarked, sunk in melancholy.

"It doesn't matter, old or young. As far as I'm concerned, old age may be pleasanter than youth, but we don't want to die. We'd never want to die, and Mechnikov's theories are very farfetched. Tell me, weren't you afraid of danger during the war—or did you just pretend you weren't?"

"I wasn't afraid, that's all. I just happened to feel that way."

"Strange! But you don't seem like the brave medic Rotter. You've gone downhill, Liova; you look sad."

"You see, Yuri, looks aren't important," answered Liova deliberately.

"What? What are you talking about? The face is the mirror of the soul. You're a medical man, after all."

Yuri Oleksandrovych felt on top of the world. After a successful series of tests he felt as if it were the first of May, and he was surrounded by victorious banners. He was in a carefree, relaxed mood before his next concentration of energy.

When they drew near the house on Zhylanska, Yuri laughed involuntarily. "What a shack! I can imagine what monsters live inside it. An interesting girl could find more interesting accommodation. I begin to doubt her high qualities, Liova."

Inside the flat Liova introduced him to Marta.

"She's cute," thought Slavenko shaking her hand.

"Meet my visitors," said Marta.

"Davyd Semenovych Ivanchuk," mumbled the co-op worker, annoyed at the arrival of two more visitors.

"Dmytro Stainychy," the young engineer from Dnipropetrovske introduced himself.

"Excuse me," said Slavenko, "I didn't catch your patronymic."

"I didn't give it."

"Dmytro doesn't like patronymics," said Marta. "Please sit down. Liova, you'd better sit on the sofa; I only have three chairs."

"Why are you so contemptuous of patronymics?" asked Slavenko, seating himself with care on a chair which looked a little shaky. "How silly of me to come here," he thought.

"No contempt," replied Dmytro. "There simply is no Ukrainian custom of using patronymics. Why bother then? It's redundant—one more word to remember, a burden for the memory. It's much better to call people 'comrade.'"

"If your argument were followed a little further, comrade," Slavenko smiled, "it would be more rational to use 'Mister.'"

"That's counter-revolutionary," roared the co-op worker.

"A rationalization like that," answered the engineer, "would be against our social practice." After a while he added, "It's true that the word 'comrade' is longer than 'mister' but so what? Maybe, to be practical, 'comrade' should be shortened to 'com'?"

"Or 'rad,'" laughed the co-op worker.

"Give it up, comrades," cried Marta. "You're all very dull. You want to make everything rational and practical."

"Life demands it," said Dmytro.

"And you don't demand anything from life, Liova?" said Marta.

"I agree with you," said Liova. "Let's have a cigarette."

"If you like. At first everybody can light up but later you'll have to take turns. Davyd Semenovych, I appoint you to check on them."

"I'm ready," said Ivanchuk.

Everybody, except Marta, started smoking and Davyd Semenovych borrowed a cigarette from Dmytro.

"Whoever mentions rationality or practicality will have to pay a fine," delcared Marta. "Twenty kopeks in aid of the homeless. Davyd Semenovych, will you look after that too?"

"I'm ready," he repeated.

"What bohemians," thought Slavenko.

"I'll pay a ruble in advance," said Dmytro giving the money to the co-op worker.

"I'll give you a receipt," he replied.

"In this company, so's not to offend our beautiful hostess," said Slavenko bowing to her lightly, "we should be talking about adventures, love affairs, like the Spanish writer, whose name, if I'm not mistaken, is Camerton."

"Shame on you," called out Marta. "Dmytro, tell him the title and author of the book."

"That's not my specialty," he answered. "Tell me," he addressed Slavenko, "are you the one who lectures on biochemistry at the University?"

"I have that honour."

"I know some of your students who've told me a lot about your lectures and especially about the practical work."

"Penalty!" called out Marta.

"Yes, penalty," screamed the co-op worker. "I already have eighty kopeks from you."

"Unfortunately, lectures in biochemistry can't be given the proper number of hours. We should organize a special Institute of Biochemistry. As far as lab work is concerned, I have rationalized the schedule as much as possible."

"Penalty," called out Marta. "Fifty kopeks."

"I see that this conversation will cost me dearly," said Slavenko, handing over the money.

"I read in the papers about your experiments with protein. I'm not much good at it, but I'm interested in practical results."

"Penalty," roared the co-op worker. "Marta, make them pay three rubles each."

"That's quite impossible," she said. "At work—rationalization and practice, and at home too. My tongue won't say it. What dry words! Davyd Semenovych, give them back the money; it's soiled."

"You want to cross out two of the most important words—one of them the symbol of our epoch and of the new man," said Slavenko, taking back his money. "Yes," he answered Dmytro. "The press reported some of my research, mostly its practical results. But it's quite possible," he added dryly, "that it won't have any practical value."

"What are you? A materialist science like biochemistry must lead to practical results," smiled Dmytro.

Slavenko smiled back and said: "A materialist science! That's daring. In fact, science is neither materialist nor idealist; it is simply science. It's impartial and can't be answerable for the direction of its conclusions."

Slavenko had taken a dislike to the young engineer right away. Dmytro sat back in his chair very relaxed and his voice often rang with the familiarity of a man who considers everybody his equal. His cowboy jacket with its open collar and his cropped hair—all this seemed a little vulgar. "He must be in love with this girl," thought Slavenko, who wanted to tease him a little.

"So, we may just as well go back to belief in God," said Dmytro.

"Up, up to Jesus," added the co-op worker.

"Yes, if you like, to God. After all, science never denied his existence. One might just as well remember the words of the great Bacon: 'Whoever tastes a little of the cup of science will

deny God, but whoever empties the cup will know God.'"

"We heard this from the preachers in St. Sophia*," said Dmytro.

"And you, Liova," asked Marta, "do you believe in God?"

"I'm sure he crawls on his knees in St. Sophia," added the co-op worker who wasn't afraid of Liova.

"What are you talking about, Marta?" Liova felt awkward. "I've never been to St. Sophia."

"Confess, Liova," Marta called out. "I can't imagine that you don't believe in God."

Liova was quite put out. The co-op worker started to clap.

"Yes, he should be a priest," he called.

"Why are you smiling?" asked Marta of Dmytro. "Has the right to believe been abolished? This is each citizen's private affair."

"Yes, private, but in practice it means mental poverty." The engineer took a cigarette, although Slavenko was smoking at the time.

"Don't smoke. Two of you can't smoke at the same time," said the co-op worker.

"It doesn't matter. We'll open the window."

Slavenko put out his cigarette. Marta, who was not paying much attention to them said:

"You're a weakling, Liova. And so kind-hearted too. No one needs you . . ."

"And what kind of people are needed?" he asked.

"Strong ones."

"I see you are a Ukrainian woman," said Dmytro with satisfaction.

"Do let me ask, if it's not a secret," said Slavenko mockingly, "why you ascribe these virtues to Ukrainian women? How are they different from other women?"

"I could talk a great deal about it."

"Dmytro isn't very talkative today," said Marta. "You see, he believes that history has developed many positive traits in Ukrainian women."

"Not believes; it *is* so," replied the engineer.

"Quite by chance, in the course of my 'Ukrainization,'" said Slavenko, "I got to know the *duma*** about Marusia Bohuslavka. That Ukrainian woman freed the Zaporozhian Cossacks from Turkish captivity, taking advantage of the Pasha's love for

* A famous cathedral in Kiev, dating back to the 10th century.

** *Duma* (pl. *dumy*): Ukrainian epic poems about the Cossacks. Marusia Bohuslavka is the heroine of a *duma*.

her, but she refused to return to her native land with the Cossacks. I can't see any great bravery in her action. This Marusia didn't do so badly herself. She remained in Turkish luxury, believing that by her generosity to the Cossacks she would pay for her betrayal of her native land. That is, she saved her virtue and acquired some capital."

"And what about Bondarivna*?"

"I haven't yet had the pleasure of learning about this Ukrainian woman. To be quite frank, this is the first time I've heard her name, but if she's interesting I'll ask my teacher about her. Still, it's certainly true that each nation has its strong and weak, energetic and sloppy, wise and foolish people. Each nation has had its heroes and heroines and if it didn't, then it invented them. But only a blind man cannot see that progress will wipe out nations. The roots of national differences are to be found in economic and geographic conditions, that is in the mores of a given group of people. Technology overcomes economic peculiarities and because of greater communication between people, geographic conditions lose their importance too, and so customs, clothes and food become more and more standardized. It's well known that railroads and cars, and the means of communications in general are the greatest enemies of a national identity. Everything feeding national differences is rooted in the past, not in the present. Today national differences are merely inertia, which is losing its hold."

"All this is sophistry," barked Dmytro.

"If you consider logical arguments to be sophistry, what kind of arguments do you respect?"

"Practical ones," answered Dmytro. "Life is more active than arguments. As you see, I'm a proletarian, a man of few words and more action."

"I would advise you then to look at the whole problem from the class point of view."

"That's what I'm doing."

"And what do you see?"

"I see a fig," roared the co-op worker.

"I see that national feelings must be exhausted. Not until then will they disappear."

"They will never disappear, never," said the co-op worker. "I have always noticed this: let two Ukrainians meet and they'll quarrel."

Conversation turned to political and economic questions. Slavenko, who was beginning to be amused by the dispute with the engineer, developed some very pessimistic theories about

* A heroine of a Ukrainian historical ballad.

the future of mankind, showing off all his skill in using logical argument. Disregarding his own views, his first aim was to confuse and defeat his opponent. He spoke quietly and clearly, stressing the appropriate words and took enormous pleasure in his speech, his personality and his superiority over everybody else there. He wanted to humiliate the engineer but Dmytro answered briefly and unwillingly. He merely registered his disagreement with the professor but did not want to be drawn into a discussion.

The co-op worker, hearing politics and economics discussed, grew subdued. He considered both these subjects absolutely taboo and very dangerous. He grew restless and even left the room to see if anyone was eavesdropping, although, apart from his small daughter, the only person in the apartment was the German woman, Frau Holz, who was asleep and in any case was hard of hearing. All the same, he shook his head and said:

"In vain do they talk about it, in vain."

Marta listened, leaning against the tapestry hung above the bed. She was enjoying the conversation, though the subject was rather dull and did not attract her. She felt depressed by all the visitors. Every day her restlessness increased. At work she managed somehow, but at home her defences were down. She had thrown out the flowers which had been sent to her; they were dry and wilted, and she had angrily burned the basket they came in. But in her heart she still felt their presence, like an unquenched thirst. She saw them in her dreams—whole fields, mountains and riverbanks full of them, and wherever she stepped she felt them like sharp thorns which drew blood from her hands. Her heart was like a wound. "Perhaps I am ill," she thought. Indeed she was ill with the fever which hides deep within the earth and the human body, which, so legend says, was made of the earth too—the fever of yearning for the sun, which endlessly fertilizes life.

Marta felt quite indifferent to Dmytro's arrival and Slavenko's visit. "It's not what I want," she thought secretly. At first she had tried to play the role of a happy, serene hostess but the new guests grew so engrossed in their conversation that they forgot all about her. She didn't pay any attention to them, either. Her room grew more and more filled with smoke which smothered the tulip-shaped lamp. The corners of her room grew dark and she felt more and more isolated from the people sitting near her, and from a distance she looked at them as if they were a landscape seen through fieldglasses.

"May I open the window?" asked the co-op worker. "This feels like a real gas attack."

Marta shuddered.

"Better open the stove; it will draw the smoke up just as well," she said. "Have you all finished talking?"

"We've touched on many problems," replied Slavenko. "But I did most of the talking because comrade Dmytro, for reasons best known to him, thought it wise not to contradict me, although he disagreed with me."

"Because you didn't say what you thought," said Dmytro darkly.

"You can now take on the thankless task of reading my soul," remarked Slavenko.

No one answered him and the threat of silence spread across the room. But Slavenko stopped it by saying:

"Well, let me thank everybody for a very pleasant time. I must apologize for coming uninvited and so perhaps being a nuisance."

"Not at all," said Marta. "You must come again."

"I shall gladly take up your kind invitation very soon," replied the professor.

Marta was sorry to hear his patronizing tone. "Why is he insulting us?" she thought.

"I am going, too, Yuri," said Liova.

They both left together and once on the street Slavenko remarked:

"There you have an example of an evening wasted in empty talk and competition. If we started to walk into all these buildings from which lights are shining we would find the same setting: an electric lamp, chairs with people on them, sitting, smoking and talking. That is what's called 'social life.' Of course, we would also see the girls or women around whom this society gathers like steel files around a magnet. All this is familiar, my friend, and dull as the world itself. It's a repetition of what has happened thousands of times over. This evening showed me what enormous power tradition holds over people and what a great effort will be needed to rationalize human relations."

"There's a great deal that can't be solved," observed Liova. "At any moment it may not be understood. What I mean to say is that something that is, apparently, solved, may turn out not to be so, and so we have to begin all over again."

"It's easy to solve problems but much more difficult to apply these solutions to life. We are poisoned by old schemes, and the rational antibodies in men are only just beginning to circulate. I'm talking, of course, about most people. It was only ten years ago that our revolution started to manufacture these antibodies. That's how it is. So I'm not sure if I didn't seek out an argument tonight with a subconscious desire to attract the

girl you introduced me to."

"What do you mean?" Liova began.

"I think all this is foolish and ridiculous," the biochemist said abruptly.

After Slavenko left, some tension still lingered in the room, as if an official visit had been made for some unpleasant purpose.

"He certainly talked a lot," said the co-op worker.

"He has a fast tongue," said Dmytro.

"I sat there as if I were at a séance," said Marta, smiling. "This professor put me to sleep with his talk. Well, what shall we do now?"

"It's time to go home," said Dmytro, looking askance at the co-op worker.

"Yes, you must be tired after travelling," answered Davyd Semenovych. At that moment his daughter, next door, called out in her sleep.

"What a child!" the father grumbled. "She makes a racket at night. Children are so nervous nowadays."

"Thank God, in Whom I don't believe," said Dmytro coming up to Marta. "At last I can talk seriously to you. Do you always entertain such crowds?"

"That's none of your business," she answered coldly, "and I ask you . . ."

"Wait, don't try to browbeat me with words. As a poet wrote: 'words are trash.'"

"But with fire inside," completed Marta.

"I only agree with the beginning."

"And I with the ending."

"Good," called out Dmytro. "The beginning is seeking the ending. We have taken one step forward."

At that moment the co-op worker came back. "She's asleep again. Dmytro, give me a cigarette."

"I don't have any left," said Dmytro who felt like giving him a kick rather than a cigarette.

"Then I'll smoke my own."

"Well, see you tomorrow," said Dmytro angrily, leaving.

"Ha, ha, they've all gone except you and me," said the co-op worker who stayed with Marta for some time making fun of Slavenko and so consoling her a little.

TWO IN A ROOM, APART FROM THE GIRL

Normally, life is a series of ups and downs and, plotted on a graph, it would look like a sinusoid with its rhythmic waves. Because a human being can be normal only in theory, the graph of our real psychological state in a system of coordinates would be an incredible curve, the bends of which could not be contained within the formulae of even the highest mathematics. Moreover, human depression is more often produced not by a lack but by a surplus of energy which, seeking a way out, creates pressures on the thin walls of the psyche. Then a person feels like a balloon full of compressed air would feel, if it had any feelings. It would suffer great pain until some merciful hand let the air out of it.

Depression has its degrees which should be clearly marked. There is an absolute depression, when the very foundation of the psychic mechanism is damaged by pressures and we find it very difficult to recover the joy of life. Quite different is a temporary depression which may, at times, be quite poorly directed, like a wind into the human sails. In order to distinguish between the two we might use the test of human reaction to a material improvement.

The following day Marta came to work in a bad mood but the unexpected news of a raise at once cheered her up. Instead of sixty she would get seventy rubles a month. Ten rubles more created a warm, pleasant sensation. In two months she would be able to afford a new handbag and to discard the old one which was worn out. Or, another example, she could save up and buy a decent coat for next winter—how far thoughts can range! There were other possibilities and she would have to weigh them carefully. All this created a new but pleasant worry, distracting her from her present state.

How did she get this lucky break, who in this overcrowded institution had suddenly thought of her and given her this pleasant surprise just when she was feeling so lonely? It turned out that the reason for the raise, as for so many joys and sorrows, was purely mechanical. At first, Marta, as an inexperienced clerk, had not received the full pay, but now that she had

moved to the statistical section she would be paid in full. It was the result of an impartial functioning of higher justice, embodied in the pay scale. Marta could, of course, have enquired why this justice was only revealed to her six months after she had started work in her section. That was what Lina, who was the first to bring her the good news, suggested.

"Congratulations," she said. "If it had happened earlier I would be quite envious, but now Boris and I pool our salaries."

"Your husband must earn a lot," said Marta who wanted to pay her a compliment.

"He gets a hundred and fifty and will get more—he's got a university education," she added proudly.

During the lunch break Vorozhiy came up to Marta.

"So you've got a raise."

"It was long overdue," said Marta.

"Long overdue? Do you know who I think was responsible for the raise?"

"Why should anyone be?"

"So you think, mademoiselle. But I bet you it was Bezpalko. You see, he'll arrange some overtime for you in the evenings."

"You're talking nonsense," Marta sharply cut him off.

"I'll be damned if it's not true. I saw him once looking at your legs when you were up on a stool reaching some papers from the top drawer. I must say I looked at them too."

"You're always judging other people by your own standards."

"And you shouldn't wear short skirts, so there's no temptation."

"What a cynic," thought Marta.

But Vorozhiy's words had made an impression on her. She glanced at Bezpalko who was sitting quietly behind his desk looking at papers as he drank a cup of tea. "Did he really look at my legs?" she thought. "No, that's quite impossible. He's too solemn." But some doubt remained about his solemnity.

Once she started work she recalled the previous night. "Liova must be abnormal," she thought. "It's not normal to be in love for two years." All her other admirers had been in love with her for a month or so and they had loved her in a different way from Liova. They had wanted to embrace her, to kiss her, to put their hands on her knees, and one of them even called out to her when he saw her for the first time: "You must be mine." When she turned him out, he left, not very offended, saying, "I knew you were a Philistine." Either all the others were abnormal or Liova was.

She could not answer this question and the rows of figures

in front of her did not exactly help. But in the intervals between figures she continued with her own thoughts or rather with fragments of them. A little surprised, she read the total 15,722 and for a second she could not remember how the young professor whom Liova brought with him the day before had looked. "Fifteen thousand seven hundred and twenty-two," she said aloud, but she could remember neither his face nor his height, nor the suit he had worn. Several times during her work she tried, for curiosity's sake, to recreate the image of her new acquaintance, but she could not recall in her mind a single feature of his appearance—it was as if it had been erased from her memory like chalk from a blackboard. Strange! It would be nice to see him again. "But he won't come again, since he's so self-important," she thought. This thought returned as she was leaving the office, but it was a thought not coloured by any emotion—just an idle thought, one of the many which float and disappear in one's head.

Outside, the day was exceptionally soft and sunny, quiet, like a smile. It seemed to mock the snow covering the streets, the heavy clothing of the pedestrians, the overshoes, the fur collars and the scarves. The day seemed sly, peeping into windows, eyes and hearts, preparing everybody and everything for some pleasant surprise. Marta had the strange feeling, growing rapidly, that she would meet someone. Whom? She didn't know. But she walked along cheerfully, bathed in sunshine and the glances of strangers, and her heart was filled with the ringing feeling of her own strength and superiority. Almost everybody she met desired her, had longed for her for ages, almost from the beginning of time, when she had lived somewhere else, was someone else, among different people and an unknown nature, but very much herself. She felt just then that she always had been and always would be, that to her alone of all the world was given the fate of being forever young and beautiful. "The Queen of the Earth," she recalled Liova's words. Now they did not seem to be so exaggerated.

Suddenly Marta thought that perhaps the ice was breaking on the Dnieper. Hurriedly, so as not to miss the sight, she went down Khreshchatyk until she could see the river. But the Dnieper had not thought yet of breaking the ice. Indeed, from its icy surface there rose a cold, sharp wind which gathered strength and, as Marta stood there, suddenly broke up the smiles of the pleasant day. The sky grew dark in a trice, the setting sun grew pale and the snow which had looked so toy-like, breathed frostily from under her feet. "It's only the second of March," thought Marta, and turned to go on with her daily tasks: supper and a class in shorthand and typing.

At home she had barely managed to start a fire when she heard a knock at the door.

"Come in," she shouted and into the room walked the professor of biochemistry, Yuri Oleksandrovych Slavenko.

"So it's you?" she said.

She saw him twice. Once as he stood there in front of her and the second time as an image which reappeared very clearly in her memory.

"Why did you think it must be me?" Slavenko asked gruffly, shaking hands.

"I didn't think it must be you. In fact, it's a complete surprise to me."

"For me, too," he said dryly. "An absolute, unlooked for surprise. The point is that last night I left my cigarette case here. Unforgivable carelessness. It must have fallen down somewhere."

"I don't know," Marta said. "I haven't cleaned up yet. We shall soon see."

"Oh, no! Let me pay for my sins. Don't worry, I'll look for it myself and I won't upset anything."

"Everything is already upset here."

"Disorder in a room is a sign of psychological disequilibrium," said Slavenko looking under the chairs and table. "There is a definite relationship between these two different things. There, I've found your comb."

"Oh, it must have dropped when I was hurrying this morning," said Marta, blushing. "Let me look for it."

"Thanks, I've found it already. The cigarette case must have deviated last night from its usual route to my pocket and landed under the table. An accident, that's all. I'm sorry to have caused you all this trouble."

"Not at all, I'm glad."

"Why are you glad?"

"That you've found your cigarette case. You might have lost it in the street."

"Yes, of course," answered Slavenko absent-mindedly. "If I could lose it at all, then it might have happened on the street."

"Perhaps you'll take off your coat?"

"No, I won't because I'm in a hurry. But, if you will allow me, I'll smoke one cigarette in honour of the prodigal cigarette case. If you only knew how this wanderer ruined my entire day."

"It was such a lovely day," said Marta.

"Maybe, but this morning I wasted a good half hour searching for it. I scolded my slave severely."

"Your slave?"

"I call my maid that. I was sure she'd put it somewhere. Now I'll have to apologize to her. Every evening she makes sixty cigarettes for me, my daily ration, which includes some for my friends, so you can imagine how annoyed I was in the morning when I missed my ration. I had to buy a package of cigarettes in a very clumsy box which bulged in my pocket all day."

"But these are such trifles," said Marta with a smile.

She smiled uncertainly because her guest made her feel uncomfortable. She sensed that he was a creature from another social circle, with which she was unfamiliar, and which was probably higher than hers. Her own life seemed rather empty to her now.

"Yes, they are trifles for those whose lives consist of trivialities," said Slavenko. "But when one's working and trying to avoid all trivia in order to succeed in one's work, every trifle which one must overcome becomes an absolute psychological obstacle which distracts one's attention." He said this in a very patronizing tone. Marta felt even more awkward. "He's very severe," she thought, but this severity was not unpleasant.

"My research," continued Slavenko, "demands from the researcher two qualities apart from ability. First of all—a high degree of spiritual concentration. Everything of secondary importance, and that means quite a lot in life, must be subordinated to the main goal. A scientist, of course, is not a monk; he doesn't deny life's necessities, but he doesn't waste time on them. Secondly, he must be physically fit in order to stand the stress of scientific work, since it exhausts the body as nothing else does. It sounds like a paradox, but it could be argued that this kind of work is unnatural. It's obvious that our organism was not created for thinking but for muscular work and when it thinks it suffers serious damage: it does what it was not made for." While he was talking Slavenko noticed an open book on the table.

"Are you reading that?" he asked carelessly. "May I know what it is? Sosiura,*" he read out the author's name. "I can't say I know the name. These are poems. What does he write about, this poet?"

"About revolution and love," said Marta.

"Although he's a poet, still he should think before he writes. What is there in common between revolution, the highest tension of human energy to which an individual must subordinate himself, and love, a narrowly personal emotion which is hostile to any social form of control? I could understand if he wrote about either revolution or love. But such an

* Volodymyr Sosiura, a popular Soviet Ukrainian poet.

unnatural combination doesn't fit into my mind. Does he write well, do you think?"

"Yes, I think so."

"About love?"

"Not only that but about revolution, too."

"I shouldn't be surprised if love interests you more than revolution," he said mockingly.

"He talks to me as if I were a silly girl," Marta thought, completely distracted.

"And you have every right," continued Slavenko, but at this moment a knock was heard on the door.

"Come in," called Marta and the young engineer from Dnipropetrovske came into the room.

The men shook hands and Marta didn't miss the chance of comparing them. They were of the same height, but Dmytro was more athletic, with a less refined face. While the professor came from an intellectual family, the engineer represented the first educated generation, showing traces of his working class origin. He was the son of a blacksmith from Pereiaslav, who had died of a heart attack and of a laundress who was still living with her eldest son—also a blacksmith.

The folk legend notwithstanding, the blacksmith's four sons were strictly disciplined by him. "You'll grow up to be men," he used to tell them. At the beginning of the revolution the blacksmith divided the roles in the family. He told the eldest one to look after his mother, especially should he himself die. The two middle ones were to fight for freedom and the youngest one was to study. It happened just as he had commanded. The eldest one looked after his mother, one was killed during the war, one joined the Party and the youngest was a student. The two sons who had left Pereiaslav visited their home every year, remembering their father who had bullied them mercilessly but had never actually beaten them.

This upbringing made the brothers rather stern but also quite tough. The youngest one had had a particularly hard struggle in his yearning for education. He had achieved it in spite of great difficulties. During his first year at the university he had made very poor progress but although he had lost his scholarship he was determined to continue. He was one of those who thrive on hardship and are stubborn enough to carry on the battle.

Having lost the scholarship, he got jobs as a woodcutter, a carter and a messenger. Sometimes he literally had nothing to eat and lived on a pound of rye bread a day. But he had enough will power not to eat the second pound of bread left for the next day. He studied hard, improving his mind which was not so

much dull as undeveloped. His second year was much better. During the third he again obtained a scholarship and graduated with honours. He read widely books from different fields, economics, the sciences, philosophy and even agriculture. All of them were on a popular level, often mere pamphlets, and only to history, which he especially liked, did he devote more attention.

He had met Marta at school and visited her often. While he was living in Kiev he usually called on her on Wednesdays.

"When I get my degree, I'll get a job and then we'll get married," he used to say.

"We'll see," she would answer playfully.

Marta thought of Dmytro as a handsome and sincere boy, but not at all interesting. He never used the passionate language frequently heard in her room, so much so indeed that if it had had the power to burn, the apartment would have been reduced to ashes. He was interested only in his own affairs and was so engrossed in the problems of industry that he could think of nothing else. He suffered for industry's sake, made grandiose plans for it and believed in the hard work which had won him everything. Nothing ever came his way unexpectedly. He was only twenty-five years old but he had no aspirations whatever for a romantic future or some extraordinary fate. He was practical and determined to work well and this alone gave him great satisfaction.

"Good evening, comrade," said Slavenko. "Simultaneously I must say good-bye for I have to be in the lab before eight."

Slavenko once more apologized to Marta and left, dissatisfied. As far as his lost cigarette case was concerned he could simply have sent his maid—yes, that would have been the thing to do. Secondly, if he had decided to go himself, he should not have stayed a minute, let alone started a conversation. And with whom? What did he care about this girl? But he had stayed with her until this close-cropped young man had come in. The professor was annoyed. "What a waste of time. I must get hold of myself," he thought. He could not quite understand why he was upset.

"Have you known him long?" Dmytro asked Marta after Slavenko left.

"I met him for the first time yesterday, just as you did. But you have grown familiar, Dmytro. Ever since you came back from Dnipropetrovske you've been 'thouing'* me, although I've given you no right to do so."

"Fancy that! A real lawsuit," laughed Dmytro.

* "Thouing," a familiar form of address, as distinguished from "youing."

"You think that just because you've got a management job at a factory you've grown bigger than anybody else."

"What a strange girl you are. We've known each other for a long time. And when I was in Dnipropetrovske I came to think of you as if you were already mine."

"That's just a dream."

"Not a dream. If you need to be asked, I'm asking you now."

"No," said Marta.

"You are as stubborn as a young goat. Young and beautiful. Just think—I come to you with a serious proposal and you defy me. It's just as well I don't get insulted easily. Sit down, Marta."

"Of course, I can't turn you out of my room," she said sitting down.

"That's just as well. Why should you turn me out? Better still, let's go to Dnipropetrovske together."

"What for?"

"We'll get married."

"What a surprising proposal."

Dmytro lit a cigarette and looked sadly at Marta. She laughed. He got up and threw his arms around her, saying, "You're so beautiful."

"Take your hands away."

"All right, let's be serious," he said sitting down. "It's not true that my proposal is unexpected. I've talked to you about it before several times quite seriously. Do you think I would come to see you every week if I didn't think of marrying you? I'm no idler, I work hard, don't have much spare time. I was hungry and tired, but I still came. Why? It's clear—I liked you."

"I'm glad to hear that."

"Good. I've never noticed that you were unfriendly to me, Marta. You have entered my plan."

"A five-year plan?"

"What's wrong with that? We should plan our lives to be straightforward and move ahead. Marriage must not be left to chance. What's marriage? It's a contract, just like the contract between the Ukrainian S.S.R. and the R.S.F.S.R. for example, a contract for joint work and struggle. It's a small contract within the larger contract of society. So we must take thought so's not to make a mistake. Otherwise you get married and in a month you're asking for a divorce. Is that right Marta? This isn't a game. Marriage must lead to children."

"How many?" Marta teased him.

"At least five. You know why? Two may die, two are replacing their parents and one is pure gain to the class and

nation. Children—that's priority number one. We are building for the new generation but we don't think about this new generation. In fact, we sadly neglect this question. I noticed that we Ukrainians are still scared of cities and are afraid to have children there. Especially those, like me, who have had great difficulties in making ends meet. They think it will be hard for the children. But this is not right. A child will always grow up. We badly need Ukrainian children, young pioneers, builders of socialism. We must educate them so that they like to work, to be sociable and strong. They must build a thousand new factories and be as tough as steel. Marta, I believe in a glorious future. People will be better then. If anyone tried to tell me that this is not going to happen I would turn into a theif. My father used to say if you don't believe in anything you can go ahead and murder people. But I'm not one of those who believe in a bright future and do nothing about it but talk. To believe for me means to work. Just think, our class is being reborn, our whole nation is being reborn—it makes your head dizzy. We need peace and work. And you, Marta, will be a wonderful mother. You have strong breasts, a good physique, your children will be strong and you'll bear them easily."

"You're not at an exhibition of milking cows," she remarked.

This practical boy began to amuse her. "Why should I be offended," she thought, "let him talk." Her mood was now wonderfully settled and she was completely relaxed. It was one of those moments when she could have said that she didn't need anything, a mood in which she could think clearly, act decisively, talk coherently, but was not compelled to do any of these things—just enjoy her own potentialities.

"These cursed words again," said Dmytro. "Perhaps they are inadequate. Perhaps I should have talked like a poet—about your beauty. But I talk as I can. I'm simple—you know me. And sincere—I don't lie. Well then, have a look at me. Am I strong? Yes. Ugly? No. Stupid? No. It's true I'm not an Apollo and not a genius. But Apollos are always lighthearted and geniuses are very rare. In fact, I don't think there's room now for a genius. The times have passed when they were needed to subdue nature. We are living at a time of systematic, practical work which requires honest, able workers. A genius would only spoil something. Besides, I would be a friend you can always trust, who will never betray you. I think you are too. That makes up ninety per cent of what is needed for a real marriage."

"What about the remaining ten percent?"

"It's there. You're forcing me to say that I like you. You know that very well. If you like to hear it I'll say it over and

over again. It's the truth. We'll make a good couple, Marta. We'll both march ahead and not be afraid of anything. How much we shall accomplish! You see, I'm proposing a serious, well-designed plan. Or do you have anything against me personally? Then tell me."

"No, I don't have anything against you."

"All right. These days people don't vote 'for.' Who's not 'against' is 'for.' Can I have your hand?"

"One can also abstain. I abstain."

"And I thought you were a real Ukrainian woman," Dmytro said, disappointed. "It's a crime to abstain. Only the weak abstain, those who don't know where to turn. Do you have an amendment to my proposal?"

"Yes, a very important one."

"Well, out with it—we'll talk about it."

"My amendment is very simple," she said, but before she could continue a knock was heard at the door. "Come in," Marta called out.

"Here they come," mumbled Dmytro, getting up. "Let them wait; I'll be quick."

"No, I don't want a scandal," she used her other cliché.

"Well, tell me in one word—what's your amendment?"

"Good evening, Liova," Marta said.

Liova waved from the threshold.

"Well, what's the weather like?" Dmytro asked him ironically. "Cold? You came in to get warm? Marta," he turned to her nervously, "I'm leaving the day after tomorrow. I can't stay any longer and there's nothing to stay here for. I'll drop in tomorrow. What time?"

"I'm always in after supper."

"Good, after supper."

Dmytro left and Liova took off his fur jacket. "Was he angry with me?" he asked Marta.

"Yes, with you. It's the second time he's been interrupted while he was telling me he wants to marry me."

"I came at the wrong time," whispered Liova.

"Did you want him to persuade me?"

Liova was silent. Marta started to laugh. "You were anxious for me to fall in love with someone or get married. Confess it!"

"Then, Marta, you'd be lost to me," he said with a great effort. "I can't get rid of my hopes."

"Why don't you go away from Kiev?"

"I can't."

"But you will agree that I can't fall in love or get married just because you want me to. You're very selfish. To punish you

I'll ask you to read to me. You haven't done it for a long time."

She gave him a book and sat on the bed. "I'm ready," she said.

Liova began to read. Clearly but monotonously he read line by line, stopping at all the commas and periods but showing no emotion. This kind of reading was an ideal background for thinking and Marta took full advantage of it. "What strange accidents happen," she thought about the professor's visit. She remembered her talk with him and was pleased that it happened. She could visualize him quite clearly, very close, as if he hadn't gone or had left behind him something tangible that she could be aware of. This feeling for what was absent pleased her like a pleasant illusion which persuades one to stay in it as long as possible.

In an hour Liova read two short stories, but she didn't want to listen anymore.

"You must go home now," she said, getting up. "I'm dead tired."

"All right, see you again sometime."

"You're not offended?"

"Marta, why do you ask? You're tired and I'll go."

When he had left Marta stood for some time in the middle of the room, then she slowly came up to the table and wound the clock. She looked at the alarm bell and stroked it with her hand. "You are my other heart," she thought.

It was still early, not eleven yet, but she got undressed. She turned off the lamp and sat on the bed. A quiet excitement, soft and languid, made her body shudder as if she were caught in a warm breeze which enveloped her and sat on her breasts like a fluffy bird. She smiled, rested on her elbow and finally lay down. She was quite comfortable now and could hardly feel her nightdress. The ticking of the clock drifted away and almost fell silent while her heart beat evenly—only the illusionary bird beat her breasts with its soft wings. To stop it she put her hand on her breast and fell asleep in a happy dream, in joyful forgetfulness, surrounded by vague, inexpressible premonitions.

ALONE WITH A GIRL IN A ROOM

"Without lysine," said Slavenko, "no young animal can grow and that includes you. As far as I can judge from your answers your growth isn't finished yet and this diaminohexanoic acid might be very useful to you. I'll see you again," he added, returning his notebook to the student.

"He's merciless," said the student to his two friends who were waiting in line to be examined. They decided to come another day.

The professor waited a few moments and then set out for home. It was half past five. In half an hour there was to be a meeting of the academic council of the University but Slavenko had decided not to go. He did not feel well, was very much on edge and tense and, even worse, his thoughts were in a whirl. However much he tried to concentrate, his mind wandered and could not be properly focussed. He was usually proud of being able to think clearly and to concentrate his mind on one point, like a sunray in a lens. Without these gifts his scientific work, such a demanding one-sided occupation, would not have been possible. The basis for this power of concentration was set in his personality, but a great deal of systematic work each day was needed to develop it. A yogi's gazing at his navel may appear comic but it is essentially the same process which has led to the discovery of the atomic mysteries. There is nothing worse for someone like that than to reach a state in which the thoughts, normally obedient slaves, suddenly create anarchy and rebellion. Where was the evil agitator who had started this unrest, breaking all the laws?

The emotions are ancient agitators among the thoughts, toiling tirelessly in the various fields. Very long ago, in the mist which is called prehistory, a lively but terrible contract was established between emotions and thoughts. Carefree thoughts which lay dormant in the recesses of animal brains received a burning stimulus, a thirst for animal instincts buried in the flesh, and became their modern expression. Blind at one time, they now obtained eyes; deaf, they received hearing; only able to howl, they now began to talk pleasantly, covering their

nakedness with the top-hat of logic. Whenever emotions inspired thoughts with their passion it was so as not to be themselves restrained and muted. On the contrary, they hoped that this rational masquerade would serve them well in their struggle for quick satisfaction. It was then that the terrible aspect of this life-stimulating relationship was revealed, as emotions, the moving force behind thoughts, began to influence them. Thoughts tried to escape into the bright realms of the future, but emotions lassoed them from behind, throwing poisoned arrows, which, at first unnoticed, became quite dangerous.

The previous night, after returning from his laboratory, Slavenko could not work productively. In the evening–between nine and twelve–he usually did some "light work"–reading scientific journals and writing letters. The night before he had written no letters and had only glanced through the journals. "This is all stale and trivial," he thought brousing through the articles. Usually he sat for these three hours behind his desk, but last night he had got up several times, once for a glass of water, another time to dust off some books. What was most upsetting was that his ration of cigarettes prepared by the maid proved to be insufficient and he had to make some more cigarettes himself, which upset his routine. He went to bed earlier than usual but was unable to fall asleep for a long time. "Nastia has overheated this room," he thought. "She hasn't noticed that the weather outside has turned warmer."

Today there was frost and wind and snow had begun to fall. Yuri Oleksandrovych came into his room and turned on the light. His mood did not improve even now that he was in his familiar room, amongst the furniture he knew so well. He did not react to the challenge of the red cloth which covered his desk, cleaned of every speck of dust by Nastia's brush. The shining bookcases which used to smile at him with their rows of books did not cheer him, either. He even thought: "These books will soon push me out of the room. If I stay here another ten years I'll turn into a real bookworm."

He came to the desk. There were more letters on it. He glanced at them and without opening any, put them aside. All this was his scholarly correspondence with its well-formulated questions and answers, dry notices and the traditional stereotyped and almost mocking salutation in the last line. Usually typed, these letters looked like some mechanism which only allowed ink to be used at the bottom in the writer's signature. It would be a waste of time to search in this pile of envelopes for a single trace of friendship, warmth or any sign that these letters were, after all, from people to people.

Slavenko sat on the sofa and, letting himself go, started thinking about Marta. He was like someone who is thirsty, gulping water eagerly down. He felt that she was uniquely beautiful. Her eyes shone for him with fascinating, unknown sparks, which attracted his tired look like the distant glow of a bonfire. He himself looked like a wanderer lost in the limitless and colourless prairies of his science, where there is only autumn, fading colours and drought. Her mouth, smooth and bright, was like a deep well in the desert full of stones and sand shining with the depth of living, inexhaustible waters bringing joy and forgotten youth. Terrifying, vibrant youth was in the features of her face, the texture of her skin, the lines of her body, in her gait, gestures and speech. She had everything he had rejected, lost and neglected and denigrated, the sum total of all the galaxies and nightly darknesses, that wonderful gift of life which falls into one's hands only once for a brief, unique span.

He no longer thought about her but rather within her. His thoughts stopped and, without moving forward, permeated his being deeper and deeper, touching his inner self like a sharp string which, penetrating every vein, made his body exhausted and limp. "Why am I doing it?" he whispered in dejection, but the wave of desire carried him further on, now lifting him on its crest, now casting him down into the whirlpools of sleep and peace. Suddenly he was left in this room, as in a hot and arid desert, with only one wish: to see her, to look at her for a very long time without thought or word. He was tense, his whole being grew convulsed, and he saw her as he had the day before—in a simple blue dress, grey stockings, glass beads around her neck and a shining black belt around her waist. She was radiant and he had to close his eyes; he was ready to fall on his knees, to bend down in silent ecstasy before her, to turn to dust before her feet, in their cheap black shoes.

When the moment of ecstasy passed, the professor opened his eyes, felt calmer and began to collect his thoughts. But his mode of thinking was now different from what it used to be; it was impatient, broken up and disrupted by the wild beating of his heart which was aching and longing. He was overcome by fear. "What's going to happen?" he asked himself in vain. "Why is it she?" She was, after all, an ordinary girl, one of hundreds you can meet every day on the street, hundreds of them scattered in small jobs in various institutions. They lead quiet lives, have their romances, get married, bear children and die. Their place is taken by those running around in the kindergartens, playing hop-scotch, then studying and forming a new legion in this senseless stream of girls. And one of these ordi-

nary girls, average in brains and beauty, indistinguishable from thousands of others, suddenly without warning, has the insolence to captivate you and to seem somebody quite extraordinary although she has no right to do so. This does not make sense.

The professor felt offended and got up from the sofa. His ego was badly hurt. Just imagine—he, a serious scientist would begin to court some office girl, to waste precious time on her, grovel in front of her, sigh and be as love sick as an idiot or even compete with the riffraff following her. "That's out of the question," he thought, excited, walking up and down the room. But at the same time, quite unrelated to this trend of thought, an answer came into his head: yes, she is ordinary, but not for him, since he had discovered something extraordinary in her. That was enough. And it was a great happiness to find something unusual where everybody else only found something ordinary. His restlessness returned. To see her—just for a moment! There was a tap at the door, or at least he thought there was. He turned in mad anticipation—perhaps it was she. But he saw only her smile, a mysterious, silent movement of her lips, enticing and saying come, come to me.

"I won't go," he said aloud fiercely.

In a flash he turned into his old self—the professor of biochemistry, Yuri Oleksandrovych Slavenko. He was thinking the way he read his lectures, sharply and confidently: "I must put an end to these idiotic trifles. I must satisfy my psychological needs. So I must marry Irene as soon as possible."

The professor looked at his watch; it was close to eight. He could propose before ten and then do a couple of hours work before midnight. He started to change. He took off his grey working suit and brought out the dark one he usually wore on his visits to the Markevychs. He put on a clean collar, a dark silk tie and in ten minutes Yuri Oleksandrovych was ready, looking very elegant indeed. "Yes, that's the rational solution," he thought, although he avoided looking at himself in the mirror, feeling a deep resentment towards himself.

He left the house and at once had to put up his collar since a blizzard was raging outdoors. The wind blew in gusts and scattered cold snow into his eyes, ears, sleeves and behind his neck. A lull followed and everything was quiet but in a trice a new blast of wind forced him to put up physical resistance. The biochemist struggled slowly towards Khreshchatyk where Irene lived. The closer he approached his goal the more he was overcome by doubt. He felt some self-pity and disliked the idea of seeing Irene and these feelings grew in intensity until, at the very entrance to his future wife's house he felt bored to death.

"No, I'm too excited," he thought. "I can't see her in a state like this." It wouldn't be right to mention such a serious matter as a marriage proposal when he was in such a condition. Besides, to court Irene meant lowering himself in front of her, appearing greedy and losing his integrity. He must take himself in hand!

He was even more reluctant to go back home. "I have lost my equilibrium," he thought. He gave up the idea of doing any work that night as a result of his own unforgivable weakness. This must be a stern warning to him. To use up the evening somehow and also to punish himself for his moral errors, the professor decided to take a long walk along the city streets. "It will refresh me," he thought, "and perhaps I'll still be able to do some work before going to bed."

Shielding himself from the snow which was pouring into his face in handfulls, with his hands deep in his coat pockets, bent a little against the wind, he walked away from Irene's apartment and trudged along empty streets in weather which was hardly suitable for strolling.

In the meantime it was warm and cosy in Marta's room. The wind was from the north, but her room and the adjoining kitchen faced south and the blizzard that struck the facade of the building nestled on her window in a gentle powder. The room was pleasantly quiet, the lamp on the table shed its light protectively, all the furniture was in place, fulfilling its function, and only the lady of the house, after starting a fire, did not know what to do. There are moments of leisure which feel like a burden. What could she expect today? Dmytro was bound to come to try and persuade her to marry him. Liova and the co-op worker would come too but no one really interesting would come, she thought. The saddest thing was that the next day was Sunday—a whole day with nothing to do from morning till night. The mere thought of it was depressing but Marta thought it gave her an excuse to see if she had a better dress she could put on. Indeed, lately she had dressed rather sloppily, she thought, and she started to change.

She took out the brown woolen dress trimmed with black silk, the one she usually wore when she went to a theatre, when coats had to be checked. She also got out her black patent shoes, bought for hard-earned money and her only pair of fine imported stockings which were the apple of her eye. In a second she was dressed. Her face looked more prominent now against the cinnamon-coloured dress and with her dark, naturally wavy, chestnut hair. Her nose was straight, her lips thin, her face oval and her features clear and a little severe, but her eyes were soft, smiling but at the same time a little melancholy, equally ready

to laugh to to cry. Having finished dressing, Marta powdered her face and rubbed on a little eau-de-colongne, a cheap brand, "Lily of the Valley."

She looked around the room which seemed much better to her now. But the light was too bright. She threw over the lampshade a green veil which she used as a scarf. "Now it doesn't look bad at all," she thought.

In a moment there was a knock on the door and Marta gaily invited the young engineer to come in. He was covered with snow and his face was red from the wind.

"Oh, what lousy weather," he grumbled, shaking off the snow. "The wind is devilish. And this is supposed to be March! But it's like a little paradise in here," he added, taking off his coat. "Warm, smell of eau-de-cologne and soft light. Why are you all dressed up—are you going out?"

"No, I'm not going anywhere."

"Splendid! Good evening, Marta," he cried. "You're so beautiful," and again he tried to embrace her.

"I'm always beautiful," she answered, pushing him away gently.

"She was waiting for me," the engineer thought optimistically.

"Sit down, Dmytro. What news have you brought?"

"I came here to listen, not to talk. Yesterday we broke off when you were going to make your amendment."

"Are you really so curious about it? It seems to me that you have made your mind up without me."

"I wouldn't have come here if I weren't curious. Marta, sit down here, beside me."

"No thank you. I'll sit near the table."

"You are a stubborn goat. Well, let's get back to last night's motion. Let's hear comrade Marta's amendment." He lit a cigarette with real satisfaction.

"My amendment is very simple," said Marta. "I'm not in love with you."

"I knew you'd say that," replied Dmytro, "and I have a counter-argument ready."

He sat closer to the girl and began to talk with great force:

"The point is, Marta, that nowadays marriage cannot be built on love. What is love? An emotion, a passion. It will burn out quickly and only a puff of smoke will be left. How many troubles are caused by love! How many have even taken their lives because of it, and they were young and strong and should have gone on living and working. But they want love! Just see whether love brings all that much happiness. Only torture and suffering. But now that's not necessary. In the old days when

people had nothing to do, love was fashionable. Knights used to cross swords over a lady, but now if two boys fought over a girl she herself would call them fools. Times have changed, Marta. There's no time for love now. If we waste our time on it we shall not only fail to build socialism, but we'll have nothing to eat. Yes, they'll be beggars, those lovers of yours!"

Then he smiled apologetically and added: "You must remember our national traditions—we always valued duty more than love. A man was above all the defender of his class. He went into the army, to the Sich* just as we now go to factories. Our Ukrainian women were brave, braver than men. You can't let them down, Marta. Marriage is something serious—it's made for work, for joint effort."

"Ha, ha," Marta laughed. "You're quite primitive, Dmytro. You would do as a preacher. Incidentally, Ukrainian women were so brave only because they could love. How did you get it into your head that I want to get married?"

"You must, whether you like it or not. That's the point. Our economic conditions are not so advanced that we can do without marriage. We are still backward. I've thought about it, Marta. To live together freely isn't possible yet. The chief precondition for it—a network of state-supported kindergartens—doesn't exist. We haven't enough accommodation for the homeless ones. How can we think that the state will look after all the new-borns? You must be practical, Marta; this isn't anything one can dream about."

"Can we live without dreams?" she asked.

"In this day and age dreamers will perish."

"Even a socialist dreamer?"

"Socialism is not a dream but a calculation. Socialism means statistics, scientific planning, a five-year plan. A nation isn't a dream either; it's work and determination. Anyone who doesn't realize this is backward, and life will pass him by—he'll be a wrongdoer. They say that socialism will be like living in barracks. True. They'll be barracks for people who stick to the old ways, but not for the new people. We have to remember that. This is no age for dreamers; it is made for practical men and women. Simple and practical. Just think of the way things are now: 'free love.' Free love means abortions which destroy women's bodies. True, there are some contraceptives but these are, as one professor put it, like using a cobweb against danger and a steel helmet against pleasure."

"You can skip those details," said Marta.

"We are talking business. We must consider everything and

* A Cossack stronghold on the Dnieper.

we must not be sequeamish about it."

"I'm not squeamish. It's just nasty, the way you talk about it. Can't you change the conversation?"

"We haven't exhausted it yet. Let's concentrate on it. Sooner or later everybody, in our society, must get married if he or she wants of live a full life–this is my main argument. Better sooner than later. Don't you agree? The sooner someone gets married the sooner they will have children and so they'll be able to educate them better. The sooner one gets married the better mate one can choose."

"For instance, you," Marta laughed.

"What's wrong with me? True, I'm only just starting work now, with no experience. I've a long way to go yet. But one day I shall be the manager of the plant I work in now. I shall be, Marta, not because I'm ambitious but because I feel I have the strength to do it."

He told her in detail how he wanted to work in the factory. He was going to specialize in smelting, which had lost ground in the country. A shortage of smelters sometimes amounted to fifty percent. Some of this was due to the old smelters' unwillingness to pass on their art to new generations. But by arduous work all the secrets could be learnt. He also told her about the apartment. There was a chance he could get two rooms not far from the factory, on a streetcar line, in a decent house. So he was all set.

"And now I'm looking for a wife," he ended, "a wife, not a lover."

"And I'm looking for love."

Dmytro was obviously displeased. "We're going in circles," he said gruffly. "Love and love. You spout this word like a magpie, like a high-school girl. But you've finished with high school. And now you're forcing me to tell you that I like you."

Marta tried to say something but Dmytro interrupted her.

"Yes, I like you," he continued, upset. "I like you very much. I wouldn't come here in such dreadful weather if I didn't care for you."

Marta started to laugh. "You needn't have bothered."

"But I did come. You must put some value on it."

"Don't be ridiculous, Dmytro. A great many others have come here in even worse weather."

"But what did you get from them? Surely their line must have bored you. You should know that all they were interested in was how to exploit you–you're a beautiful girl and tempting as well, if I may say so. None of them thought about you as a person. I expect they talked of love, perhaps even eternal love, but that isn't worth a penny."

"A penny worth," Marta repeated sadly.

"So you agree. I could tell you that I love you too. I could use that word you like so much."

He was getting more and more upset. Was there a possibility that all this practical approach had been wasted, that he wouldn't be able to make her see the truth which was so self-evident to him? Maybe they were talking a different language. Up to now he had never realized that his efforts might fail; he had always been able to press a point home, but he felt here that he could not overthrow this ridiculous, this harmless notion of love. He had got so used to the idea that this girl, whom he liked, would be his wife, his life's companion with equal rights, that it was painful to him to realize that his plan could not vanquish a woman's whim, so obviously silly it was. To make matters worse, this pretty young girl in this softly-lit, cosy room was very seductive. It looked as though all her finery was not for him. She wasn't expecting him but someone else. This made him even angrier.

"It isn't a matter of words," said Marta.

"Yes, you are right, for the first time. Words aren't important. What is important is one's outlook and understanding of life. I am no hypocrite and won't confuse 'liking' with 'loving.' Liking belongs to the present, loving to the past. Love is madness, it means nonsense, suicide and all that stuff in the crime and scandal column in a newspaper. Liking—that's a sign of friendship between male and female, a feeling which doesn't interfere with living and working. Love is harmful for our society because it leads one astray."

"I don't think the world we live in now is so shallow."

"Well, to dreamers the sea is up to their knees, but they can always drown in it. When I tell you that I like you, it doesn't mean that I'll do anything stupid like throwing myself out of the window or falling on my knees in front of you."

"Yes, that would be ridiculous and not at all in tune with the times," laughed Marta.

Her laughter maddened the young engineer. Still, he restrained himself and said maliciously:

"It means that if you turn me down, in less than a month I'll find just as good a wife as you."

"I wish you luck."

"Is that your last word?"

"I said so at the beginning."

"All right," said Dmytro coldly, getting up. "I'm leaving tomorrow. There's nothing more to talk about. You'll be sorry one day, but it'll be too late then. And I know this Slavenko very well," he added. "Not personally, but from friends, med-

ical students. He's a cruel man. As hard as a rock. They say he drove his own mother away because she got in his way."

"Why are you telling me this?" asked Marta. This was painful to hear.

"Just in case. Perhaps you think he'll marry you?" he added acidly.

"Are you afraid of competition? Well, I don't know—perhaps I'll marry him. Who knows?"

Dmytro's face reddened but the subdued light disguised it.

"I wish you every success," he said. "It's all the same to me. I'm not going to be jealous and I won't beg you on my knees. But just tell me why you led me on?"

"I?" asked Marta in surprise.

"Well, it wasn't this table, was it?" he sneered. "Why did you spend one evening a week with me? Isn't that leading me on?"

"I just liked talking to you, Dmytro. Do I have to shun people?"

"All right," he said. "Then goodbye. Let's shake hands."

"Goodbye. Don't be angry with me. When you're in Kiev, come in and I shall always . . ."

Dmytro clutched her hand firmly and wouldn't let it go. Bending over her he increased the pressure and muttered close to her face:

"You wanted to see me on my knees. Now let me see you on your knees."

He squeezed and twisted her hand sadistically, hoping she would fall down.

"Dmytro, I shall call for help."

"No you won't," he said and covered her mouth with his other hand. "So you wanted to play with me. On your knees!" he whispered, breathlessly.

Her hand was stiff and painful. Dmytro's other hand was scratching her face. Marta twisted awkwardly and fell on her knees, convulsed with pain.

"Now will you admit it?"

He pushed her on the floor.

"So we had a wrestling contest and I won."

"You're a brute," whispered Marta, getting up and massaging her hand.

"You're a brute," he answered, putting on his coat.

"You still live in the old, brutish ways. It's a pity I was deceived by you."

In the doorway he halted for a while and repeated, agitated:

"You're chasing shadows; I'm not. And I'll find somebody,

I'll show you."

Then he left.

"How stupid and painful," thought Marta. She looked again at her bruised hand, though the pain was subsiding as if with her look. Its disappearance left a pleasant, sweet feeling in the numb fingers, the feeling of pleasure one gets after hard physical work. She wanted to close her eyes but a soft knock was heard at the door. "Someone unusual," thought Marta. For a second she felt a bold desire for it to be he, who had accidentally brought her such pleasant sleep yesterday and today and who kept constantly reappearing in her thoughts in all kinds of epithets which she used without thinking of him directly. The intensity of her desire did not frighten her, but she thought to herself sadly, "It's impossible."

"Come in," she called out.

The impossible happened. He came in.

The professor of biochemistry who stood on the threshold of Marta's room was a sorry sight. He stood there covered with snow, numb with cold after his ill-timed walk, and morally devastated by his desire to see her. He was driven there like a criminal with a bad conscience who returns to the scene of the crime and his knees were shaking as if he were about to be beheaded. His heart had almost stopped beating before he shyly knocked on the door.

"Excuse me," he said, "but perhaps I am bothering you, at an inconvenient time."

"Oh, no," answered Marta. "Do take off your coat."

He did so and then said: "Are you sure I'm not in your way? I must warn you that I didn't come on business."

"That means you haven't forgotten anything here."

He missed the reference at first but remembering the incident with the cigarette case he said:

"Yes, I've forgotten something."

"What is it?"

Then he came close to her saying passionately and in great despair:

"I came. I couldn't . . . Something has happened. I had to see you. I couldn't stop myself—so I came. I had to see you."

Saying this he took her hand and his touch on the fingers, which had been in such agony just a few moments earlier, was such a great reward for her pain that she let out a cry.

"Are you afraid of me?" he said, at a loss.

Before she could answer she heard outside the door the good-humoured voice of the co-op worker singing a snatch of song about a poor widow and asking if she was at home. Then he knocked and entered.

"How dark it is in here," he called out and saw the professor. "Good evening," he said in a subdued voice.

"Sit down, Davyd Semenovych," said Marta, pulling herself together.

"I only came in to ask what time it is. My clock has stopped."

"A quarter to ten," said Marta.

"Thank you very much, thank you."

He went out, smiling maliciously and in the dark kitchen met Liova who was just coming in.

"Where are you going?" he asked him. "You're too late."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm telling you you're too late. She's got someone already."

"Who?"

"That clever chap you brought, your friend. The professor—he's after her."

"Really?"

"Well, go in and see if you don't believe me. It's half dark in there and he's there all right."

"Oh well, I'll go home then," said Liova and turned back.

"You may just as well not come back here," thought the co-op worker.

BAYADERE,* YOU ENCHANT ME

The laboratory of a biochemist does not startle the eye with its variety or please it with complexity of apparatus. The laboratory of a biochemist is a test tube, a thin, transparent test tube with various attractive shapes. It is fragile, fire resistant, soft yet harder than some metals under the corrosive fluids and destructive mixtures. The laboratory of a biochemist means, too, reagents, colourful fluids which in the accidental composition of their atoms have acquired the new quality of longing for each other and mixing passionately with new substances. Of these the most prominent are acids and alkalis, the potent and passionate representatives of the chemical sexes, tempestuous and terrible lovers, which consume each other on contact and create water and salt, from which life began and has continued up to our day.

The subject of biochemistry is life. Life, in its most intimate manifestations, life itself, its essence, so difficult to understand: the deep foundations which are contained in most of the complex chemical processes in a certain physical environment. This life, quite different from the one treated by philosophy, politics, sociology or art, is the subject of biochemical research. Not the passions or ideas which move mankind, not the joy and suffering of human beings but this basic mechanism of life, its unseen workings within the spirit-holding body. This science is terrifying because, like some others, it constantly reveals the nothingness of life and yet at the same time it is great for it discovers that nothingness with the help of the highest spiritual powers.

As long as man remained comparatively instinctive he was proud of himself and considered himself related to the gods, but when he ascended the heights he discovered that he was an organic phenomenon. There is a certain pride in this; it is a gesture worthy of a genius but a gesture of despair. A fiery youth and a stern biochemist will agree on only one point: that

* An allusion to Kalman's operetta *Die Bajadere* (1921) which enjoyed great popularity in the Soviet Union in the 1920's.

life is a burning-up process. The former will explain it by the attempt to reach a distant goal, a struggle for shining ideals, a contest and the other will coolly explain that this burning up is merely metabolism, the transmutation of substances.

Biochemistry is a new science and rather modest. Unlike many of the other sciences, it does not claim to invent anything. There is nothing more than a desire to know precisely the workings of an organism and to be able to recreate what it does. But when we consider that an organism can create living matter, then a biochemist's modesty begins to look like arrogance. To create living matter! This is unheard of!

But it is very likely that living matter will be recreated artificially. At first there will be synthetic protein, the basic substance of life, found in the body of every animal, and then protein will have to undergo certain chemical conditions that will enable it to live, that is to receive and eliminate nourishment and split in two when fully satisfied. This is a complicated matter but, theoretically, quite possible, even if the joy of an artificially created amoeba will probably also be theoretical. This amoeba will confirm that the hypotheses have been well founded. It would flatter human egotism by its slow motions, but it would be just as useful in its single-celled or multi-cellular forms as obtaining water by mixing hydrogen and oxygen in an electric current while all the streams, seas and oceans exist. It might, after all, be more suitable for such an amoeba to multiply in a smelly puddle. Even if biochemists were able to create an entirely new man this product would hardly be able to compete with the existing human being.

However, the science of biochemistry concentrates on problems connected with metabolism. Among the substances which take part in the steady breaking down of organic compounds the pride of place is taken by albumen, honoured by science with the name of protein, a colloidal substance which appears in many different forms. Its place of honour is due to the fact that protein is also present in the human body which can grow and gain strength from it. From the three substances which constitute our food—proteins, fats and carbohydrates, only the first two contain nitrogen, a necessary component of a live cell and so only albumen can regulate the so-called nitrogen balance of an organism. By destroying protein we destroy an organism. To create artificially a cheap and palatable protein would revolutionize agriculture and liberate men from dependence on good harvests and soils, on animal meat. This could be the best revolution of man, the beginning of a new era when men will indeed equal the old gods who drank ambrosia. To create artificial protein would mean reaching the limit of human

creativity, since nature herself has invented nothing more complex. Would a man dare to compete with nature in this?

And yet research on proteins has not been very active. Because the slightest chemical reaction can destroy protein, every method of chemical analysis has failed to reveal the secret of its substance. Instead of discovering the protein, at first chemists could only destroy it. Albumen was declaring its extraterritorial powers, its diplomatic immunity among other organic substances. But in time new methods of attacking this problem were found. A daring attempt was made to attack the proteins through their weakness—their fear of acids. In the end the protein was conquered. Forced to decompose through hydrolysis it yielded up the complex amino acids which may be described as following the formula $R - CH(NH_2)$ and this does not make it clear to the reader. It was found that proteins consist essentially of amino acids of which there are twenty kinds, existing in pure form as a white sweetish powder. Thus protein can be made from amino acids.

The name of the famous German scientist Emil Fischer who, early in the twentieth century made a signal contribution to the creation of synthetic proteins, might be mentioned. If boiling water added to proteins produced simple substances called amino acids, then, to reverse the process protein might be made from pure amino acids by dehydration. The interesting point about amino acids is that they are not the normal children of the world of chemistry, which, like the human world, has its anomalies. Among its inhabitants there are not only monosexual fluids like acids or alkali, not only asexual ones—salts, which are the equivalents of our castrates—but amphoteric substances too, both alkali and acid, sort of hermaphrodites which contain in their molecules the possibilities of bisexual reactions. Among these are the amino acids, which can become linked in such a way as to hitch the end of one molecule to the front of another. Under the right conditions, which mother nature has hidden from us, these amino acids can form the complex hermaphrodistic structure of protein. It is strange, but perhaps a natural phenomenon, that the organization of matter into life forms is carried out not, we may say, through normal unions but by a rather subtle perversion.

Within the human organism, protein taken in the form of food begins, under the influence of the digestive juices, to turn into amino acids just as it does in the chemist's test tube. Yet while the human organism can then transform these amino acids back into protein, no laboratory can do so. It took Fischer seven years to link the molecules of amino acids artificially into a simple chain which produced the biuret reaction characteristic

of protein. Fischer called them polypeptides but the distance between them and the actual protein is no less than the distance between a rough draft and a carefully printed, well-bound book.

While he was still a student, Slavenko, who had intended to become a doctor, grew so interested in Fischer's research that he decided to continue it, especially since, after Fischer, attempts to produce a synthetic protein proceeded very slowly. He remained at the university and had to work there under difficult civil war conditions, when water froze in the laboratory, and there was no equipment, alcohol and reagents, not to mention food, of which he had very little. In spite of these drawbacks his work was successful, although he had to simplify his research methods. He was lucky in this and in a year he was able to repeat Fischer's experiments with the help of much simpler reagents. Slavenko succeeded in simplifying Fischer. His article, published in a German journal, attracted a great deal of attention.

Later, after spending a year on the Polish front, he returned to his research with even greater zeal. He made a plan of work for himself. It was to go in two directions: To study the structure of protein in the human organism in order to ascertain its qualitative as well as its quantitative composition and the part played by the amino acids; and secondly, to develop methods of concentrating the already known polypeptides into peptones, a more sophisticated organization of protein. This work was divided into several series of experiments, each of which, provided it was successful, would lead to the next series. Each series was described in an article and Slavenko had already published six of them, giving him a high reputation among scientists. He proved that each of his series not only provided new data but showed a brilliant command of methodology and a high concentration of scientific intellect.

He had just finished another series and he had to describe it in an article. Soon he would start his next project, since time passes and life is limited while the task is boundless and unending. True, some reagents necessary for the new series had not yet arrived from abroad, but he could already start his preparations. Not an hour must be wasted since even a minute never returns.

Yet in the long row of hours and in the unseen passage of minutes there appears a spark, a live flame which sets a bright rainbow over the cold current of time, which tries to run faster until it is stopped like the biblical sun over the battlefield. This is the fire of love which fulfills life.

What can be more trivial than to procreate? What can be more boring than to fulfill this animal function? And yet man

was destined to find here an enchanting zig-zag in his otherwise straight and narrow path. Is it strange that man who in his hunger created beautiful cities, and again in his hunger unravelled the mysteries of existence, would disguise this particular hunger too in such an attractive guise?

On the wide surface of life, love is not noticeable and is of no interest except to lovers. It may even repel if it becomes obvious. "How silly," everyone will say seeing an open kiss. Jealousy? Foolishness? Neither. The nature of love lies in its intimacy, in the seclusion of its joyful impulses, in its dark separateness, in the daring division of the world into lovers and the rest. This most ordinary human feeling hides its secrets and gives everyone the right to unfold himself from the beginning, as if he were created precisely for this.

What is love?

"It is some kind of madness," said Slavenko, rising in ecstasy.

"Glorious madness," replied Marta. "But sit near me, Yuri, always near me."

Their love was a week old. Springing up so suddenly, it joined them firmly together so that they could not imagine themselves without each other. Indeed, if one of them thought of himself or herself then they always thought of each other. They became a pair, a couple, a voluntary twosome, each freely agreeing to this status and sharing the only desire—to be together.

They did so as much as they could. Since they were both busy during the day, they were only together in the evenings. This was a solemn occasion for which they both prepared all day long secretly, hiding from others the splendid mystery, which only they could share and understand. Outwardly neither had changed but what had filled their lives up to now—job, lectures, all kinds of plans—all at once became dead, a dry, uninteresting duty which had to be carried out. The highest truth was revealed to them in their unexpected feeling for each other and everything which had seemed important to them before was suddenly overshadowed by the new sunlight, which dispersed everything else like a mist.

The biochemist experienced love as a sudden catastrophe. At first he could not understand anything and frequently asked himself what was the matter with him. Later he stopped asking this agonizing question. It was silly, redundant and harmful, since it had a clear answer: she was most beautiful. The answer came from a different sphere of human activity; it bypassed the question, flooding it without solving it. So the question was dead or appeared dead. But then his emotions took over and

began to destroy his routine, his work and even himself. All these changes he accepted gladly; he surrendered to them without resistance for he felt in them the strongest evidence of the words: she was most beautiful.

Several times he attempted to write the article on his last research series. But scientific thoughts were anemic and dull. Memories of Marta interrupted his thoughts again and again. Where is she now? How does she look now? What is she going to do until seven when they are due to meet? "My darling, my precious one," he whispered, getting up from the desk. He would start walking up and down and smile. "People would think me a fool—but this is a lie. It's you who are fools. You don't understand anything," he answered his imaginary attackers. In such a mood all kinds of desires were let loose in him. He suddenly thought that it would be a good idea to paint a portrait of Marta, so that everyone could tremble in front of it. He imagined himself a painter of genius, painting this portrait with ecstasy, although he had no artistic gifts. After a few days he would begin to think that it would be better to sculpt Marta in marble. And he would be the accomplished sculptor. And sometimes he would just lie down on the sofa, smoke, and think of the distant lands where he and Marta would go and wander amid tropical forests and eternal snows.

The longer he was in love the deeper the satisfaction he derived from it. He immersed himself in it and allowed it to change his life and even to hamper his work, which would have seemed blasphemy before. He began to see greater value in Marta than in his work. She was far more precious than all his research, both what he had completed and what he had merely planned, higher than any human science. He looked, as it were, to the side of the path along which he was travelling, saw luminous open spaces and felt what he had never felt before.

To Marta, love was the fulfillment of her dreams. What she had so much desired came about. And it was exactly as she had imagined it. An hour before it happened she would not have believed it possible. This man, to whom she felt so close, was then a stranger—and suddenly she understood him and was in love with him. There was nothing strange or mysterious in this stark transformation. It had to happen like this. She had known it would happen like this long ago, when she was filled with longing, when she wakened at night after a strange dream and when she took her eyes off her book during the evening. Even then this premonition was growing in her and became a certainty, nourishing a hope that there would be a unique encounter, an unfailing instinct. She lived in constant expectation, sharply aware of everything that touched her inner self. Now

she responded as if to a sudden call and she was overcome with joy and gladness that this was so.

What did they talk about? If someone took notes on their conversations he would be struck by the paucity of vocabulary. Many exclamations, personal pronouns and one verb, usually in the present tense—that's what their talk consisted of. But it sounded wonderful to them and simple sentences which ended not with a period but with a kiss seemed to them the finest examples of oratory. Slowly their vocabulary expanded and after a week Yuri Oleksandrovych was ready to talk about anything.

"It's madness," he said, standing in front of Marta. "That's the best definition—reason has no part in it."

"Sit near me, Yuri," she replied. "Why have you run away?"

"Ever since I fell in love with you," he continued, "lots of things have seemed different to me. I understand a great deal that I didn't see before, or understand before. You are a real witch," he kissed her and she stroked his head, "and even if we had to part . . ."

"Be quiet!" Marta called out. "It's impossible."

"Don't be alarmed; I'm only talking hypothetically. Even then I would go away a new man. I would always keep the changes you have made in me. You are invincible."

"Look into my eyes," said Marta. "I want to look deep, deep into your eyes. I love your eyes."

As she looked into his eyes they kissed.

"Marta," he murmured, holding her close. They both sat down on the rug near the bed. "Marta, you are like the women great poets loved. I have a poor memory for names. I remember formulae much better. But I remember that Dante found in Bisectrice eternal beauty."

"Beatrice," she corrected him softly, kissing his forehead.

"Her name isn't important. The point is he found eternal beauty. And in you, Marta, I have found a lost nation."

"So quickly?"

"Yes. We won't argue who found the most—Dante or I. An argument like that would be metaphysical."

"Dante loved his nation too," she said, putting her head on his shoulder.

"I knew he was a universal genius—a man who could be a model for anyone. But even he wouldn't be able to say what a nation is. I've tried to analyze this concept and I believe that it's a very mysterious phenomenon which seems to exist while in fact only its component, contradictory parts exist. If you like, a nation is like protein, which immediately falls apart as soon as

you try to analyze it. And yet protein does exist as a definite substance and it's an important factor in human life. In any case, since I fell in love with you I've become aware of being a Ukrainian, although when I first visited you I only intended to practice the language. I went further than I intended—so you have become a catalyst. This is my own chemical term," he added, kissing her.

"You can't live without those terms," she said reproachfully. "You love them more than you love me."

"I'm as used to them as a blind man to his dog. True, because of you I'm not blind any more, but it would be cruel to chase the dog away. It may yet come in useful to us, Marta. When my reagents come from abroad, a new series of experiments will begin, which I shall name after you."

"I wish they'd never come. I refuse to have anything to do with this series."

"Oh, you're joking. You want to ruin me."

"Why don't you ruin me?"

"Tomorrow I'll dynamite the Tobacco Trust."

"I wish it would happen," she sighed. "If only people could be free. Free of their jobs and wages. What a glorious life it would be then, Yuri. There should be big theatres and cinemas free of charge, free travel, where you would be welcomed and given free food. Yuri, will this ever happen, do you think?"

"These desires can't stand up to criticism. Even under socialism people won't become free of care."

"What a pity! But," she said quietly, "I wouldn't exchange that paradise for one moment with you. Or even more: I wouldn't exchange it for one moment of waiting for you. I simply won't give you up."

"Marta," he whispered, bending over, "do you realize how much I love you?"

"And how much I love you?"

Their conversation once more became rather limited to a primitive vocabulary, centred around a verb which clings to the lips of lovers as a delusion does to a deranged mind.

Marta's head was now on his knees and he was stroking her face and wavy hair. Feeling an inner need to develop and finish every thought, he continued:

"I said that a nation is something incomprehensible. But if we can't understand something we look for analogies to it. Have you noticed how much interest there is now in the past? Among my small circle of friends two are collecting antiques, all kinds of ceramics impossible to use, all kinds of dark pictures and books, nibbled by mice. Why? Because we have come a long

way forward and, like immigrants, we want to glance back to the abandoned country. We came out of the past and we long for it. Love of one's country means a love of the past. The essence of a nation is recollection of the past. A member of a nation is one who has understood the past. That's why it's unimportant who was born what. That's a mechanical moment, a stamp on a document on which nothing is yet written. One is not born into a nation; it is a matter of choice."

She agreed. She generally agreed with anything he said just because he said it. Even if she didn't agree, she did not contradict, but only dissented.

"So this is what you think? All this is so simple to me. After all we lived in Kaniv*."

"In Kaniv. We must visit it. You will be my guide in my belated pilgrimage to Taras' grave."

"We shall go, don't worry. I was born there. I'll tie your hands, Yuri, and guide you. I'll show you every corner. My valleys, my shrubs. Whenever I went for a walk and saw a shrub I used to tell myself, 'this is my shrub.'"

"I'm afraid these shrubs will be fully grown trees now," said Slavenko, putting out his cigarette.

"Why did you have to say that so cruelly?" Marta asked. "No, shrubs stay small, they don't grow. It's very beautiful there, Yuri. When shall we go there? In April? No, it's still cold. In May? It's so long to wait. We'll walk on and on, side by side."

"Side by side," said Yuri, emotionally.

Her emotion had an infectious effect on him. Her shining eyes bewitched him. There were moments when Marta's feelings overflowed and transformed her. Her features grew soft and sad and he felt he must carry this being in his arms across the universe. The room then became still with the stillness of love, when he held her in his arms and touched her lips with his, uniting their overwhelming passions.

"Are you Marta?" he whispered.

"Yes, I am," she replied.

Then she pressed her head between her hands and said slowly:

"I don't want to think about anything. Yuri, I only want to think about you. Right now. Now you are here and I'm thinking of you. It's as if you were two people. One of them I feel, the other I think about. Is it strange? How long I have waited for you. I didn't know you, yet I felt you would come.

* The place on the Dnieper river where the greatest Ukrainian poet, Taras Shevchenko, is buried.

And you did."

"I think this psychological riddle is easy to solve. In the spring animals begin to feel more intensely. You simply felt the approach of spring, nature."

"You always want to explain things," she sighed. "Why explain them? You mustn't be too rational with me, Yuri."

"It's difficult, but I'll try. You're right, Marta. Why try to explain? We don't add anything to it, but we ruin its magic. A curious child ruins his toy, just to find out how it was made. Our explanations are inadequate and in the final analysis they don't explain anything. The large X which we try to solve always yields a smaller x and so on until instead of one large X we have a whole series of small x's, equally difficult to understand. You're right! We think too much and don't live enough. Life passes us by and we live a sterile life in which all the microbes of unrest are dead. Our tendency to think too much is a great crime. Your lips, Marta, promise the highest wisdom, against which my wisdom is contrived and small. Teach me your wisdom, Marta, for I am your pupil; I am a big child who hasn't lived yet."

BAYADERE, YOU HAVE INTOXICATED ME

Having fallen in love, professor Slavenko began to show great interest in poetry. Every two or three days Marta brought him a new collection of verse from her trade union library and apart from that Yuri Oleksandrovych acquired some volumes with the help of his maid, Nastia. He did not have the courage to go to a bookstore himself and buy a book of poems, since he was afraid he might meet some of his friends there and betray his passion to them. His interest in poetry he regarded as a private matter. Yet, being a methodical man, he had to find room in his bookcases for poetry and he solved this problem by placing them next to the books on psychopathology.

He decided not to write the article after all, but to delay it until the results of his next series of experiments became known. Journals and correspondence piled up on his desk but he had become indulgent about it. "Let them lie," he thought, "they can't change the world. What importance have I here in this world? My death would not change anything." And he would sit down on the sofa to read the poets and in the evening he would tell Marta about his excursions into the land of poetry.

"A careful reading of the poets," he said, "has confirmed my earlier opinion of them and of art in general. My main thesis, that artists do not solve any of life's problems, has not changed. Since time immemorial the poets have not changed their position one iota; their themes and concepts are the same as ever. If science now regards our earth as a speck of dust in the universe and man as one of the animals, poetry still holds the earth to be the centre of the world and man—the crown of creation. Science has discovered the laws of nature, it has showered us with new theories and inventions, while poetry has not discovered anything new. In our own times we've seen the birth of reflexology, the theory of relativity, Freudianism, not to mention thousands of technical inventions, among them the radio and the aeroplane, but the poets, just as they did centuries ago, celebrate the free man and the slave, the half-a-dozen human emotions and above all, love."

"What's wrong with love?" asked Marta who was lying in his arms. He kissed her.

"That's the only answer I can give you," he said.

She hugged him and replied, "Tell me more."

Marta loved Yuri's thoughts as much as she loved him. She wanted to know him through and through and the thoughts he expressed made it easier for her. She liked to feel that he was sharing his thoughts with her and to hear that this and that had changed in his views since he fell in love with her was to her the highest compliment. It was she who forced him to look at life anew from her room, who became a kind of lens wherein his look was newly refracted. She could not have dreamt of a bigger victory.

"My thoughts on poetry haven't changed but my attitude to it has. It's strange but true that thinking does not determine our attitudes. I'll give you a good example. My neighbours in the apartment have a huge cat who systematically steals my food. His skill in stealthy theft would be envied by the best burglars. It's this cat and my very talkative landlady that are the only drawbacks of my apartment. The cat costs me about a ruble a month in stolen food, but I have suffered this so as not to quarrel with the neighbours who worship him. I could only hate it and whack it occasionally. My view of this cat has not changed; it is a thief, an insolent brute. Yet, for some time I have felt, if you can imagine it, great friendliness towards it. And if you like, I have understood it. He's simply bored and by stealing he makes his life more interesting. Now I let him wander freely into my room. He jumps on my desk, buries himself in my papers and falls asleep."

"Yuri, your examples are impossible," remarked Marta.

"My students forced me to think of them. Some of them are so simple-minded that only an example like this could make them grasp an abstract proposition. So the poets don't understand anything either, but they force us to stop and think. I must confess I feel great uncertainty here. True, we have studied many phenomena and we can in one way or another exploit them, but can we really understand them? Take electricity, which we use so much in our daily lives. Why does it arise from the friction of some material or other—this is what we cannot understand and we cannot transfer its characteristics to some other matter which doesn't have it. Whenever we see a phenomenon we say, 'Yes, it must be so.' We confirm it, but we don't explain it. The first cause remains unknown."

"Maybe it's better not to know," commented Marta.

"Science can do very well without it," Slavenko continued. "However, I'm more and more convinced that although it

has developed steadily it hasn't affected human beings very much. Progress has changed our environment, has added more comfort to life, but it hasn't changed its essence. We're still animals with half-a-dozen emotions, which we've carried along with us through the centuries. And they are very basic to our existence. We still cherish the ancient hopes of happiness and a brighter future, the hopes of primeval man, from whom we differ only in clothes and language. The future is still unknown to us, both the personal and the collective. We can only guess and pass our guesses off as knowledge. This is cheating and it's exposed again and again, but it doesn't stop us from fooling ourselves, since men must have perspectives, although they don't know what they are. We go forward toward what we imagine but we arrive at what will be."

"How can we live without hope, darling?" asked Marta. "It is a good thing we don't know the future. It's all right if the future is good but if it isn't, no one would go on living if he knew. So we can dream. About anything. And sometimes the dreams come true," she added, kissing him. "Don't talk like this, Yuri, Life knows what it's doing. No one could imagine anything better. And if he did it would take root, too."

"Marta, I'm defenseless against your arguments. You see clearly, your mind isn't clouded by idle thoughts which lead people to theorize. Life is glorious, everyone secretly hopes so, and you express this clearly and openly. This rings in every line of poetry too whether poems praise or condemn life. That's why poetry takes hold of us although it can't stand up to rational argument. So love is intoxicating. It opens our hearts to life, it lets us enjoy the primordial pleasures of our ancestors, from whom we are descended and who also loved. How happy we are to feel this bond inside us, to throw away all our pride, all our trivial cares and to know that we are small and insignificant. The poet put it so well: 'I am as small as an insect on your indifferent hand.'"

In moments of self-abasement like this Slavenko would get into a mood which scared Marta. He kissed her until she trembled with fear and tried to get away from him, almost crying. Her movements became convulsive, as if she were drowning and she whispered imploringly:

"Don't, Yuri, don't."

He calmed down and grew as quiet as a lamb, but every day he gained greater power over her. Their intimacies grew every day. Nothing disturbed their meetings. Nothing existed outside the walls of the room as soon as their hands touched. From seven till twelve, five full hours—almost a working day—for them passed like a flash. Every day they thought of going

somewhere—to the theatre, a cinema, an art exhibition or simply for a walk—but they forgot about it and they never left the room which held privacy for a kiss. They never went out for they wanted to be alone, just the two of them. No one else was necessary for them and no one disturbed them. For at least a week and a half. But suddenly the outside world which they had kept at bay stretched out its fingers to them.

One evening Slavenko found Marta was not alone. But she didn't exactly have a visitor. Her visitor was a five-year-old girl, blonde, in a short dress and with a large bow in her hair which made her look more serious than her behaviour warranted. She was restless and her gestures had a certain pretentiousness, the coquettishness and mannerisms of a grown up, making her look like a lilliputian adult who, despite her size, knew everything about life.

When Slavenko came in the girl grew shy and stood there with her eyes downcast.

"Whose child is this?" Slavenko asked in a surly tone after greeting Marta.

"This is the daughter of my neighbour, the co-op worker. You've met him," whispered Marta.

"My name is Ada," the child said suddenly in Russian.

"Why is she here? Did you call her over?" asked Yuri, using the polite form of address to Marta in the presence of a third person.

"No, she came over herself."

"I can dance," said Ada.

Not waiting for an invitation she struck a ballet pose in front of Yuri, raising her hands above her head and twisting her tiny body.

"Stop it," Yuri said, to whom this unchildlike flirtatiousness appeared repulsive.

"I won't stop it just to spite you," said Ada continuing her dance.

"A spoilt brat," Slavenko mumbled and lit a cigarette.

"You say she belongs to your neighbour. As far as I remember you told me that they were Ukrainians. Why is she speaking Russian?"

"I can speak Ukrainian too," said Ada seriously, "but it sounds so coarse."

After finishing her dance she sat on the bed and started talking. Words came to her easily. She told them about the meals she'd eaten that day, her girlfriends and the boys with whom she played, making fun of all of them and stressing her own superiority. For half an hour Marta and Yuri stood there listening to her, only occasionally exchanging a phrase or two.

The boasting prattle of the child and her very presence deeply annoyed Slavenko who finally could bear it no longer and asked Marta to send her away. When she hesitated, Yuri himself asked the child:

"Why have you come here?"

Ada was put out by his tone.

"My father sent me; he told me to go out and play."

"Then tell your father that you are bored with playing here."

"How can you speak to a child like that?" interjected Marta reproachfully.

"She isn't a child; she's a spy."

"Do you realise that you are ruining my relationship with the neighbours?"

"Why? Is he in love with you?"

"Who?"

"Your neighbour, the co-op worker. He's sent his child to spy on us and to bother us. A good father! "

Marta started to laugh and put her arm around him.

"Yuri, this is nonsense. I'm the one to blame here. How can I put it? I've always had a lot of admirers."

"So that's how," muttered Slavenko.

"But I wasn't in love with any of them. I didn't even flirt with them. I don't care two hoots about them. I'm in love with you and I say so openly. All those others who came bored me in the end. The co-op worker used to send Ada whenever he felt that one of my admirers was becoming too insistent. So's to cool him down, you see."

"How shrewd," said Slavenko. "And I suppose you just teased your admirers."

"A little. They were all so funny. So my neighbour, seeing that you visit me so often, must have thought I needed his help. So he sent Ada again. This time he's wrong, but it's a pity you chased the poor child away."

"I didn't know that the co-op worker was your guardian angel," protested Yuri, still upset. Marta hugged him tenderly.

"Please don't worry, Yuri. It's nothing."

"Marta, I've been so worried the last few days."

"What's the matter, darling?"

"My longing to see you torments me more than ever. The whole day without you—it's stifling. My head isn't my own. Sometimes I feel as if I'll go mad; I forget everything. Inside I feel empty, terribly empty. Then, a moment later, I begin to remember painfully that I have to do this, to go there, or to read that. My thoughts are bits and pieces. Sometimes I try to remember something and I can't. I search my memory for hours

and I can't remember. Then I feel utterly exhausted. I sit down and sit in a stupor. My head is as heavy as lead. When finally I see you I can still feel the remains of pain, dissatisfaction, exhaustion."

"You're in love with me, Yuri," Marta whispered happily.

"Yes, I love you. I love you blindly and unconditionally. But sometimes I hate you too. When I come home after seeing you I often sit at the table and hate you with all my heart and mind. If someone told me then that you'd been killed, I'd cry with joy."

"You don't have to hate me."

"Even now I don't know," he said, looking into her eyes, "whether I love you or hate you."

Instead of answering him she started kissing him. At first softly and languidly, then more passionately. Between kisses she whispered, "You love me, you love me."

He wasn't pleased with these games. He sat next to her, dark and aloof.

"What's the matter?" asked Marta.

Yuri was silent. She started teasing him by looking into his eyes. But he averted them and resisted her attempts to cuddle up to him. At last he murmered:

"You're not logical, Marta."

She placed her hands on his shoulders and said in an elated child-like tone:

"I understand everything, Yuri; I'm not a naive little girl. I know what you want. I know what I want too. And I think we both want the same thing. Whisper to me what you want."

"I want you," he said, encouraged.

"So do I," said Marta. "So what's the problem?"

"Yes, what's the problem?" he repeated embracing her.

But she freed herself and said, "The problem is in my little whim."

"Tell me what it is and we'll remove it together."

"It will go itself in time. You see, I've thought it all out. I'm afraid, terribly afraid. I knew it would happen one day, but I don't want it to happen here."

He looked at her surprised.

"I don't understand anything."

"It's difficult to understand. It's ridiculous. But I want it to happen where I was born—in Kaniv.

"Forgive me, Marta, but this is more than ridiculous, it's sentimental."

"Yes, it's very strange," Marta answered awkwardly, "I can't understand it myself. But I was born and grew up there. I was happy there. You must understand that it can only happen

there."

Marta's eyes shimmered with the reflections of the past, with the dreams which belong to the past though they reach for the future. Her voice vibrated, carrying her deepest desires and seeking sympathy and understanding for them. Yuri was quite moved. In these moods she dominated him and awakened something in his heart of which he was not aware—the yearning for distance and great joyful premonitions.

"It's something very important, Yuri," Marta said. "It doesn't happen every day—it's something festive. Like childhood. Do you understand now? In the spring I'll take my holiday and we'll go there. I'll show you extraordinary places. There I'll be logical, Yuri. No one will be there except us two. We'll wander together through the steppes, valleys and hills. I was born there and know every nook. In the evening we'll row a boat along the Dnieper. Better still, we won't even row, but let the water carry us along. You'll see how beautiful it is there. Do you agree, darling? We'll stay there for two weeks and then you'll go wherever you want to go, because it's impossible to be in love all the time. We'll know when to part, won't we?"

He got up and took her hands.

"Marta, why do you say this? How did you manage to keep this tenderness and this passion? How can I not agree with you? Everybody has to listen when you talk. What you say holds ancient, forgotten wisdom. You're quite a mystery."

"I'm quite simple," answered Marta.

"At a time like this I see things clearly and my mind is lucid. I feel a great enthusiasm for work. But let me put off work for a while and just think about you and live for you."

"Agreed. I want you to do that."

He often mentioned his work and at first this worried Marta, since she believed his science was her rival. Later she accepted his interest in science and wanted to learn more about it herself.

"You never talk to me about your research," she said to him one day.

"I didn't think it would interest you."

"Yes, it does. I want to understand everything."

So he started to tell her his ideas about biochemistry.

"Proteins strike the researcher as extraordinarily complex and having such a delicate structure. We can certainly say that no genius could create what nature does so easily by accident. Yes, accident. We are the children of accident too, but we can detect in nature the laws which she reveals to us. Of all the animals we are the only ones who know of nature's law of chance and this knowledge is the source of both our happiness

and our despair. Happiness, because chance gives birth to hope, not only a personal one, but a group and national one, even a universal hope in mankind's bright future. But at the same time there's also despair in that knowledge. Because we ourselves are a product of chance, and so impermanent and according to Schelling all impermanance leads to sorrow. Hegel stresses that too: every temporary existence means suffering. If only we could live forever, Marta, how trivial and insignificant all our sorrows would seem!"

"But so would our joys."

"You're right. Eternal life would be boring; it wouldn't be any different from eternal death. Opposites do meet; that's a pointless law of chance. Yet we are powerless against it and there is no way out, not even in theory."

"We don't have to look for a way out."

"It's best not to look for something that doesn't exist, but see how strong is the human desire to prolong existence. If the religious idea of life after death is in ruins and if the idea of a hereditary continuity—the old Jewish concept of immortality—does not satisfy anybody, then what is left is the immortality of ideas which could be attractive to all kinds of people. That's why people are still prepared to sacrifice their lives for an idea. Nothing enhances an idea so much as the destruction of people for its sake. History teaches us that the best soil for ideas has always been soaked in blood."

"Do you remember a song about death?" asked Marta.

"'Death is walking in the garden
It steals quietly on me—'

I sometimes sing it and I feel I'm calling my own death. As I sing I feel death walking near the building, coming into the apartment, touching the handle of my door and in a second it will come in. It's quite scary."

"Don't worry. Death doesn't come from anywhere. It's always right inside us, waiting for the right moment to seize its rights. We carry our death within us and it doesn't have the mysteries created by human fear and imagination. Metabolism ceases, there comes a moment of stillness and solidification, then the protein begins to decompose—and this is a simple, well-known process. True, not all the cells are affected by it immediately; some go on working. The best example is the hair which continues to grow on corpses. The phenomenon of death has some paradoxes. You know that the protein in our food is dissolved in our stomachs by pepsin. But the walls of our stomachs also contain protein, so there is a danger that pepsin may also dissolve our stomachs. That's why our bodies fight against it and produce antipepsin which protects the walls of

the stomach. After death the production of antipepsin ceases and the remnants of pepsin begin to devour the stomach. That's a clear case of self-devouring cannibalism which is all the more interesting because it happens after the creature has lost the ability to eat others."

"How hideous," cried Marta. "The mere thought of it spoils my appetite."

"This and a lot more hideous things only underline the fact that the life processes are blind and mechanical. So it's all the more astonishing that it's their complexity with which a biochemist must constantly struggle. The structure of a simple molecule can stun us with its sophistication. We know, for instance, that there are types of sugars which are different in spite of the fact that they have the same molecular structure. It seems that their differences don't depend on the quantitative or qualitative properties within their molecule but on such a delicate matter as the distribution of their groups within the molecule. Chemical analysis can't reveal the secrets of these isomers and they must be recognized by their reflection to the right or to the left of polarized light. So we get right-wing and left-wing isomers of glucose."

"Just like political parties," remarked Marta.

"In science the direction in which they turn doesn't matter," continued Slavenko. "What's important is establishing a fact. That's why the development of science is helped by the materialist outlook which in its logic is the most daring and the most modest. True, it's based on the premise that things are as we perceive them to be through our senses. This basic premise can't be tested because one would need another set of senses and organs for it. And even if we had them they would have to be tested too. It's much simpler to suppose that the world is basically what we perceive rather than to maintain that it's something else, because then there would be no communication between us and the world; there would not even be perception."

These conversations were continued every evening. Lying on Yuri's lap, Marta listened to them eagerly, and Slavenko went on, pleased because this kind of talk demonstrated his superiority over her. For him, it was like a poem, the love song of a scientist by which he enchants his mate.

"Studying the basic processes of life," he said, "we begin to have a better understanding of the laws of spiritual existence. We can assume that all our psychic functions have a prototype in the lower sphere of life itself because it's difficult to imagine a different structure for our psyche which, after all, is a by-product of our physiology. The basic apparatus of life is the

digestive apparatus and in this we can discover the analogy even of our thinking. I will cite one example. Protein, when it gets into the intestines, decomposes into its parts—the amino acids. Later it becomes the protein of our body. You see two stages of this process; the first analytic, the second synthetic. Doesn't our brain do the same with our perceptions? It also analyses and synthesizes. Digestive principles are the principles of our thinking. It would not be far wrong to call the brain our spiritual stomach."

"Yuri, you have said so much about the stomach that I am beginning to think of it as something quite separate. Yet you don't tell me anything about your research."

"The stomach is everything, Marta. Upon it depends our temperament, our moods, our way of thinking, our energy, even our beauty. My research also touches on digestive problems. What shall I tell you about it? It can't produce tangible results like the invention of a new machine. The goal is very distant. And the problems are difficult to analyze. Especially since I feel all alone in this field. Biochemists have turned away from proteins; they are working mostly on ferments and vitamins which can lead to practical results in medicine. Proteins are neglected. We know quite a bit about them and there is no need yet for the creation of synthetic protein. Fischer's naive belief that in a few years we shall all eat artificial protein has vanished and evaporated. But the problem has remained. Its solution will be the crown of all the giant labours now being undertaken for the creation of a new world."

"I look towards the future," said Marta. "I can feel this new world in which everyone will be free. I'm so happy that you are working to bring this about."

"Yes, I am. Besides, I'm sure that artificial food will be created. This is the only thing that helps me to carry on my dreary work without any achievement. Every year I move ahead an inch and there are miles to go. My life won't last that long. But every stop I make is a fortress which will not be given up. What do we have now? Some laboratory attempts to concentrate the amino acids into protein-like substances. That's all. Moreover, in our attempts to synthesize protein we have to take amino acids from the protein itself. We still don't know how to get them from dead organic substances, apart from glycocol or leucin. I don't even mention the expense of these laboratory experiments, the expense of the amino acids and from the economic point of view artificial protein is sheer nonsense just now. But we already make artificial rubber and silk which are cheaper and better than the genuine articles. We make artificial paints, perfumes, and so on. There is no reason to doubt that

artificial protein will in the end be economically feasible."

Marta asked if the artificial food of the future would affect our psychology, whether it might not lead to the decline of some characteristics and to the rise of others.

"I don't think there is any reason to suppose this will happen," said Slavenko, sighing. "Science, as I have already said, is helpless in the face of conservative human nature. Whether he eats real or synthetic protein man will remain the same, equipped with the half-a-dozen emotions the poets write about."

"And will he still love?"

"This, more than anything."

"That's wonderful," she said putting her arms around him. "You know, Yuri, human beings must not be changed; they must only be helped."

"Marta, you are always right," he answered and kissed her.

These biochemical conversations had a strong influence on Marta. She was helped to enter the world of Yuri's thoughts, his plans for his work, his secret hopes, the very basis of his existence. She became his confidante and penetrated his innermost creative interests. He had nothing to hide from her; by her love she forced him to reveal everything to her. It all gave her more pleasure than a kiss or all the talk about love. She could feel his spirit, so wonderful, unexpected and unparalleled.

These conversations left in her memory many terms, which she loved though she did not understand them. Alone, she often repeated them and played with them, lending them different personalities. Glucose was a masked woman for her; alanine, a nice blond boy; glycol, a spoilt brat; tyrosine, a dangerous fellow; tryptophan, a comic. She felt quite tender towards these unknown substances, since she had learned about them from him and they stayed with her after he left, making him more real during her solitary hours in the evenings while she was waiting for him.

A HOMELY OTHELLO

Finally biochemistry won Marta over. In the morning she woke up and thought about the day before—how she had given herself to him. For a while she even tried to smile, but soon she was overcome with great terror. Her heart contracted so much that she had to press her breasts and her whole body grew heavy and cold. She was so cramped and sleepy that she could hardly get out of bed. Unlike her usual habit, she dressed very slowly, holding everything in her hands for a long time. At last, fearing that she would be late for work, she hurried and ran out of the house.

On the street she was stricken by a feeling of shame. She felt that everybody knew all about her love affair, that she had it written all over her forehead, that all her gestures betrayed her. Every look seemed to her an accusation and she wanted to hide as quickly as she could behind the door of her office, although there she was afraid of being questioned by people who knew her. "I wonder if I can stand it," she thought to herself. But the peace of the office calmed her down a little. Everybody was in his or her place, working, and she tried to concentrate on what she was doing although numbers sometimes disappeared before her eyes.

After work Marta tried to continue as if nothing had happened. Through ordinary routine she attempted to erase the big event from her consciousness. She went to her evening class but on the way she was overcome by her own inferiority and contemptibleness. She developed a real headache and before the class ended left for home. It was a pity, because she had only one month to go before the final exam.

At home she wanted to clean up, start a fire, wash, change but she couldn't do anything. All the feelings of depression she had had during the day now rose up against her. She was afraid of the future. At times she imagined that there would be no future, that her life had ended and she had reached the end of the road. As always, the feeling of helplessness was not unpleasant, but rather left her in a state of apathy and remoteness. She dissolved in her own sorrow to such an extent that she was

outside it and looked at is as if from a distance.

She was overwhelmed by a feeling of loss over something which had already happened and was now behind her. It had not happened as she had wished, in Kaniv, where she was born and where in her dreams she had wanted to become a woman and connect this fact with her birth, there, near the great river, amid the steppes, in a great festival of love and nature. These were only romantic dreams but their sudden loss seemed to her now to be a defeat. Remembering that he would soon come again, she left the room so as not to meet him. She even thought that she must never see him again.

Yuri Oleksandrovych appeared that evening ten minutes earlier than usual. Never before had the desire to see her so tormented him. During the day it had racked his heart mercilessly and now he arrived, tired with enthusiasm. After the previous night he felt a great passion for Marta, his peace and confidence were gone, he thought only about her. "I love her," he whispered and these words were news to him, as if he had to offer her not one but many loves—with infinite shades. Contrary to all the laws of logic the same thought about the same object offered him inexhaustible variety. The three words enchanted him throughout the day.

Slavenko was severely disappointed when he came into an empty room. Marta was out. Today she should have waited for him most eagerly of all. Her absence was like an insult, an attempt to humiliate him. For a moment he was overcome with hate and wanted to leave, never to return. But he calmed down. "She must have had a meeting and will be late," he comforted himself. He took off his coat, started a fire with some logs that were lying around, sat down and lit a cigarette.

He sat there till eight o'clock, listening all the time. Then he began to read something, but at half past eight he put the book down and grew restless. "No, it's not a meeting; there must be another reason." He thought about the possible real reason for Marta's absence. "What else can you expect from her? She is emotional and a little romantic." Perhaps she had experienced it very deeply; maybe she was afraid, had run away, but would come back. "She's so lovely but so silly," he thought in a forgiving mood. To use the time he started to think what he would tell her to calm her down when she did come back.

What should he tell her? First of all, that her behaviour, if he understood it rightly, was the result of a bad education. Despite the revolution, in this respect contemporary girls have preserved the remnants of traditional views on their relations with men as something indecent, shameful, forbidden and sinful. There was not enough struggle against this reactionary cult

and superstition which most girls still accept. "We are still living in feudal times," Slavenko sighed.

It is even worse when the failure of education is supported by individual failings. She is a naive and romantic girl and has an exaggerated notion of the value of her virginity. Its loss she connects with the loss of her dreams and hopes and therefore becomes disillusioned. However, she is afraid of the stupid ideas of the past which are very harmful in any struggle for the complete emancipation of women. But how to combat personal failings? The biochemist thought about it for a long time but came to the conclusion that this problem could be solved only through education and by the imitation of good models, in a word, by overcoming the old ways which had become stifling for the new men.

He deliberated the problem of women for a long time, thinking how to present it to Marta in a clear and concise form, but at half past nine his reflective mood was shattered. Waiting for two and a half hours had depressed him. He got up and started walking up and down the room. Uncertain thoughts aroused in him both fear and longing. Where was she? Wandering through the streets? Sitting somewhere in a cold orchard? Had she perhaps done something to herself? Where to find her? All this seemed silly to him. He felt helpless which oppressed him even more. Slowly, unable to change anything, he grew sad and began to feel guilty for what he had done and for all the messiness of life. "It feels as if we have been cursed," he thought sorrowfully.

He had smoked all his cigarettes and sat down on the bed, propping his head on his hands. He no longer believed that Marta would come back, not merely today, but ever. She was lost to him, unreachable, a fragile vision from the past. "All I can do is to go away as well, and never come back," he thought. "There is something inhuman about this not seeing her again. She understood. She had a great heart. And I must say goodbye to her and write her a note."

He sat down at the table, took out a notebook and pencil and wrote: "Marta, I bow before your wisdom in love. I am going away too. I never loved anybody as much as I loved you. I not only loved you, I lived you and thought you. You were the first and the last, the only one, Marta. Now I am going back into the grey and dark from which you called me forth. Goodbye, Marta, you are very great."

He finished writing and looked at the note where the words appeared light and warm, reflecting his feeling and sorrow.

Something touched his shoulder and he slowly turned his

head. Behind him, in a coat and hat, pale and out of sorts, stood Marta who had quietly entered the room behind his back.

"What are you doing?" she asked hardly audibly.

"I have written a letter to you," he answered in the same tone.

"Yuri, I cannot understand anything; it's all mixed up."

"I love you," he said.

She looked at him as if she did not trust him. He said to her:

"You don't believe me? I would have left forever if you hadn't come now."

Marta rushed to him and embraced him.

"You won't go. You're mine. Ah, what torment this is."

At about the same time as Marta, the wife of the co-op worker, Ivanchuk, had also come back from her night shift in the buffet of the public booths. The first room in their apartment was used as a dining room, although Ada slept there at night. Tetiana Nechyporivna walked quietly through the room and entered the second room—their bedroom. The light was on but the co-op worker was lying on the bed with his eyes closed.

"Have you fallen asleep, Davyd?" cried his wife, taking off her coat.

The co-op worker sat up and yawned.

"Not quite. I lay down and dozed off a little. Tomorrow I have to get up early—I'm off to Shepetivka. On business, as I told you."

He yawned again and added:

"I'll earn a couple of rubles, perhaps. I have packed myself; you only need to give me some food tomorrow morning."

"I'll get up in the morning too," she said. "Do you want to eat anything now? I've brought three dumplings, although they are a little stale."

"No, Ada and I had some borsch for supper. There was a little left over and I warmed it on the Primus."

They talked in whispers so as not to wake their daughter and their words seemed to carry more weight because of this. The things they talked about were important to Tetiana and in her questions one could feel genuine concern and solicitousness. As a housewife she carried around with her an air of competence and fastidiousness and her gestures and her voice showed constant interest in household affairs. She was very fond of this nocturnal moment on her return from work, of finding her family there in their home. Her feelings were channelled once and for all and the path of her life was straight.

Sitting on her own bed, which was separated from her husband's by a threadbare runner, Tetiana began to enjoy the

dumplings. She continued to talk in a low voice. When Davyd Semenovych was away she would have to ask their neighbour, Frau Holz, to look after Ada in the evenings. Since Frau Holz had asked her to make a pair of shirts, she would not owe her anything.

"You see," she said to her husband, "how useful the sewing machine was. And you were against buying it."

Although they were very short of money, a year earlier Tetiana had bought a sewing machine on credit. For years she had wanted to have it but when the co-op worker still had his job he argued that it was unnecessary and that sewing ought to be done by seamstresses. The co-op worker dreamt of other luxurious things and he thought of having a maid and a cook for his wife. After he was fired his tune changed and his wife's practical suggestions displaced his earlier dreams. In this way the sewing machine was bought out of their meagre savings and it became an object in their bedroom which was as valuable to them as a picture of a bourgeois house on the wall.

"Yes, I was against it," sighed the co-op worker. "I was against many things."

Davyd Semenovych recalled the thoughts he had had before his wife came back. He had lied to her when he said that he had just dozed off on the bed. He had even forced himself to yawn in order to convince her that he was sleepy. In fact he had been lying down and thinking of his neighbour, Marta.

His thoughts were painful but he continued to think them and could not do without them. Perhaps he would have thought about Marta for the entire night if his wife had not returned and brought him back to reality. He was quite surprised by her return, for he had forgotten her existence and never thought that she could come back and talk to him like this, sitting on her bed and eating dumplings.

Ever since Marta had become their neighbour, Davyd Semenovych had gotten used to her. After helping her to fix up her room, he visited her every night since he didn't work and his wife was out. These nightly visits, talking and joking, became the only joys in his joyless life and Marta his only confidante. In her room he poured out his troubled soul, found fresh although sometimes mocking sympathy which helped him a great deal more than the steady support of his wife. This friendly relationship, partly because of its constancy and partly because of its secrecy assumed a very special charm for him. He carried away from these meetings some vague hopes which were perhaps just his dreams of getting a job, better pay and a happy career, but all the same they made him feel very content.

His triumphant moments were those when he returned to

Marta's room after one of her admirers had been rebuffed. Then he would come in beaming with pride, full of jokes and innuendoes, victoriously claiming his rights as a good neighbour. He was convinced that all these "creeps" were chaff that would blow away from the true kernel of his own personality and that Marta would always come back to him as something constant in her life. That was why the first visits of the biochemist were regarded by the co-op worker as odious and unnecessary, but they had not spoilt his mood. He waited rather condescendingly. He waited a week, ten days, but Marta gave him no sign. It was then that he had decided to remind her of his presence by sending Ada to her apartment. In this move he was severely rebuffed. He grew seriously worried.

He felt lonely during the long evenings in empty rooms where everything was familiar and weighed heavily upon him. A feeling of loss grew in him, although he was not sure what he had lost. All spontaneous feelings left him, he did not know what he wanted and in the evening he felt stifling oppression, like a prisoner whom the walls of Marta's room separated from the entire world. "Tonight I must visit her since it's so boring here," he thought but lacked the courage to go. So today, too, this desire to go had tormented him. As always this made him remember happier times, when he was full of hope for the future. Everything at one time had seemed so smooth. In 1924 he was moved from a small co-op in Tulchyn to the big city of Kiev where a career waited for him in the All-Ukrainian Co-op Union. He felt to confident that he gave his child the name Adelaide, which sounded so full of promise and which embodied all his ambition to succeed. And then suddenly he was fired. And now he could not even visit his neighbour. Her doors were locked for him. Life itself had come to a halt when, lying down on the bed, he had these thoughts.

Now as he was talking to his wife, the thought that he must go and visit Marta still buzzed in his head. The intensity of the desire, in fact, increased, since it was already eleven o'clock and with every minute a visit became more and more impossible.

"Here's something for you and Ada for tomorrow," said Tetiana, putting aside two dumplings.

"I'll take it with me. You get hungry travelling. 'I must go and see her,'" his heart was telling him.

"Well, let's go to bed. I'll make your bed."

The co-op worker got up and stepped to one side noting how skillfully his wife tossed the pillows and comforters. He did not want to go to sleep. The very thought that he would have to lie down and sleep was like facing death.

"Davyd," said Tetiana beginning to undress, "after four hours on your feet, your legs are like wood. I'll fall asleep as soon as I lie down."

"Yes, you get tired," answered Davyd. "Even I get tired although I don't work. And it's late."

He looked at his pocket watch and called out in surprise:

"Well, my watch has stopped. Perhaps I forgot to wind it up. Such a business!"

The watch was in perfect order, but Davyd had suddenly decided to announce that it had stopped. Then he would be able to go to Marta and ask her the time. Maybe he would even go into her room.

He stood in the middle of the room with the watch in his hand, simulating great surprise.

"Such a business!" he said.

"Go and ask our neighbour what time it is before she goes to bed," said Tetiana, yawning. "How else are you going to get up tomorrow in time for your train?"

She stretched comfortably under her sheets.

"I suppose I'll have to go and ask," said Davyd, also yawning a little. "You go to sleep," he added, turning out the light.

He went into the dark kitchen and listened. Everything was still. The rim of light under Marta's door was bright and even; drops of water were regularly falling from the tap into the sink. The co-op worker was undecided whether he should go up to the door very quietly, or normally as anyone would. "I am no thief," he decided and walked briskly, though he was longing to approach it stealthily and eavesdrop.

"Can you tell me the time? My watch has stopped."

With trembling heart he felt that at first no one answered. After a while there was still no answer. "It can't be true," he said to himself, for some reason raising his hands, which were shaking. He wanted, as it were, to defend himself. Several moments passed, his heart was pounding and then, as if from some deep ravine he heard Marta's hesitant voice.

"It's a quarter, no ten to twelve."

"Thanks," Davyd answered sullenly.

He turned back and quickly closed the door of his room behind him. "So that's how it is," he thought. His head felt as dark as everything outside it. Then he tried to cheer up and thought, "We'll like that." Then he moved quietly to the bedroom where his wife was lying. He imagined her naked and suddenly was seized by desperate passion.

"Is that you Davyd?" asked Tetiana sleepily feeling his touch.

"Yes, it's me," whispered the co-op worker, embracing her.

"What are you up to?" she said dully, turning away.

"I can hardly move my leg. I'm dead tired. And you must get up tomorrow. Another time. Now go to sleep."

"So that's what you're like," whispered Davyd.

He felt like a sack emptied of grain. Quietly he slipped into the room where his daughter was sleeping. His whole body was exhausted and he sat down to rest on a chair which he found in the darkness. He held his breath as if he were waiting for something unexpected to happen. Suddenly, his daughter called out in her sleep and this brought Davyd to his senses. He felt once more that he was in his home and realized exactly on which chair he was sitting. Once again he started to think, or rather to imagine.

He recalled the accident he had witnessed several years before. A young woman had tried to jump off the streetcar, but fell under the wheel, which had cut off her leg. A crowd had collected around her unconscious body, among them Davyd Semenovych who had watched at the accident until the ambulance took the victim away. Now, instead of the woman he imagined Marta, with her legs cut off, bleeding, her face mutilated, groaning and suffering. Her voice was like the voice that had told him the time. "Yes, she's met her end," he thought and moved to a more comfortable position on his chair.

Marta was now entirely at his disposal and he did what he wanted to her. Giving her an injured look he now imagined that in addition she was pregnant and deserted. He forced her to cry and madly lament her lot, to come to him and beg for help and rescue. "You ought to have known better," he would tell her and she would faint. Later a monster child would be born to her, of which she herself would be afraid. She would cast him out and hang herself on the braces which her lover had left in her room. But she wouldn't die. The police would rescue her and she would be tried for infanticide. He would appear as a witness before the court and would say: "Comrade judges. I knew it would lead to this. She has committed a terrible sin and she must be severely punished." As soon as he had finished his speech everybody in court would leap at her and try to tear her to pieces and there she would be, lying in front of him, trampled like the woman without the leg.

Suddenly the co-op worker stopped the flow of his lurid imagination, jumped and ran to the door. He was listening. Marta's door creaked and steps were heard in the kitchen. He quietly opened his door a little and saw the kitchen and the other door by the murky light which came from the half-

opened door of Marta's room. In a moment he saw two figures– Slavenko in a coat and hat, and Marta. Davyd shook with frenzy and insult, particularly since they walked side by side in a half-embrace, blended into one figure. The co-op worker felt that he had caught a glimpse of a nightmarish apparition.

They stopped at the outside door and kissed silently for a long time. They whispered something, but the co-op worker's heart was beating so loudly that he could not overhear the words. He only looked and was conscious of this and of his wild heart. "That's what she is like," he thought pointlessly.

After Slavenko had left, Marta closed the door behind him. Davyd felt a desperate need to reveal his presence, to shout something about her being a whore. But he waited helplessly.

In the meantime Marta came up to the sink and drank a glass of water. She was turning to go back to her room when the co-op worker opened the door he kept ajar and loudly asked:

"Who's there?"

"It's me, Davyd Semenovych; I've just drunk some water," answered Marta quickly and disappeared into her room.

A SCANDAL IN A WELL-BORN FAMILY

The large clock in the Markevyches' dining room had struck ten. The spacious room, feebly lit by the lamp over the dining table seemed empty, hiding in its amorphous stillness the presence of furniture and of a woman sitting pensively on the sofa. The striking of the clock aroused her a little and she got up, tall and thin, in a black dress which made her seem even taller. Maria Mykolaivna stood a little while deciding where to go and only after some thought did she go through the dark living room to her husband's study.

Stepan Hryhorovych sat at the table full of opened books, notebooks and papers and out of this chaos he tried to draft a lecture for the next day on cancer of the stomach. This solitary work he interrupted from time to time by exclamations, shifting his position on the chair and by moments of concentration when he stared into the distance and slowly bit the end of the pencil. Outlining the plan of his lecture, he never actually used it in class, but if it wasn't in his pocket he could not put his thoughts together and would have lost his power of concentration. Standing on a podium before the audience, every ten minutes he touched his pocket and having made sure that the outline of the lecture was still there, he went on smoothly with his precise and even witty lecture.

At eleven he usually ended his preparation and pressed the button which signalled to Pelahia that she must bring him a glass of sour milk. After drinking it with relish he usually went to bed. It was customary not to disturb the professor in his evening work and that is why the appearance of his wife upset him.

"Is it you?" he asked in a panic. "As you see, I'm working. Sit down," he added as if he were talking to a patient.

"I want to talk to you seriously," said his wife, sighing.

"Seriously? Go on. But wait a second. I'm almost through."

"Well, finish your writing then."

After ten minutes the professor put down his pencil.

"Splendid! Now, let's talk."

"Have you noticed that Yuri Oleksandrovych hasn't been here for over a month?" asked his wife coming straight to the point.

"Yes, it's some time now," the professor was surprised. "Yes, I noticed it. Remember, I told you . . ."

"And do you know that he was almost Irene's suitor, that Irene is in love with him and is willing to marry him?"

"That I hadn't noticed. I'm very glad to hear it. Let them get married. I'm not opposed to it. On the contrary . . ."

"Please understand that he hasn't been here for a month. Try to realize this."

"I don't understand anything."

"I asked Irene. I asked her what it all means. But you know how proud she is. I am afraid of her, Stepan. She simply said that she doesn't know the reason. But how did she say it? I simply cannot ask her again."

The professor beamed: "You see," he said, "even she doesn't know. How then can I know?"

"Well, we must find out; we have a responsibility to our daughter. She is our only one. She is twenty-nine years old. We must remember this. Yuri Oleksandrovych is a most suitable man, a perfect match. Everything was going so well, so well . . ."

"Yes, so well," murmured the professor. "Is this all you wanted to tell me?" he added after a while.

"Stepan, we must take some steps to put this right. That's what I have decided."

"It will put itself right, Marusia. Believe me, as long as I have lived things have always put themselves right."

"You are still seeing things through rosy spectacles. But I have the worst premonitions. Just think how suddenly all this has happened. Last time he was here I asked Irene what he told her. She said that he told her everything that was necessary. I was pleased, naturally. But after this he vanished."

"Perhaps he went away somewhere? Yes, he must have left on an assignment."

"But he could have told us. True, he phoned once and oddly enough told Pelahia that he was ill and couldn't come. Why did he tell her this?"

"Simply because she was answering the phone."

"Yes, but he could have asked to speak to Irene, to me or to you. To tell the maid is simply an insult to us."

"He has progressive views about maids," meekly suggested the professor but his wife ignored the remark. Instead she said with great determination:

"Stepan Hryhorovych, you are Irene's father. You are

responsible for her. Oh, if only my sons were alive . . ."

She dabbed her eyes with a handkerchief and the professor got up from his chair.

"What must I do then?" he asked in desparation.

"You must find out everything about Oleksandrovych. How he lives, what he is doing and what he is thinking. That's most important."

Stepan Hryhorovych sighed with relief.

"I can do this right away. I can phone him."

"Phone? On the phone he can tell you anything he likes. No, you must find out from someone else. We must have objective facts. Then we shall know what to do. You see, I've planned everything. Do you know where he lives?"

"I have no idea."

"You are wrong. You know that he lives in Slipovsky's apartment. He was your patient."

"Oh, yes. That was an interesting case. And I cured him. By the same old principle: medicine must only help the organism. The less medication the better."

"So you'll go and visit Slipovsky."

"But he's quite well and hasn't called me."

"He was your patient for over a year and you have a perfect right to enquire about his health. He will be honoured. You will drop in on him and as if by the way ask about Slavenko. Ask him about everything, but do it so as not to arouse suspicions."

"I'll never do that," cried the professor. "You want to make a spy out of me. Never! Marusia, you must realize this is dishonest."

He looked imploringly at his wife. She got up and said firmly and irrevocably:

"For the sake of Irene's happiness you must go to the Slipovskys tomorrow. You are a father."

Triumphantly she left his study, leaving the professor petrified. A few minutes later he rang a bell to the kitchen and then Pelahia appeared with a glass of buttermilk.

"You've finished early tonight, Stepan Hryhorovych," she said.

"Yes, I must get up earlier tomorrow because I have one more call to make than I thought. How is Irene? Is she all right? She hasn't been crying?"

"No, Irena Stepanovna is well and is not crying."

The professor sighed and said to the maid:

"You're lucky, Pelahia. You don't have a family. You don't have any worries and can concentrate on your work."

Next day professor Markevych did exactly as his wife told

him and in the evening reported to her on the results of the day's reconnaissance.

"He lives splendidly, Marusia. Don't have any worries about him," he said. "He's very well, cheerful, in a word a gay young man."

"Did you see him?" she asked.

"Did I see him? No, I didn't. But Mrs. Slipovsky said that they didn't see him often either. In the morning he was off to the university and in the evenings he went out regularly at a quarter to seven. They said that they could set their clock by his evening routine. You know, his punctuality does impress me."

"And when does he come back?"

"Also punctually. At midnight sharp he's home again. You see, I managed to find out everything without raising any suspicions. I didn't have to ask many questions. Mrs. Slipovsky is a very talkative woman."

"At midnight," said the professor's wife quietly, deep in thought. "And every night?"

"Yes, every night, Marusia. That's what puzzles Mrs. Slipovsky so much. He used to spend his evenings quietly at home and now, suddenly, he's off every night."

"Where does he go every night? That's the most important point."

"They don't know. Mrs. Slipovsky said she couldn't make it out. Perhaps, she said, he has fallen in love. And I said, 'Of course, fallen in love—he's young and healthy . . .'"

"I don't understand your tone, Stepan Hryhorovych. You are a cynic. You are forgetting about Irene."

"Irene?" mumbled the professor. "I am forgetting about Irene? But what can I do if he has really fallen in love? I can't do anything, Marusia. I am powerless. If he had fallen ill, had colitis or something else then I would treat him, but fallen in love—I myself, as you know, was in love once . . ."

"Oh, stop it," Maria Mykolaivna interrupted him brusquely and the professor fell silent. "Haven't you learnt any other details?"

"What else? I did what you asked me to. Perhaps I forgot something. You know Mrs. Slipovsky—she talks like a machine gun. When her husband was ill I forbade her to talk to him since she completely wore him out. Yes, she complained that Yuri Oleksandrovych doesn't talk much."

"Did he talk much to her before?"

"No he never did. He was never talkative."

"Then it's unimportant. What else was there?"

"She said that lately he had become fond of her cat,

Narcissus, and let him into his room."

"What rubbish are you saying?" said Maria Mykolaivna and plunged deep in thought.

The professor sat at the table and looked longingly at his books and papers. However, since his wife had not indicated that their conversation was over he did not dare to start work and only sighed loudly to remind her of his presence.

"Irene is a great worry to me," said his wife at last. "Have you noticed that she almost never leaves home and always sits in her room? She is proud and scornful of sympathy. Just like me."

"Yes, just like you," agreed the professor. "She has your spirit and my mind."

"She is always reading. I never noticed it before. And do you know what she's reading?"

"What?" asked the alarmed professor.

"She is reading a Ukrainian grammar by Horetsky and Shalia, the sixth edition."

"Is that so?"

"And, besides, she writes all kinds of exercises in a notebook. Do you realize what danger she faces?"

The professor looked bewildered.

"I can understand a love for languages. I myself speak French and German fluently. But this—this is sheer madness. We must rescue her immediately. But first of all we must find out more about Yuri Oleksandrovych."

"Marusia," pleaded the professor, "I have already found out all I could."

"A little more is needed," she answered sternly. "Tomorrow you'll go to his place at twenty to seven and will find out where he goes."

"Marusia!" cried the professor.

"Yes, the street, the number of the house—that's what I must know. You must do it tomorrow, Stepan Hryhorovych."

"Never, not on any account," the professor defended himself. "I love Irene, but I am no detective. You are humiliating me. You are forgetting who I am."

"But see to it that he doesn't recognize you. Keep a block away from him—you have good eyesight."

"I see that you are determined to make a Nat Pinkerton out of me. But I won't do it. Never! I can't spy on people. Let's send someone else."

"I cannot involve other people in our intimate affairs. Arrange your day so that you will be free at half past six tomorrow."

After that she left the study and the next day the profes-

sor did as she had asked. He was almost late, since Slavenko left his house at twenty to seven and walked so briskly that the professor could barely keep up with him. It was just as well that Zhylanska street was not far, or else Stepan Hryhorovych would have got completely out of breath in his pursuit of Slavenko. When the latter disappeared into a building, professor Markevych cautiously passed it, noted it and took a cab to hurry on to his patients. He was satisfied with his mission and was in a good mood. While he was following Slavenko some hunting instinct awoke in him and his heart was aflutter with excitement. He had to track down a man and he did it well.

"I shall know what to do next," said his wife after he had told her his observations.

"You know, Marusia, it was very exciting," said the professor. "He was walking and I was after him, not letting him out of my sight. It was getting dark and it was very easy to track him down."

"You are like a little boy," remarked Maria Mykolaivna, severely. "Where is your seriousness?"

Next morning she went to Zhylanska street and knocked at the door of the small building. The door was opened by Ada, since the co-op worker had gone to Shepetivka and his wife was out shopping. Marta was at her office and the German woman, Frau Holz, was hard of hearing.

"Does Vladimir Petrovich Izotov live here?" the professor's wife asked, using the ploy carefully prepared beforehand.

"I live here with my mummy and daddy," Ada began, but Maria Mykolaivna interrupted her:

"Can you call someone older?"

Frau Holz had heard the noise by then and came out.

"What do you want? Ada, be quiet please."

Maria Mykolaivna immediately planned her next move.

"Sind Sie eine Deutsche?" she asked.

"What? Shut up, Ada; don't interfere."

"She's deaf," said the little girl.

"Ich frage ob sie eine Deutsche sind?" shouted the professor's wife. "Sie haben eine deutsche Aussprache."

"Ja, ja, ich bin eine Deutsche, ganz richtig," answered the beaming Frau Holz. "Mein armer Vater kam als Mechaniker her, hier ist er auch gestorben . . . Treten Sie, bitte, womit kann ich ihnen dienen?"

"Ich suche einen Verwandten und er hat mir diese Adresse gegeben," said Maria Mykolaivna loudly, following Frau Holz into her room.

For half an hour they talked with great animation. At first Maria Mykolaivna had to listen to the tragic story of Frau Holz

and how she and her father came to Ukraine. After her father's death she remained as a spinster, becoming homeless too. When all this was over, Maria Mykolaivna, who had shown appropriate sympathy, had no difficulty in finding out about the neighbour, Marta (ein hübsches gutes Madel, doch schade, dass sie das Haar beschnitten hat) and that she was visited every night by a young man (ach, was für ein staatlicher Mann, sehr elegant und schön). Frau Holz added that it was natural to expect that Marta would have a boyfriend but that he stayed with her very late (das ist gefahrlich fur ein Madel, dass keine Eltern hat und uberhaupt fuhrt es zu einem schlimmen Ende).

At last Maria Mykolaivna expressed her regret that she had failed to find the person she was looking for, promised to find the German woman a job as a nanny and said goodbye.

"Yes, he is in love, all right," she announced to her husband that evening. "He's in love with a young girl—that's the worst of all." She was quite exhausted and had lost some weight as a result of her maternal worries.

"Yes, one could guess that," the professor agreed. "If a young man doesn't stay home in the evenings, he must be in love. That is quite logical."

"You are lucky, Stepan Hryhorovych, that you have a temperament like that. You are easily reconciled to anything," sighed Maria Mykolaivna.

"Facts, Marusia, facts, what can you do about them?"

"If it was a married woman or a widow I would know what to do. But with a girl—it's difficult. He must be hopelessly in love. You don't realize what a tragedy it is for Irene and for us."

"You must calm down, Marusia."

"And how could he have fallen in love with a young girl? He is so clever and intelligent. How irresponsible of him. What can this girl give him in comparison to our Irene? My heart tells me that Irene and Yuri Oleksandrovych would make a wonderful couple. His falling in love with that girl rather than with Irene is his moral downfall."

"But I can understand him," said the professor. "I might have fallen in love with a young girl too."

"You are already married. To be honest, I think we must tell Irene about it. Let her know the whole truth."

"An excellent idea."

"But what will she do? It will be a terrible blow."

"Yes, if she is in love with him she may faint," said the worried professor. "I'll have some ammonia ready."

They both went in the direction of their daughter's room in a funeral mood.

Irene was in her warm room. She was sitting on the sofa, waiting. When her silent, worried parents came in she looked at them in surprise.

"It must be something serious if you're both here," she commented.

The professor sat next to Irene on the sofa and her mother on the chair, facing her.

"You're right, Irene," said Maria Mykolaivna. "We have come to you as you parents in a very serious and unpleasant matter."

"Don't get upset, Marusia," pleaded the professor.

"How am I supposed not to be upset when the fate of my only child . . ." Maria Mykolaivna pressed a handkerchief to her eyes, remembering her sons.

"What's the matter?" asked Irene.

"He's in love," said the professor.

"Yuri Oleksandrovych," added her mother, "is in love with a girl. You must know everything."

"I already know this."

Her parents exchanged glances.

"You couldn't have known," Maria Mykolaivna said gently. "You are proud, and you're pretending that you knew. That isn't nice, Irene."

"You couldn't have known about it without me. Only I could have tracked him down," maintained her father.

"You, father? Since when are you so good at it?"

"I tracked him down. He was walking and I crept after him."

"You needn't have bothered, father. I did it much more simply."

"How?" asked her mother, taken aback.

"I sent Pelahia."

"Pelahia couldn't have done better than I did."

"Irene," whispered her mother, "you have implicated other people."

"But I had to know, mother. I'm not a girl; I'm a woman. What should I have done—sighed and languished?"

"Well, what will happen?"

"Everything will be all right. He will come back to me."

"I told you so," called out the professor. "Everything will come out right. The law of life. Facts. Everything will turn out for the best."

"Stepan Hryhorovych, you can go and do your work."

"Very well. Irene, I'm leaving the ammonia just in case."

"Tell me, Irene," her mother said imploringly after the professor had left the room, "tell me as your mother. Don't be

so secretive. If you only knew how I have worried."

"First of all, mother, I know Yuri Oleksandrovych as well as I know myself. I know his temperament, his weaknesses. It's ridiculous to think that he would ruin his scientific career because of some girl."

"But he's in love with her. He visits her every night from seven to twelve."

"Precisely. I can recognize his regularity. He must have a regular routine. Even to love he has assigned a set period of time—quite a long one at that. Besides, he's truly in love, even perhaps madly in love. This is understandable. Years of concentrated work have left their mark. He's letting off steam and I am very pleased that this is happening before and not after our wedding. Then it would be a much more dangerous matter."

"So you are sure that he will come back to you?" her mother asked timidly.

"Of course, mother. The hours he spends on love are hours of his scientific work. It is only a matter of time until he decides how much of this work he will be able to sacrifice for this girl. It's I and not she who is related to his scientific plans. As soon as he returns to work he'll come back to me."

"I'm surprised, Irene, that you can consider all this so calmly."

"As you know, I had to let some steam off too. This is inevitable, but after it's over we have to live our lives quietly and productively."

Maria Mykolaivna sat with her head bent down, still full of misgivings.

"It's to you, the older generation, that love appears to be a catastrophe, something great and elemental," said Irene. "During the revolution we learned to regard it as an episode in one's life."

"Yes, I know you are the new generation. And yet you may be mistaken."

"Mistakes are always possible," said Irene in a tone which showed that as far as she was concerned, this conversation was at an end.

Maria Mykolaivna got up, but before leaving asked:

"Forgive me for prying into your life. But tell me, why are you learning Ukrainian? I was frightened when I saw all these textbooks."

"You're really cross-examining me today," smiled Irene. "All right. I'm doing it because I must know this girl. To do this I used some of my connections in the Tobacco Trust where she is working. She is a Ukrainian, one of the younger generation which is not satisfied with Ukrainian schools in the villages,

with the publication of Ukrainian books, and with the theatrical performances that used to satisfy their fathers. They want more. Their appetite grows with eating."

"L'appetit vient en mangeant . . . But they want to eat us," remarked the mother angrily.

"Perhaps. They are easily recognizable. In the stores they speak Ukrainian openly and demand to be understood."

"But this is ridiculous."

"Of course. The store clerks laugh behind their backs. It's ridiculous to hear in the mighty Russian stream this feeble Ukrainian voice. But a bad example has many imitators."

"Do you think that Yuri Oleksandrovych . . .?"

"There's no doubt about it. It's no accident that at the end of the academic year he told his students that he was now prepared to lecture to them in Ukrainian. A strange impatience, if one doesn't consider this girl. We must understand the psychology of the people here. In their culture, language and political consciousness they are Russians, but somewhere deep in their memories there is still something Ukrainian left. It's enough to warm up these memories and they become national Romantics; they begin to consider themselves the heirs of the Zaporozhian Cossacks; they begin to dream about Mazepa, Khmelnytsky, Doroshenko and all that old junk. A woman's influence on all of this can be cruical. This is called Ukrainization through Love."

"Oh, Lord," sighed the professor's wife. "He's surrounded by treachery."

"Fortunately, the womanly influence is not decisive. Ukrainians are very naive, mother. They are so pleased when they hear a Ukrainian phrase. So I must get ready, too. We must be more astute. The Russian intelligentsia played a leading role here for centuries; it guided the culture and the entire life of this restless land and its role must not be undermined because of a hundred Ukrainian words. Language still does not constitute a nation, mother."

"How complicated all this is," sighed Maria Mykolaivna. "What are you going to do?"

"I shall wait," answered Irene.

MÄDEL KLEIN, MÄDEL FEIN . . . .

Liova Rotter was quite wrong in his calculations. Only a mind poisoned by emotion could bear the thought that when a girl falls in love she ceases to be attractive to anyone else except her lover. It was very naive of him to compare a girl to a building which does not interest prospective dwellers if it is fully occupied. One must not forget, too, that there are men who desire only a woman who is already in love, married, or, in an extreme case, divorced or widowed. Liova was guided not by reason but by reflexes, the same ones which force a drowning man to seize a razor and add superfluous wounds to his sinking position. "If she falls in love with someone," it seemed to him, "she won't fall in love with me and therefore I'll not have any hopes of success." But hopelessness does not still the emotions. If it did, then those sentenced to be executed would be in the best of spirits.

It is difficult to imagine that Liova's situation was less hopeless before Marta's falling in love than it was before. His love for Marta was not fed by any hopes. On the contrary, if he had any hope he might have become indifferent to her. As it was, his love for her was born in an impoverished heart, in the loss of life's balance and in a disastrous flood of pessimistic thoughts. It was like art for art's sake, a self-sufficient love whose fulfillment would immediately ruin it. It was that pure, disinterested love which a teenager feels for his teacher and which, in adults, becomes ridiculous.

The former medic knew all this. He realized that his feelings humiliated him, were robbing him of self-respect, weighing on him like heavy iron, making it impossible for him to straighten his back. Marta's image oppressed him since she appeared to him perfect, something unreachable, like a luminous picture which cannot be described in words. Whether this was really so he refused to admit, since for this he needed doubts and doubts he had none. He tried, however, to find a way to liberate himself from Marta's dominance over him, to throw off the yoke of passion which was using up all his vitality.

Sitting in the evening in his room, empty and deprived not only of luxuries but of any real comfort, sitting in the light of a gas lamp near a rough table, in a badly heated and uninviting room, Liova fell into long reveries which led to abstract generalizations, leaving behind the real problems of his own person—a habit common to people who love thinking. He thought, "Where do these passions come from, these fires of the human heart, the insane drives which stifle reason? Where is the source of these secret desires in man which arise in him of their own volition and bring him to a halt or turn his path in another direction from the one so clearly marked earlier?" He himself, recognizing in his mind the hopelessness of these passions, wanted to stand aside from the beaten paths of life and seek a higher peace. But in his meditations he fell once more into a tangled web. "We don't know ourselves," he thought, "we do not know our limitations or possibilities. Self-knowledge comes with experience, not with thinking. The limit of self-knowledge is death."

So went Liova's sad evening meditations. The most annoying thing was that the news of Marta's love affair had brought on a new crisis for him. Until that moment Liova had thought that his feeling for Marta had reached its greatest intensity and he could not imagine it increasing. But now it rose by several degrees, as if the perssure in his heart had increased, too. He felt a hopelessness, a recklessness, almost a religious force within him, for Marta in love appeared more glorious than ever before. He was ready to fall down in front of her in ecstasy. Now even his evening meditations grew difficult. He would sit in the silence of his room without any thought, like a corpse in a coffin. Or else he would wander along the city streets and look for a reflection of her beauty in the distant stars. He felt her infinity, her eternity all around him and caught the breath of her presence in the night air around him.

From time to time, tormented by a great thirst, he would go when he was free, to watch secretly his earthly Queen, the unextinguishable fire of Life. He carefully noted how she left her office, passed him by and disappeared from sight, beautiful and divine. He waited for her appearance as if for the fulfillment of a dream. Whenever he saw her he realized once more her uniqueness and thought that he would never be able to abandon her. This hopeless thought did not drive him to despair but brought him moments of supreme happiness so that for several days after that he enthusiastically weighed sausages in the store where he was employed.

Normally, Marta was not aware of his following her and she had almost forgotten about him. She never thought that

someone might be interested in her since her existence was completely fulfilled. Somewhere in the distance were her friends, events, hopes and worries, but all this belonged to the prehistory of her life, since when, as in the period following a revolution, a new count of years had begun.

She had finished the course in shorthand and typing and received a diploma plus two free hours in the evening. Her professional qualifications had improved and she was able to think of advancing up the ladder in the Tobacco Trust. But she was interested in something else. More than ever before she wanted to work on her own to improve her education. She had to become more intelligent and better—her love demanded this of her. Marta decided that in the fall she would start studying a foreign language. Why couldn't she become a translator, or get a job in the field of literature which she loved so much? Reading always gave her the greatest pleasure and now she read during her free hours every night between coming back from work and Slavenko's arrival. She lived as if she were in a novel. True, not all her dreams came true—there were still some gaps in her ideal world—but the latter was, after all, located in a point of time and reality transformed itself into a sleepy ocean which surrounded with its waves the fortress of her personal life—her small, quiet room.

One day, after returning home from work, Marta saw a large basket of red roses in her room, again an anonymous gift. So the unknown knight-errant whom she had quite forgotten had not forgotten her. What impertinence! What obstinacy! These baskets of flowers must be stopped, but how? Whom could she tell that his efforts were in vain, that he was wasting his time? At first she wanted to throw the flowers out, but they were not to blame and they were beautiful. She kept them and told Yuri all about the secret donor.

"I have an obstinate admirer," she said. "At one time I called him the 'knight-errant' but now that you are here I don't know what to call him."

"Call him an unknown fool," laughed Slavenko, "and you won't be far wrong. He must be a monomaniac who saw you once and fell in love with you. There are some people who under a normal appearance hide an insane passion which gives meaning to their empty lives. When they die they take their secret with them. In real life they are modest and peaceful but one night they are capable of murdering their family or setting a house on fire. The annals of criminal medicine are full of them."

"What if this unknown fool should murder me one night in a back alley?"

"Maybe his case isn't as acute. Monomaniacs vary a great deal, yet they are governed by one idea or feeling which is irrational, one they can't get rid of. It's not an urge to achieve a definite goal, as in science, but a dark and merciless drive which ends in some disaster. A normal man cannot fathom the power of these drives. Although at times any one of us may fall a victim to monomania."

That evening he told her that the reagents had arrived from abroad and that he could not put off a new series of experiments.

"It's my duty," he said.

Marta was no longer afraid of science.

"At last," she said. "As it is, you have wasted a lot of time."

"It will be a series dedicated to you. But it will disturb my routine a little."

"How?"

"One hour will have to be sacrificed. Otherwise I won't have enough time in the lab."

"Fine," said Marta.

Next evening Yuri came to visit her an hour later—at eight.

This was the first change in their daily routine. It had become very rigid—every night from seven till twelve they were together in Marta's room. They never left it. They were like two voluntary prisoners who did not want to run away. Their relationship was essentially an evening one, dependent on darkness and electricity. It would have been nonsensical to meet during the day, not only because they were busy in the daytime, but the very nature of daylight was hostile to them. Perhaps if they had met by accident in the street before the lamps were lit, they would have felt awkward and alien. Marta was afraid of such a meeting and decided that if that happened she would turn away, but her fears were in vain since their daily routes followed different parts of the city.

On Sunday mornings when they were free they never met, giving their love, as it were, a few hours of rest. Marta used the morning for household chores. She washed the floor, dusted the furniture and tidied her dresses, underclothing and stockings. Today she was doing some lacework on new handkerchiefs she had had to buy. After finishing it she read a book, intending to go for a good walk before supper. Suddenly there was a noise in the kitchen where the Ivanchuks cooked their dinner and where Frau Holz warmed up her coffee. Someone was knocking loudly on the front door which had been closed for the winter. Tetiana Nechyporivna grew agitated, Ada started jumping up and down, Frau Holz yelled, "Knocking, knocking," and at last Davyd

Semenovych came into the kitchen without his jacket, a newspaper in his hand. They decided to send Ada to tell the visitor to use the side entrance. In the meantime they tried to guess who it could be. Frau Holz thought a letter had arrived for her from Germany. But Ada came back in a second saying, "It's for Marta."

"So that's what it is," remarked the co-op worker. "As if she didn't have enough visitors at night."

"That's not your business," mumbled Tetiana. They all fell silent as the visitor came into the kitchen.

Realizing that she had a visitor, Marta put down her book and got up. She had overheard the remark about her evening visitors and it gave her quite a shock. But someone knocked on her door. Instead of saying, "Come in," she went to the door and opened it. There stood her boss—comrade Bezpalko.

"You are surprised; I knew you would be," he said. "But allow me to come in, all the same."

"Please come in."

"May I take off my coat?" he asked, coming in.

"Of course."

Comrade Bezpalko wore a cap and a hunting coat which he hung on a nail to which Marta gestured.

"May I sit down?"

"Please do."

Comrade Bezpalko sat down and Marta sat opposite him, still feeling rather tense. Here, in her own home she should treat her boss differently, but how? Why had he come? She felt quite upset.

"It isn't difficult to guess what you are thinking," he said suddenly, looking carefully around the room. "What is the purpose of my visit—that's what you are thinking."

He gazed at her narrowly and she nodded her head involuntarily.

"Have I come here on business?" he continued without noticing Marta. "Of course not. There is a time for that in the office. Why not assume that I simply came to see you? But you cannot imagine why I who see you every day should want to see you on Sunday as well. You think this is unlikely," he said as if he were answering for her. "Then what is the reason?"

His tone was outwardly gentle but inwardly impatient and nervous. It had an upsetting effect on Marta.

"I hope you will tell me yourself."

"Yes, I will, of course," he said with some relief. "But first of all, let me tell you that outside the weather is beautiful. The air is soft and warm. Spring is near," he added somewhat sarcastically. "To tell you the truth I didn't expect to find you

in. I was doubtful if I'd find you here. You know, there is a novel by d'Annunzio . . . In weather like this people should be out walking. When I came here I thought, 'Comrade Vysotska has probably gone for a walk.'"

"Yes, I was getting ready to go out."

"I won't keep you long. But I didn't think I'd find you in. I chose a time when the chances of finding you in were the smallest. If I find you in, I thought, I'll have to drop in. I am a fatalist. Do you smoke?" he asked, seeing a box full of cigarettes on the table.

"No, these are here by accident."

The cigarettes had been brought in by Slavenko just in case he should run out of his own.

"Many girls smoke nowadays," said Bezpalko gloomily. "It's rather primitive of them to try to achieve equality of the sexes like that: to take over all men's vices—smoking, swearing . . . I used to smoke, but it gave me a cough at night and I stopped. I'm almost fifty. Twice your age, I bet?"

"A little over."

"But I'm still strong. I can play tennis like any twenty-year-old. In the winter I skate. I'm not a bad huntsman, either. I don't like to shoot animals, but I love to wander through the woods. Fifty *versts* a day—I can do that easily. You must think I'm showing off. Perhaps he's a suitor—isn't that what you think?"

"Maybe I'll have to have the towel ready,*" replied Marta jokingly. His last words made her shiver a little. Wasn't it Bezpalko who was supposed to have admired her legs?

"Do you like chocolates?" he asked suddenly.

"Not much," she said, rather confused.

"All the same."

He got up and took out of his coat pocket a two-pound box of chocolates tied with a pink ribbon. He opened it, handed it to Marta and said, smiling:

"Help yourself. In moments of meditation it isn't bad to sweeten one's life."

"Do you always meditate while eating chocolates?"

"No, I eat chocolates without thinking. These problems don't interest me. And yet each man has a thinking mechanism which works automatically. This machine, when it receives a perception, throws out a thought just as a vending machine at a railroad station throws out a ticket if you put in a penny. Sometimes thought can take one by surprise. It makes one uncomfortable."

* A reference to a Ukrainian wedding custom.

He stopped for a moment, selected a candy and Marta seized this opportunity to have a close look at him. Yes, it was Bezpalko, but how different from the man in the office—the silent and aloof official, from the "idol" as he was called at work. Who would have thought that this punctilious official could give you chocolates and talk all kinds of nonsense? Marta grew more used to his behaviour and thought, "He's an eccentric. I wonder what he'll do next?"

"Thinking is harmful to life," said Bezpalko, swallowing a chocolate. "To the whole progress of mankind. Everything progressive has been achieved against reason."

He said this as if everyone knew it and added:

"The world and mankind are moved onward by great ideas which have little to do with reason. But these big ideas are very fragile. They are like owls living in darkness. A great idea cannot be analyzed; it's as afraid of analysis as a devil is afraid of incense. Reason sheds light on great ideas. It points out that it is not eternal and will perish as others have. You are like a wave, reason argues, which will break against a rock. Your glitter is false; you are one of many will-of-the-wisps. Reason, which longs for ultimate truth, rejects great ideas. The latter are the aces in the hand of history, but reason doesn't like to play poker. It is passionless. If it had its way it would turn the world into a desert without an oasis where the sun would always be setting. Instead of great ideas it would create a great chill."

Comrade Bezpalko talked with his elbows on his knees like a guest entertaining his hostess by conversation.

"That's why an intellectual is tragic—he cannot do anything. He is a man with frustrated will—he can be found in all strata of society. Instead of acting, he thinks. The path to action is marked for him by all kinds of reservations, very justified but harmful. As a result he doesn't act or acts incompletely. An intellectual is divorced from reason, since reason creates doubt which destroys the idea. He is the creator of pessimism and longing. The less he is listened to the easier it is for the people to live. Just recall the eighteenth century with its belief in the natural harmony of the world. Reason played a secondary role then. The eighteenth century with Leibnitz and Rousseau was a century of optimism. Adam Smith was arguing that the ratio is one unhappy man to twenty happy men and asked what could be added to man's happiness when he is healthy, has a clear conscience and no debts. But in the nineteenth century Schopenhauer had other things to say."

"I've read about him," said Marta. "He was a real pessimist. But he must have been wrong, for if the world were such a dreary place, who would want to live in it? Yet we all live well."

"Schopenhauer gave a brilliant reply to all this. The world, he wrote, is as bad as it can be, but even if it were worse than it is, people would still live in it. For the most part they don't think. In order to think one must be fed and dressed, and this occupies so much time that none is left for thinking. As for the younger generation—what do they care about experience and thought? To argue is the dullest thing for them. Rolling up their sleeves they seize on some idea and say goodbye to the experience of their fathers. How well I know it," he cried in despair. "I, too, was a follower of Nietzsche at one time and an anarchist, too. A superman—is this not an attractive idea? Free medieval guilds—is that not a good economic program? A reform of human relationships? What is better than to abolish the state, all punishment, force. Then man's virtues will flourish, for he is innately good, only corrupted. An idea not only tries to convince you at a given moment but to presuade you that it is eternally true. Hence the idea of anarchism, it is argued, may be found as early as in the works of Lao-Tsu, six centuries before our era. One must also not forget the ancient Greeks—Aristippus, the cynics, Plato. It doesn't matter that the devil himself can break his neck in the gloomy writings of Lao-Tsu and that Plato was a serf-owner. What does it matter that the free medieval guilds were part of the feudal system? Again it doesn't matter that the state and force would never come into existence if man was as virtuous as he is supposed to be. But I saw through the idea and was cured from ever falling under the spell of other ideas."

"So now you live without any ideas?" asked Marta, a little frightened. "Wouldn't such a conclusion be a little absurd?"

Bezpalko was not offended.

"Yes, now I live without ideas," he replied with a smile. "I feel quite well, I assure you. You may think that only philistines live without ideas. You are right. I am a philistine. But you are wrong to deride philistinism as is so fashionable nowadays. Those who laugh at philistinism only show their own arrogance. Because the philistines are a compact mass on which the entire social order rests. It is the pillar of society; it is a skeleton merely dressed up in different ways. Always the struggle is not against philistinism but for philistinism. An idea is victorious only when it is uncritically accepted by a large number of the philistines. It would be bedlam if everyone had his own ideas."

"Allow me to disagree that you are a philistine," said Marta with a smile. "You must certainly read a lot."

"There you go," he interrupted her courteously. "Of course, I read. In my opinion a man with any pretensions to culture should read at least four hours a day; otherwise, he will

be hopelessly left behind. Besides, I love the theatre too and I know something about painting. Why should a philistine be stupid and limited? You are rejecting the educated philistines among whom I belong. An enlightened philistine likes sport and books, he cares for his body and soul. How can one possibly not read? Comrade Vysotska, you don't yet know what long evenings are. And you don't know yet the purpose of my visit," he ended unexpectedly.

"You promised to tell me."

"I shall. It would be silly not to tell you. Have I offered you some chocolates?" he said in confusion. "So, we are making progress. Yes, go ahead and eat them. I've explained my views on life, too. They are harmless—they don't lead to revolutions. Now I have to tell you about myself; I'll be brief. My life has been uneventful. I was married once but my wife died. She was a wonderful woman. But then, most wives look wonderful after their death. Death purifies not only the one who dies but his friends too. You won't understand this since at twenty-two death seems something not worth thinking about. Did I have children? Yes, only much later did I understand that the greatest love for children is shown by not having them. I had two children but only one son remained alive and when he grew up he scolded me for my conservative views, for being out of touch with life. I wasn't offended, since in my time I treated my father in the same way."

After this Bezpalko chose a candy and looked at Marta. He looked straight ahead of him as if remembering everything he had said. He sat motionless, turned a little towards Marta. His face was tanned and a little full but not at all bad. His lips moved evenly and his grey hair added a touch of serenity disturbed only slightly by the throat muscle which betrayed an agitation he tried to hide. The tone of his speech was brusque. Marta suddenly realized that Bezpalko was in love with her and had come with some kind of proposal. She was tense but not enraged since she felt some sympathy for this elderly gentleman who had fallen victim of her charms. She wanted to say something kind to him and was afraid of offending him. She was afraid that Bezpalko was joking and could at any moment get up and leave, explaining his visit by some joke. She decided to wait.

"My son, you know, lives in a different town and is not interested in my personal fate. So you won't understand what it is to be alone on a long evening when I usually want to read. An evening like that arouses all kinds of feelings in me. At first I regard them as something distant but after a while they begin to affect me. They steal into my heart, like beggars asking for a

penny, but they enter like burglars. Of course, what was important was that I saw you every day. Do you remember the day you first came to the Tobacco Trust?"

"No—that was long ago," she answered, feeling relieved that the conversation was coming to the point at last.

"But I remember," said Bezpalko. "Before I had worked in the Trust a year, I got used to every wall in the office. But when you came everything seemed brighter to me. If I could I would have fired you so as to regain my earlier contentment. But because I couldn't do that I arranged for you to work in my office. Of course, I did it officially."

"You did me a great favour," Marta said because there was a pause in Bezpalko's speech.

He smiled feebly.

"I did it for myself, not for you," he said. "I am an egoist, comrade Vysotska, an incorrigible one. But I was sorry to see you bent over the figures. I was sorry for your hands, your eyes, and your head. I wanted you to shine. How? I thought you might become an actress. I saw you on the stage, in the ballet. Maybe this was just the result of my lonely evenings. But I wanted to help you to get out of the office and launch you into the world of art. All the time I wanted to visit you, but instead I sent you flowers."

He acknowledged the roses which stood near the window.

"So it was you who sent me flowers?" said Marta quietly.

"Yes, flowers," Bezpalko almost cried out. "I imagined how you'd receive them, how you'd look at them. It was nonsense. I promised you I would tell you why I came here, but I don't know. You tell me."

"Andriy Romanovych," Marta started.

"But please don't tell me that you esteem me and are grateful to me," he interrupted her.

"No, I'll say quite openly—I'm not free."

There was a long silence during which she could not read anything in his face. After a while Bezpalko got up and said:

"Of course. Why should a girl wait for an old fool?"

"Have I offended you?"

He did not answer, put on his coat and went out to the kitchen. Marta saw him off. Taking advantage of the fact that the kitchen was empty she said once more:

"I have hurt you but I didn't want to."

"No. Don't bother. I'll look after myself," he answered brusquely.

WHAT IS NEW UNDER THE LIGHT OF THE MOON?

The professor of biochemistry, who was reading by the light of a small lamp on his desk, put down his journal and leaned back in his chair. "Yes, one might expect that," he thought, lighting a cigarette. At first he had felt ashamed but now he had got over it and thought of his plans which were quite clear. "Of course, an American," he continued his thought, "always an American, the devil take him." Yet there was no reason to be upset. What if an American had taken over some of the thoughts which Slavenko was slow to publish after his last series of tests? To the American scientist these were still theoretical hypotheses, while for him they were the results of experiment. Yet the very fact that someone else was so close to his own conclusions threw Slavenko into a panic. Like all scientists, having devoted so much work to his research he was jealous of his conclusions and considered them his own spiritual property. It was not a matter of ambition but of honour. "We fight an unequal battle," he thought. "Better equipment not only saves the American's time but provides him with an advantage. If we want to keep up with them we must work more intensively." But how could he work more intensively just now?

Yuri Oleksandrovych looked at his watch. In half an hour he would have to start out on his nightly visit. "Why have to?" he asked himself. Any activity repeated often enough becomes routine. It becomes quite unrelated to the first cause which originally prompted this activity. But this reflection did not cheer him up because routines are pleasant and comforting.

In fact, about a week before when the time came to visit Marta, he had begun to feel very tired. His legs refused to show their earlier desire to go out in the evening. An unexpected lassitude of legs, eyes and heart led him to look anew at his room. He looked at the bookcases, his desk offering itself to him, and recalled memories of the work done here which he had so unforgivably neglected. He vividly remembered some of his articles, lectures, evenings of intensive research, his careful plans, the magic spirit of the laboratory with its sharp smells and twisted tubes creating an image of elegant beauty. Amid

these memories Slavenko suddenly thought of Marta.

At that moment Marta's image underwent a drastic metamorphosis. It was as if a gust of wind suddenly tore off all the leaves from a tree, leaving the trunk in its dismal nakedness. All the virtues and attractions which his imagination had showered upon her and those, too, which she did possess had fallen under his scientific scrutiny. The beauty of her face, the subtle charm of her smile and of her eyes suddenly evaporated and the contours of her body which he knew so well became cold and trite. Her romantic, passionate words to which he had listened with such enthusiasm appeared to him now like the prattle of a small child—of no conceivable value. How different did she appear to him now from what he had first felt about her, sitting on the very same sofa when he had been swept away by passion. Now she became one of those creatures who wear skirts, one among a mass of women from which he had selected her. The ruin and devaluation of her image occurred so suddenly that at first he was a little shocked. However, he soon consoled himself that he had, as he put it in his own terminology, "digested" her. The comparison of Marta to a substance difficult to digest, which he had swallowed by accident and which his stomach had finally overcome, immediately quieted him and made matters clear.

How long had he been in this state of delusion? Approximately a month and a half. "What an ass I am," thought the biochemist. Forty-five days, as if torn off all together from the wall calendar, forty-five lost days. The hatred, which at odd moments he had felt for Marta before, dominated him completely, but he quickly recovered himself. Having made one mistake he was careful not to be carried away by his feelings a second time.

Arriving at Marta's fifteen minutes late, Slavenko explained the delay by telling her that he had been held up at the university. He carefully hid his disillusionment from her.

This had happened a week before. Next day Yuri Oleksandrovych went to the laboratory, put on his white overall and performed, as it were, the ritual of purification. The pigs, kept for research purposes, were well looked after by his assistants. Students were working in the laboratory at their various practical assignments and the professor talked to them, encouraging them and pointing out the difficulties of biochemical analysis, which requires the greatest concentration.

"Perhaps some of you," he said, "will want to devote yourselves to research work. You must know in advance that this is a demanding task, especially in the field of human emotions which disturb the steady activity of the mind."

After that he locked himself up, along with two assistants, in his room which also stored the reagents and the apparatus, and explained to them his plans for the new series of tests, asking them to work out some of the details.

"Now our pigs are going to rest and abandon themselves to their swinish love. Next, we must study the decomposition of the nucleoproteins of the human body. You already know that in these tests we are not only the subjects but the objects of research too because our budget does not allow us to hire someone else. In a week or so we must be ready for some unpleasant operations and I hope you will have enough dishes to collect our urine."

Used to scrutinizing and categorizing phenomena, Yuri Oleksandrovych was thinking that day about love. He classified it as first of all a breakdown of the rational faculty under the influence of sexual appeal which, because of the complexity of our nervous system, appears to us as something exclusive and extraordinary. This state prevents us from analyzing love for what it is as long as we are in love. However, the rational faculty which is supreme in man, since it alone distinguishes him from the animals, must be defended against all attacks which, in the end, degrade man. Thus the biochemist analyzed love as a purely destructive factor, a sign of weakness in man who is destined to lead the way in life's progress. In addition, love is a demeaning feeling for it leaves no traces after it, as he had just experienced. "It is a waste of energy," he thought. He recalled how once, while waiting his turn at the photographer's, he had looked through an album of women's photos, in which they smiled, bent down, raised their hands, amorously bent their necks, and saw that the energy of women's smiles alone could move a large power plant. In these meditations the image of Marta crossed his mind, but only as a criminal piece of evidence. Having freed himself from any feeling for her he looked at her as if from a distance. Perhaps she wasn't bad, after all. After all, objects don't change; it's only our attitude to them that changes. But the only correct attitude is the rational one.

Besides, love is nothing new. To experience it is to repeat the experience of millions of people, described in thousands of volumes, stale and worn out. Everything one feels for a woman has been felt precisely in these variations, passions and kisses a million times before. All the words told her have been used before and to tell them again shows a certain lack of seriousness and respect. "How undemanding people are," the biochemist thought sadly. The thought that love is like a paralytic old man especially appealed to him. He had thought of this earlier but just now it seemed very relevant. "Everybody should remember

this," he thought. "What a pity that men do not listen to analyses."

Now that he had realized how harmful and hopeless love was, there remained the task of finding a universal antidote for it. Armed with scientific logic the biochemist did not hesitate to look for such a solution. If the root of love is a physiological need then the satisfaction of this need would make love impossible. Most important, sexual energy must not be allowed to accumulate, but must be discharged systematically in some natural way. Slavenko recalled that period in his life when his first maid, Olena, had been with him as a marvellous mate who had helped him to start his scientific career. Coarse in manners, fond of swearing, greedy for money, she was all the same completely undemanding and indifferent to any idealization of sex. He remembered the pleasant time in the evening when, after performing all her assigned tasks, she departed and he sat down to work with a clear mind and a contented body. During these hours he could really concentrate and his thoughts were creative. It was a golden time. But they had to part. "I'll never find another Olena. She comes once in a lifetime," he thought sadly. No wonder her name was celebrated* in a Greek or Roman epic poem, which he had studied in school but the title of which he had forgotten.

With less chagrin he thought about Irene. Would he be able to go back to her? He had offended her. Would he find another Irene, or did she too only come once in a lifetime?

As usual, that evening he visited Marta. Without any definite plan in mind he thought it unwise to let her know about the change in his feelings. He pretended to be gay and pleasant, told her the same old words, which had a different meaning for him. He even teased her and left her in a good mood. But next day he began to think carefully of the best way to part from Marta.

The simplest way would be not to visit her again and so bring the whole story to an end. But he could not be sure that after a day or two she would not come and look for him, thinking that he was perhaps sick or had met with an accident. That might lead to an unpleasant confrontation with her. A letter was not a good way out either, since such an abrupt end might upset her psychologically. The biochemist did not want to hurt her. After all, it was he who had gone to her first, not the other way around. Oh, that son of a bitch, Liova. He had brought them together, the swindler, and now he did not show himself. "That's what comes of having friends," thought Slavenko.

* Olena is a Ukrainian variant of Helen.

He finally chose the way of gradual separation which he believed would be the least painful for Marta. First of all, he must cut the visiting time by an hour, then by two, then see her every other day and, finally, not see her at all. It all seemed very logical to him. He would thus decrease the intensity of her feeling, slowly convincing her that love was nothing new. If she became stubborn he would have to force the issue. But he hoped that it would not be necessary and he hoped to have the whole problem settled within two weeks.

Marta readily agreed to shorten the visit by an hour, since he had started his research. This upset Slavenko. He felt she should have opposed it and then he would have tried to persuade her. "Easy victories are not lasting," he thought. But he went along with it. Today's article in the American journal revealed the danger which faced him as a result of his love. But even this did not shake his determination to carry out his plan, which seemed to him the most rational.

Marta was in a touchy mood these days. First of all, the unexpected visit of comrade Bezpalko and the strange conversation she had had with him had upset her a great deal. After all, he was in love with her, he had come to see her against his better judgment and she could not reciprocate his feelings. Yet he had come. How strange. She could not imagine that she played any part in the life of this middle-aged man, that she was the goal of his dreams, passions and thoughts. She felt sorry for him; she wanted to do something good for him so as to become reconciled. He had sent her flowers which stirred some feelings in her and these feelings became independent of the flowers. The confusion of feelings and intentions horrified her at times as if a secret passage was suddenly opened to her, winding and strangely mysterious.

On top of everything, Marta had to go to work the next day and see Bezpalko. How would he treat her? She entered the Tobacco Trust like a guilty schoolgirl. But Bezpalko's looks encouraged her. He did not change either in his speech or in his attitude to her. She did not notice any hints about the previous nights's visit; it was as if someone else had come to see her who looked like comrade Bezpalko. At first she was puzzled but then she thought that he had forgotten about the previous day.

She was much more worried about the co-op worker's remark in the kitchen, "as if the evenings are not enough for her." She felt the stinging poison of these words. They hurt her because she had kept this relationship unspoiled by any gossip. Her love was innocent and free as a cloud passing over the sun and she could not bear to have it dragged down to the level of the garbage pail. She felt this to be an insult and was quite

offended and hurt. She recalled that the co-op worker had not talked to her recently and was avoiding her. A great deal in his behaviour which used to amuse her before now seemed quite serious to her. "Perhaps he is in love with me too," she thought. She was filled with nausea at the very thought that the co-op worker could have secretly desired her.

Marta did not tell Yuri about her apprehensions. She did not want to soil with sordid details a feeling which appeared to her to inhabit a different world from the one in which most people live. "It will settle itself somehow," she thought. But today another problem cropped up which was more difficult than any she had encountered. After coming home she noticed a letter on her table. She was surprised, since she wrote no letters herself and received them rarely. She opened the envelope and read the following, in Russian:

> You are being very careless. I know him. The end of it will be that you will be pregnant by him. He has done it to others before. Before it is too late, chase him away or you will be sorry.
>
> Your friend.

Marta read the letter several times. At first she thought it was not meant for her. She did not even think it could refer to her. But then she understood everything and her hands shook. An anonymous letter! A low dirty trick that was aimed at destroying her love. What a shame. She threw the letter on the floor as if it were something hideous which she did not want to touch. Yet how much pain these lines caused her. Not because they made her suspicious but because they were brutal and incredibly insulting. For several moments she stood near the table feeling sick. It seemed to her that something nasty and cruel was threatening her, that her love had provoked hate and malice. A premonition of these blows suddenly struck her so hard that she almost cried out.

In her thoughts she returned to the letter. She picked it up and looked at it without reading it. Whoever wanted to enlighten her? "Your friend." A scoundrel! In a little while the handwriting seemed very familiar to her. The same clerical incline of the script, the figurative v's, the hooks under the yas—she had seen all this before somewhere and tried desperately to recall where. Later she searched in her drawers where she kept all kinds of papers and took out several advertisements which the co-op worker had prepared in Russian and had asked her to translate into Ukrainian. She carefully compared them

with the letter and now had no doubt whatever about the author. "You jealous swine," she said aloud, took the letter and left the room.

The Ivanchuk family was sitting at dinner. Tetiana Nechyporivna served borshch to her husband and daughter before leaving for the Karavaiv baths. Dinner was a cornerstone of family life to them; it had to be quiet and meaningful. So the appearance of Marta who came running into the room upset them a great deal.

"Davyd Semenovych," said Marta quietly, "don't bother me with your nasty letters."

She threw the letter in the middle of the room and left.

"What? What is this?" Davyd Semenovych called out in Russian, shooting up from his chair.

"You can't come in like this while people are having their dinner," said Tetiana Nechyporivna. "What letter is it?"

"How dare you?" shouted the co-op worker. "I shall call the police if she enters my room. A shameful hussy—she has lovers and I don't have any peace."

Tetiana Nechyporivna rose to pick up the letter. But her husband beat her to it. He jumped up, picked it up and tore it into shreds.

"I don't want to read her letters. I know she wants to draw me into her intrigues. But I won't allow it. I have my honour!"

By now Tetiana was upset.

"Tell me, what happened?" she begged.

"I'll tell you everything. I didn't want to bother you, but now you should know the truth. Ada, you have finished; go on out to play."

"You are always sending me out whenever there's something interesting going on," she objected.

But her father handed her her coat and hat and she went out. Then the co-op worker sat down near his wife and said mysteriously:

"You don't know what is happening here in the evenings—when you are away."

He told her the whole truth: how Marta had tried to seduce him, enticed him to her room and how at first he had not understood her intentions. But then one day . . . .

"I walk in and she is lying there with her legs spread apart and asks me to sit beside her."

However, he would not be seduced since he had a wife and daughter and was a man of honour.

"So after that she took a lover but she can't forget me and now she's invented this letter. Only you mustn't take it to heart. It's foolish. I can't think what she saw in me. I am

middle-aged, a man with a family, but you can never tell."

On hearing all this, Tetiana got angry.

"And all this happened while I was away?"

Although she was of a docile temperament this attempt to break up her family made her angry.

"That scum," she cried, "and in front of other people she pretends to be an angel."

"She's a snake whom we have been kind to," said the co-op worker.

Tetiana Nechyporivna, hurt in her most sacred feelings, turned from a gentle citizen into an angry lioness.

Returning to her room, Marta lay down on her bed. She was no longer upset, but she needed to rest and lie down without thinking. She heard an uproar in the next room but she could not make out the words. Then it was quiet. She had no feelings for the co-op worker; he had disappeared from her life. At times, however, she still shivered with disgust and pressed her lips together in unbearable sorrow.

Before Slavenko's arrival, Marta washed herself but she could not hide all the signs of her emotional state from him.

Slavenko noticed it at once and, kissing her, asked:

"What's the matter, Marta?"

She invented an excuse by saying that she had caught a slight chill, which was to be expected in the early spring. The biochemist was sympathetic.

"Yes, the beginning of spring, like any transitional period, hides many unpleasant things. Any change in the weather, or in one's way of life, even if it is for the better, clashed with our set habits and so leads to conflict. Things are ambivalent and the very same habits which give stability to our life, defending it from accidental influences, are at the same time an obstacle in our striving for a higher form of life."

"Yuri," Marta said laughing, "you can't stop yourself preaching. You have to explain every triviality on the basis of some universal law."

"Yes, but this is the only way to fight trivialities. If we don't realize their cause immediately they can wield great destructive power over us. One could even argue that man's fondest dreams come to nothing because of trivialities which have not been recognized and neutralized in time."

He lit a cigarette and continued.

"The most important thing in life is to be able to set every phenomenon in its place, because just like people, phenomena can be arrogant and cocky, demanding inflence when they have no right to it. We must not shut our eyes to the fact that among these bullies are human emotions. All kinds of sorrows, griefs

and joys and enthusiasm as well, can destroy the human psyche only when we give in to them too much. Indeed, Marta, these emotions are trivial; since they don't leave any traces, they don't enrich us. Try to remember any joy or grief more than three years old and you'll find nothing in your memory except the bare fact that there was such a feeling. Then the question arises if it was worth it to feel so much. Everything which does not leave a permanent trace is an illusion. Our feelings, Marta, are illusory."

"And yet they are beautiful," she said, embracing him. "Kiss me, Yuri, I'm feeling sad today. Long live illusions."

"I'll kiss you, but I disagree with you about illusions. We might agree that there is a point in having new experiences that no one else has felt before. To create illusions never before known in the world. But it is ridiculous to use an assortment of experiences which are so obviously old. The thought that the sun circled around the earth was an illusion before Galileo, but now it has turned into a stereotype. The longings which filled the first dozen people were original but the longings of men in the twentieth century are an unforgivable anachronism. So I'm not surprised that contemporary literary criticism condemns the analysis of feelings in a literary work. It justifiably points out the limitations and narrowness of human feelings and their deep conservatism. We must educate ourselves and the younger generation on a rational basis. We must teach them that emotions are old rags no longer suitable for them to wear."

Later, caressing Marta who leaned against him, he explained how to be rid of the emotions. He thought that the best way was to recognize that there is nothing new in an emotional experience. So it can be exposed and put to shame.

"I am sure that no emotion can withstand this kind of scrutiny, if it is consistently applied."

Marta freed herself from his embrace.

"Let me open the window; the room is full of your smoke and theories."

Her comparison of Slavenko's thoughts to smoke offended him but he thought that he had better control himself and when she sat near him again he said gently:

"We must listen to the voice of reason and be more daring in our conclusions. Although I am in love with you, I make no exception for my feelings. Our love is as old as all emotions, it has been sung in countless songs, described in thousands of books and if a writer wanted to write a novel about us (Marta shuddered) then he would be criticized for his lack of originality."

Marta remarked sadly:

"You asked me once to teach you not to think, but I see I have been a bad teacher."

"She would like to make a cretin out of me," he thought, but he was pleased that she had reacted to his words. He decided to point out to her often the fact that there is nothing new in this world. He thought, too, that he would remind her of the beginning of their relationship since this would be a delicate hint about its end. He started to reminisce.

Marta listened willingly. For her these were not memories but a living reality tied to her daily life by an unbroken glowing chain. She did not distinguish yesterday from today; all their days of love were for her one glorious moment outside time. Her feeling reached its climax when a new kiss recalled all the old ones and all the old looks added lustre to the eyes.

In the end, Yuri said, smiling:

"You don't even know what I thought about you when I first saw you."

"Something very rational."

"No. On the contrary. I thought literally, 'She is cute!'"

"How shallow! And you couldn't even think of me in Ukrainian."

"You are a chauvinist. Even now I don't know how to say 'cute' in Ukrainian. It's a specific word, so it's untranslatable. And let me tell you that you attribute too much importance to the Ukrainian national renaissance. Not only you. People much older than you, like some of my colleagues, treated me much better as soon as I started lecturing in Ukrainian and supported their demands in the national field. It seems that they esteem me not as a scientist but as a compatriot. This narrow-mindedness shocked me very much. In our valuation of people we cannot be guided by secondary factors such as nationality at a time when reason demands that our culture must be international."

"But people don't live by reason alone," protested Marta.

"Yes, and this is very sad," answered the biochemist. "I'm sorry to think that you might not have loved me if I had had another nationality."

"I don't know; I don't know," she said pensively.

"Of course, this 'Ukrainization' has also got the better of me," he thought to himself, "and after all, my name ends in -enko."

"You still live in an old world, Marta, lost to reason."

"But there are new concepts, too," she replied. "First of all, our national renaissance is occurring under new conditions . . ."

"Well, and secondly?"

"Secondly . . . well, what made you decide to tell me so many unpleasant things today?"

"I do have the bad habit of saying what I think," the biochemist answered, kissing her gently. "But I haven't told you the most unpleasant thing. The point is that my research demands from me . . ."

"Another hour?"

"Yes. I must sacrifice another hour."

"I don't object," Marta answered after a while.

He pressed her hand.

"I'm grateful to you."

"Work, my love," she said. "But don't forget me. Take pity on me for I am sad."

He did and then left, a little worried. His plan was working too well. "You can't be sure about her," he thought. "She'll give in and then at the very end will surprise you with some trick."

Marta did not go to sleep for some time. It was hard for her to give up another hour but she felt deep contentment in this self-denial. There was great joy in restraining her feelings so that he could work with his comic-sounding substances to restructure human life in the distant future. With her small sacrifice she was helping, as it were, to hasten this future a little. Remembering his saying that there was nothing new in love, Marta moved restlessly, a little insulted. Then she was overcome by a strange fear. But she thought, "What nonsense he talks sometimes," and quickly fell asleep.

OH DEAR LORD, WHY DO YOU PUNISH THE GIRL?*

Next morning Tetiana Nechyporivna, meeting Marta in the kitchen, did not return her greeting. Marta was not surprised since after the anonymous letter she felt the distance between her and the co-op worker's family had increased. Her neighbours with whom she had always maintained good relations had suddenly turned into her enemies. Somehow this did not bother her now. She could not hate people and anyone who turned against her was simply removed into the distance, leaving a vacant space behind him towards which Marta had no special feeling. Marta was incapable of projecting her pain outwards.

However, Tetiana grew quite annoyed when she saw that her snub had not produced any reaction. She was sorry that she had no other way of annoying Marta. It would have been so much easier if Marta had used the kitchen to cook her dinner. Then they would meet near the hotplate and the Primus—inexhaustible sources of domestic quarrel. So Tetiana searched in vain for reasons to snub Marta again.

During her working hours she planned revenge. What if she should deny her water? Or lock up the toilet? But it was difficult to do these things—first, because she was usually out when Marta was in, and second, because there was something illegal about it and Tetiana, good soul that she was, was terrified of the courts. "She could sue me," she thought. Most of all she would have liked to get rid of Marta altogether, to throw that hussy out into the street. She finally decided to have a talk to the official from the rental office.

In the meantime, unable to bear any longer her own and Marta's silence, Tetiana a few days later threw this accusation at Marta:

"So, you've started to go after husbands," she said maliciously. "Perhaps there aren't enough boyfriends for you, so you throw yourself at a married man! It's shameful to do things like that. It's convenient when his wife isn't at home in the evening, so then you spread your legs for my husband. You don't care

* From a ballad by Shevchenko.

that I've lived honourably with him for ten years. You don't care that I am supporting my whole family by working. The Revolution has allowed you to do this? Is there no God anymore?"

Marta, who had to cross the kitchen on her way out to work, stopped in surprise. Then, shrugging her shoulders, she said quietly:

"You're mad," then she walked out. Tetiana, shaking a pot in her hand, called out after her in despair:

"You're nuts yourself! Slut! Strumpet!"

Marta quickly reached Khreshchatyk. "How nasty can you get?" she thought on the way. It was the first time in her life that she had been exposed to such an attack, such lies and bad language. Her neighbour had accused her of trying to seduce her husband, a mean gossip whom she was careless enough to admit to her room. Marta could not imagine anything more ridiculous. And yet this ridiculous accusation had been flung into her face. She felt crushed by the meanness of her neighbours. What else would Tetiana do to annoy her? All this because Marta had fallen in love with someone and now had to pay the penalty for her love, her dreams, her passion and her happiness. When she thought about it she felt as if she had wakened from a dream. "And he tells me that there is nothing new in love," she thought sadly. Yet by remembering him she lifted herself from the slime which was touching her. "He's my only one," she whispered.

She came to the office early, but Lina and Vorozhiy were already there. In the last few days Lina's appearance had changed drastically. Her features were not so sharp but quite round and she, so unattractive, had become quite pretty. After greeting them Marta sat at her desk and took out her papers. But Lina came up to her and bending over said in a half whisper:

"Comrade Marta, you haven't heard anything yet?"

"What's up?"

Lina fell silent.

"You see, I hate to mention it. But you don't know about it . . . I'm surprised. The day before yesterday a conference was held in the director's office about streamlining the office. Yesterday they talked about it, but you didn't hear. Today lists have been posted in the hall. Many people have been fired."

"I have?"

"Yes, you too. Forgive me for telling you but I saw that you didn't know. It's too bad. Of course, you can appeal."

"I'm very grateful to you, Lina. You see," she forced a smile, "I started to work as if I still belonged here. But it turns out I'm no longer needed."

She got up and went to the great hall where the payroll and bookkeeping offices were. There on the wall were the administrative orders, resolutions of local committees, placards and a wall newspaper. There it was—the list of those whose services were no longer required. She started to read the names and stopped at her own: M. Vysotska, a clerk in the statistical section.

The hall was full of people. There was the noise of cash registers, telephones and the general hubbub of a working day. Marta had the sad feeling that this big institution with all its employees, to whom only yesterday she was equal, had suddenly become indifferent to her because her name was on that list. Tomorrow they would forget her as if they had never known her, although she had done nothing wrong. The work which she had done here for almost a year would move ahead without her. Someone else would take care of reports, papers and letters written by her hand, open the drawers of her desk, pick up her pen. How strange and painful all this was. Swept away by love, Marta had not thought recently about her office, although she had worked as diligently as ever. Now it appeared something very dear to her, a part of her own life. She did not know what to do next, how to live, where to find a new job, but abandoned herself entirely to the feeling of loss and expulsion. Yes, she had been expelled.

None of those who had been fired were standing near the list. It was obvious that Marta was the last one to learn about it. Only one person—a stranger—was there carefully scanning all the announcements. Marta turned away. "And yet," she thought, "how shamefully he took his revenge on me, and how quickly."

So as not to see her co-workers and not have to listen to their sympathy, she sat on a bench in a corner of the hall. She very much wanted to talk to Bezpalko. She saw him in the distance in the hall which he had to cross to reach his office. She waited a few minutes and then walked back to the statistical section.

Bezpalko sat at his desk, examining his correspondence. Raising his eyes, he saw Marta and looked at her questioningly. Expecting a scene, Vorozhiy gave up the abacus and pretended to study something. Lina was typing, but her ears were carefully pricked up.

"So you have fired me, Andriy Romanovych," Marta's voice sounded loud and sharp.

"I didn't fire you, comrade Vysotska," Bezpalko answered quietly without changing position, "but a conference concerned with the rationalization of the apparatus decided that three

clerks were sufficient for the statistical section . . ."

"But why was it I who was fired?" Marta interrupted him.

"Don't get excited, comrade Vysotska. I think that the choice was made for good reasons. First of all, as the delegate of the local trade union committee informed us, comrade Lisova is pregnant ("That's why she looks prettier," thought Marta as Lina tapped her keys harder), and you could not take over the bookkeeping from comrade Vorozhiy. In addition, both comrades Lisova and Vorozhiy have worked her much longer than you have and in these cases, as you know, seniority counts. However, if you consider your case unjust you can of course appeal through your trade union committee."

"It's a lie," Marta called out suddenly. "You are avenging yourself on me, that's all. You have purposely recommended that I should be fired. You wanted to hide it from the Tobacco Trust."

"She's out of her mind," said Bezpalko in surprise. "Comrade Vorozhiy, can you give her a glass of water."

But Marta controlled herself. Pale and upset, she said in gasps:

"I don't need water . . . Goodbye, comrades."

She left the room. As she reached the main door she stopped, remembering that she could pick up her severance pay. So as not to have to come back she decided to get her pay now.

There was a short queue in front of the cashier and Marta joined it. Her lips trembled nervously and the fact that she could not control this increased her pain and anguish. She felt the trembling quite clearly although her whole body was calm, cold and in a daze. She found it difficult to stand, to move step by step with the lineup, even to look ahead. She thought slowly, as if an oppressive burden weighed on her mind: "Why did I talk to him? I shouldn't have shouted. I shouldn't have done it."

At last her turn came.

"Severance," she whispered into the wicket.

"Your name? Louder. Vysotska? Thirty-five plus pay for the last seventeen days. Altogether forty-five. No deductions. Here's three, four, five, two—forty-five rubles."

"He couldn't care less," Marta thought of the cashier.

She put the money in her purse and moved away, but someone touched her arm. She turned and saw Vorozhiy smiling at her.

"You are strange, Marta. Let me look at you. So you got your money and off you go. You give up easily. You should write a complaint about the 'idol'—a sharp one too!"

"I don't want to," she said and continued walking.

Vorozhiy walked out with her to the steps.

"Wait, let's talk. Why are you so kind to him? I can be your witness. I saw how he looked at you. It's a real scandal. He was making up to you. Maybe he even called on you at home?"

Marta nodded involuntarily.

"So that's it! Have you witnesses that he came? You must have witnesses."

"No, I don't want to. It's so dirty," she said with disgust.

"But you must stand up to him. You could bring him before the court. And you let him off—the son-of-a-bitch."

Vorozhiy's coarse sympathy moved Marta.

"I'm very grateful to you, but it isn't necessary," she said shaking his hand.

"You're too intellectual. Devils like him only survive because of you. You don't have the right to keep this whole thing quiet. What a pity!"

She silently pressed his hand and walked down the steps to the street. It was quite warm and she unbuttoned her collar. The morning's events had completely exhausted her and now the warm air made her feel even more tired. Her thoughts wandered from the co-op worker to Bezpalko, running away from one and bumping into the other. So she was out of work. What would she do next? Since she had nothing else to do she went straight home.

In her room she sat down on a chair and remained there for a long time without taking off her coat, her handbag in her hands. Remembering what had just happened she shook her head thoughtfully. This motion rocked her to sleep and, taking off her coat, she lay down and fell asleep.

She woke up as someone touched her. Professor Slavenko tried to wake her up. He came at nine, crossed into a dark room and saw Marta, fully dressed, asleep on her bed.

"So that's how you waited for me. Out of boredom you fell asleep. I had quite a job to waken you."

"What's the matter with me?" she whispered, waking up. "Excuse me, Yuri, I have been asleep since twelve."

"Are you ill?"

"No, darling. I'm quite well. But what a shame to fall asleep like this. Don't look at me for a minute; I'll tidy myself up."

He looked at her, sleepy, her hair disarranged and thought to himself, "She isn't so cute, after all," and turned away.

Today the biochemist had planned out his life with great accuracy. To protect himself from any further love surprises he had decided to get married at once. "I'll choose the lesser evil," he thought. What a fatal error he had committed when, that

evening, he had turned his steps from the building where Irene lived to Marta's hovel. However, he had to collect his thoughts. "It would not be rational to find someone else before finishing what has already begun. So I must try to go back to Irene. Then my circle of irresponsibility will be closed. Only if Irene doesn't respond to my appeal will I have to, alas, look for another woman to marry."

So today he had written and sent off the following letter written, of course, in Russian:

Deeply esteemed Irene Stepanovna,

For reasons independent of me and because of unexpected circumstances, I have not been able to visit you lately and have missed your pleasant company. Fortunately, circumstances have changed without leaving any aftereffects and I would be delighted if you would allow me to see you again.

I shall wait impatiently for your reply, upon which a great deal in my life will depend.

Yours affectionately,

Yuri Slavenko

Upon finishing the letter, the professor congratulated himself on his reasonableness and went to visit Marta in the mood in which a servant spends the last hours of his unpleasant work. Marta's falling asleep appeared discourteous to him. "I was thinking such a lot about her," he thought, "and she was sleeping quietly here."

At last Marta was ready, and coming up to him from behind put her arms gently around his neck.

"You are such a darling," she whispered.

He stroked her hands which touched his chest.

"Darling, you are my only, unforgettable Yuri," she said.

"How old all this is," thought the biochemist, but pressing his head to her cheek he said:

"Why did you sleep the whole day, Marta?"

"It's because all kinds of nasty things happened to me in the morning and I was very, very tired."

"Yes, that can tire you out," remarked Slavenko. "There is a great waste of psychic energy at a time of emotional crisis. From one point of view, emotional excitement is a kind of

illness. It should be avoided like a bad cold."

"But how can one not be emotionally upset if, for example, one is fired from one's job?"

"Has this happened to you?"

"This morning."

"Oh, that's very unpleasant. What are you going to do?"

"What? The usual in such a situation—go to the employment exchange."

She talked about the loss of her job carelessly and almost gaily, with a smile, so as not to worry Yuri. But she felt she could not keep it quiet, especially since he had found her asleep.

"I see you are not too worried about it," he said.

"Well, I still have you and my qualifications."

"I can hardly help you," Slavenko said with a smile. "You must rely on your qualifications."

"I'm not afraid, but I'm sorry. It isn't pleasant to be fired."

"And what was the reason?"

"You will like it: rationalization of the staff."

"You are right. This is the only change in our mores of which I wholeheartedly approve. Rationalization, whatever the form, destroys old habits, stupid traditions, harmful superstitions which we have inherited from earlier, ignorant generations. That is, rationalization in its broadest sense as a general process of normalization of human labour and our emotional relationships means progress to higher forms of life built on rational principles. Thousands of ancient feelings, this whole beast which sits and cries within us, are aroused and yet maddened with the cage which reason makes for them systematically day by day. I am happy that I live at a time in this country when reason sharply opposes everything that is weak, mean and emotional with which we are so generously endowed by nature. In my opinion, the concept of rationalization is identical with the concept of communism. They are the same, part of the same process, called different names from different points of view. Of course, it's sad to lose one's job, but don't forget that rationalization is a good reason for it."

"So I've been honoured."

"You don't have to be ironic, Marta."

"Why can't I be ironic when I've been rationalized?"

"You should be conscious of the event," said Slavenko, kissing her. "Look at me," he added. "My research is going ahead well and I must confess that I shall be obliged . . ."

"Another hour? But what shall we have left?" cried Marta in a panic.

He held her seated on his knees.

"You must be reasonable, Marta. You will find it difficult and so will I. No, I don't think it would be a good idea to cut our visits by another hour. We'd better keep the same number of hours but see each other every other day."

"Every other day?" she whispered. "And later not see each other at all?"

"Why do you jump to such hasty conclusions? You agree that I have to work?"

Marta was silent. Yuri continued:

"Your conclusions are premature. But even if we had to part one day then I think we should be able to do it without superfluous weeping and bitterness, without all those old sentiments which, as I said, are not becoming to a modern man. Just think how many songs are devoted to parting and you'll understand that we could make no new contribution to that subject."

"Stop it, stop it!" she cried out.

She flung herself at him and laughed loudly and spasmodically, on the verge of groaning. Now he cried out in alarm:

"Don't, Marta. What's the matter? Please stop it!"

To himself he thought, "I knew it; I knew that it would come like this. What nonsense!"

"Listen, Marta," he said pulling at her, "stop crying. You mustn't. What have I said? The neighbours will hear. Stop it, Marta."

The mention of the neighbours sobered her up.

"I won't . . ." she sobbed.

She got up from his knees, wiped her face and lay on her bed. In a while he awkwardly sat down near her and held her hand.

"You don't understand me," he sounded offended. "Science . . ."

"I know, science requires sacrifices," she answered quietly and he did not know whether she was serious or mocking.

"I agree," she continued, pulling him towards her.

"It was the unreasonable heart, Yuri, that cried. I had so many unpleasant things happen . . . No, what you said was not unpleasant. I know it's necessary. I, a humble, ordinary girl realize that you must work. You are working for future generations. They won't know me, but I am with you . . . I love you and I am glad that we won't see each other every day, and that you'll be working instead. I believe that you will make life better, freer and if you knew how much I want people to be more beautiful, better, happier . . ."

Slavenko was almost moved by all this.

"Marta—you understand me," he said.

For the rest of the evening she felt as she had that first day of being in love.

Next day, the end of Marta's working career became known to her neighbours. Because there was no direct contact between them, Frau Holz acted as an intermediary, asking in surprise why Marta was not going to work. Marta felt ashamed of being fired and told her that she had resigned her job and that she was preparing for an examination in foreign languages, hoping to enter a course in the fall.

Tetiana Nechyporivna interpreted this in her own way.

"So she's a kept woman now."

"What do you say? It's a scandal," Frau Holz exclaimed indignantly.

"Just think, Amalia Henrikovna," said the buffet worker, "why should this loose woman work for sixty rubles a month when she can earn a ruble a night in her own room? It isn't hard work like the poor prostitutes walking the streets in all kinds of weather. She's found a fool and she's exploiting him bit by bit."

"Oh, what a scandal," sighed Frau Holz. "That couldn't happen in Germany."

"Your Germany is no better; don't try to tell me. Everywhere there are these women who like to break up families for their own pleasure. The trouble is that here the law is too soft. In the old days they were at least afraid of God but nowadays no one pays any attention to God and so they carry on without hindrance."

Tetiana Nechyporivna gave vent to her outraged feelings and she did this on purpose so loudly that Marta could hear it in her room. Marta was now mostly worried that the venemous neighbour might somehow offend Yuri when he came in the evening. That was why she was more easily reconciled to the fact that the biochemist would only visit her every other night now.

Without intending it, Marta had helped to enliven the stale marriage of her neighbours. Now Tetiana, coming home from the Baths would have a jealous tantrum in front of her husband, which amused him very much.

"Tell me, has she tempted you again?" she would ask. "Tell me the truth, Davyd; I must know everything."

"No, I swear to you, Tetiana. From that day on I have been cut off. She's scared of you. Of course, if I wanted to . . ."

"Wanted to? Oh, you are a mean traitor. You men are all the same. The rustle of a skirt is enough for you. Do you know what I would do? I would kill her. So help me God, I would strangle her."

"I'm sure you could do it."

"Well, don't make me commit a sin."

At night, after putting their daughter to bed, they sat in a tender embrace, remembering their youth in these moments and recalling their first meetings and conversations. Aroused by these love quarrels, their feelings, subdued by time and habit, flared up violently.

"I have always loved you and I shall always love you, Tetiana," the co-op worker grew rapturous.

She cuddled up to him in bed with her warm, awakened body, stroked his face and whispered:

"What a nice mustache you have, Davyd. You don't see whiskers like that nowadays."

The news about Marta, the woman of easy virtue, the temptress, was unexpectedly replaced by even greater news which spread like lightning. The co-op worker, Ivanchuk, had at last got a job. The co-operative "Agronom" had expanded its staff and invited comrade Ivanchuk to be its sales agent with a regular salary, a travel allowance and other fringe benefits and thus brought to an end the long, dull period of unemployment.

The entire household was full of bustle. Davyd Semenovych came out again and again into the kitchen and told the news, adding new details each time. Tetiana Nechyporivna was preparing a special dinner. Ada, prompted by Frau Holz, also took part in the family festivities and brought her father a bunch of violets which were already being sold in the street. In the kitchen the co-op worker held forth about his future plans.

"No, Tetiana, don't stop working. After all, we have a big daughter to look after and times are not so certain. It's difficult to make ends meet, to tell you the truth, but I don't want to beef against the government. It will look after you if you are honest. That's how I got the job. There are some, we know, who don't want to work, but we are used to honest labour and our government understands that. I'm not telling you to go on working just to bring in more money. I don't care about money. But it's a woman's role nowadays, to work as the equal of man."

"I shall certainly go on working," chirped Tetiana like a spring sparrow. "We shall both work together."

"And so that Ada will grow up decently and not be a good-for-nothing, like someone we know, we shall," he continued solemnly, "take you, Amalia Henrikovna, as her governess and we shall both contribute towards your pay."

Frau Holz gladly agreed, on one condition. If the lady who had come looking for a cousin recommended her to someone, she wouldn't be able to refuse, since this lady was so nice and spoke German like someone from Germany and they had both

become very friendly. In the dull imagination of the old maid, the visit of the professor's wife had assumed fairy-like, mystical proportions.

"We shall see about that," said Davyd Semenovych gently, "but for the time being you will give Ada a good education and, most of all, teach her German."

"Oh, it's a great language," said Frau Holz with enthusiasm.

That same day the co-op worker solemnly opened up the main door to the building and posted on it a piece of paper on which he wrote in large and clear letters: Davyd Semenovych Ivanchuk, associate of the Co-op Union Agronom. He had a great deal of trouble in repairing the rusty old doorbell and under it he placed another, smaller notice which stated categorically that "This bell is exclusively for D. S. Ivanchuk." After doing all this to celebrate his new appointment, Davyd Semenovych took Ada to a movie that evening.

Despite her domestic festivities, Tetiana Nechyporivna did not stop pestering Marta, whose unemployment provided an ideal weapon. Soon after dinner Marta was visited by the lessee, the former landlord, to whom she regularly paid five rubles rent every month.

He was a corpulent man with a black beard which made him appear even more stately. He talked quietly and mellifluously, trying to charm people with his speech. He asked Marta if he might sit down and made a short introduction about the hard lot of the lessees, the cost of renovations demanded by the housing committee and the taxes demanded by the financial committee.

"Our regime is immoderate," he said, placing emphasis on the last word. "It cuts down, as it were, the branch of the tree on which it is sitting. However, that's not for us to judge," he added, smiling. "When they take from us, we have to take from you. There is no other way. Look at your room, for instance. Six square meters, two windows, heated, not damp and you are only paying five rubles. That's ridiculous."

"I'll find it difficult to pay five now that I'm unemployed," said Marta.

"I know that, but salary is not the only source of income."

"Where else can I get the money?" Marta flared up.

"I don't want to go into your intimate affairs. That's a matter for the courts, if need be . . ." he said with a smile which made Marta shiver. "Now, you know, a person calls herself unemployed, is listed in the employment exchange, but if it is a woman . . ."

"Is that what the neighbours told you? It's a lie, a lie!"

"The neighbours can be witnesses if need be," he said quietly. "And don't you shout at me because if I shout you may wet yourself. Without making any fuss, you as an old lodger will have to pay thirty rubles. I could get forty for it; you know how tight the housing situation is."

Marta was stunned and silent.

"Well, shall we shake?" he asked.

"I shall leave," she said at last.

"Pity. I'm always sorry for nice people. But you know best. When do you want to leave?"

"In a month."

"Two weeks will do. That's the normal time to give notice. So it'll be May 5th. But let me have your notice in writing, so that I can be sure."

She wrote the notice in silence and the lessee took his leave very gently after wishing her all the best.

ON A SPRING NIGHT ALL THE ORCHARDS ARE A-WHISPER AND EVERYTHING SPEAKS OF LOVE . . .

Marta had a lot of free time now. One day she had entirely to herself and the other was free till late in the evening, when her beloved came at nine. Her beloved—this word was not enough for her. She did not, in fact, think of a word but was filled with great exaltation and some somnolent peace when she thought of him. Where at the beginning of their relationship, the biochemist had not seemed very real to her and she often thought that she had created him in her dreams, the longer she knew him the better she got to know him in words, features and detail and so, slowly, he became the only real thing in the whole world. Now this reality was intensified by the pressure of the nasty, painful mishaps which had so suddenly befallen her and was more clearly delineated by the sacrifices which she was making for the sake of his research. For her loss of her job, being hated by her neighbours and driven out of her room, she saw only one cause—her love. So all her misfortunes became dear to her, despite the pain they caused. She loved them unconsciously as the inevitable results of her great passion. And the concessions made as to the hours and days of visits, done for his sake and for the future of mankind, rounded off her love and transmuted her fiery desire into renunciation and complete abnegation.

These feelings stirred in her the day after she had had the talk with the lessee and a visit from Yuri to whom she did not mention the talk. She wanted to be alone for a few hours. This day Slavenko was not coming. Remembering him, Marta was filled with joy. Today he would work the whole day and the next evening he would come again.

Yet thinking about the lessee brought her back to reality. She must settle her own affairs which were quite upset in two vital fields: her job and her apartment. The money she had received plus her own savings would last her six to eight weeks if she cut her expenses. The trouble with the apartment made matters much worse in every way. True, she had friends, girls whom she had not seen for some time, and she must look them

up immediately. But in two weeks she had to move. This was too short a time to find something. "I was foolish to give him notice," she thought. Yet she felt she could not have done otherwise. Sure, she could have fought for her room just as she could for her job—she knew her legal rights, and she would have used them if her feelings had not been involved, her "intimacy" as the lessee had put it yesterday. This had paralyzed her resistance. It would have been very odd for her to argue that she was fired not because of any rationalization of the staff but because of the amorous whims of her middle-aged boss, or that she had lost her room because of the alleged temptation of a middle-aged neighbour. Her love, she thought, would then be soiled and so she was ready to give in.

So, despite her unwillingness to go back to her office, Marta got from there confirmation of her release and took it to the employment exchange where they promised to put her on their list of qualified workers. After supper she went back home and decided that she had done enough for that day. As usual she picked up a book and read. However, literature now had a strange effect on her. In every book, novel, poem, drama or short story after a page or two her eyes met the word "love" which was offensive to her. Descriptions of love, kisses and of the passions of the heroes plunged her into despair. In all these gestures of love, whispers, favours and heartbeats she recognized her own emotions and dreams. Just as in her own case, there were sudden encounters which blossomed into passionate loves, there was mad desire, women fell into strong embraces and gave themselves to their lovers in longing and fear. Just as she had done.

Weren't the others driven out of their houses and jobs by their love affairs; weren't they slandered by men whom they had rejected? Just the same. In every book she now found one of her features, or a situation which cut her heart, the same smiles and wiles and she felt painfully that if one were to select from all that was written about love piece by piece then her own love, so new and incomparable, could be reconstructed in every detail. This depressed her and destroyed the support which she needed now more than ever before.

Ever since the biochemist had suggested to her that love was old and stuffy her reading had been ruined. At first she tried to dismiss this thought so as to think these things through to the end. No other words touched her so deeply and her heart rose against them as against her worst enemies. There is nothing new! Then all her dreams would be vain and silly, all her passion ridiculous and primitive, if she could not create anything new when she was searching for the unknown and unique. There is

nothing new in love. Then there was nothing extraordinary in her feeling which she valued above anything else and which for her represented all her hopes; there was nothing fresh in the kisses which she gave and in the words she whispered—only an echo of words said and used before! Was it really true that instead of breaking a new path she was walking a beaten road where millions of feet had left their traces? "I mustn't think about it; it is too terrible," she thought to herself and yet she continued to think about it as soon as she was left alone in the room. Her romantic heart blared the loud trumpet of alarm.

At first these thoughts appeared to be some kind of misunderstanding which needed a quick solution. But the more free time she had the stronger they grew, enveloping her in their web. It was as if she had carried within her a poison which spread further and further. She was struggling within herself. "Of course, people have been in love before," she thought, "but not quite in this way." Yet literature proved to her the contrary: not only were people in love, but they were in love in the way she was. Every day she went to the library and read a great deal, determined to compare and find out, pausing at examples similar to hers and to her chagrin finding again and again obvious similarities in each love story. Dozens of them passed in front of her eyes. Even in works which were primarily stories of adventure, revolution or social change she detected a love built of the same bricks as her own. It seemed that love was not only an old phenomenon but an inevitable one. How was it that she had not known it earlier? "I fell in love because I had to," she thought. "Every girl must fall in love." She not only felt as they all did but she could not help feeling that way. This awareness was a greater danger to her than the loss of her job or her room.

Of course, whenever he came, these thoughts vanished at his first words, at the mere sound of his voice, at the thouch of his hand. Like a magician, by his appearance alone he subdued the evil spirits which he had called forth. As long as he was present everything was made new but as soon as he left she was beset by the old uncertainty. And yet her passion fed on these colossal doubts. Her love grew stronger, grew sharper in its own analysis and Marta, losing some illusions, was trying to create new ones. Fragments of old dreams nourished new hopes, a desire sprang up in her to bring to fulfillment this old feeling of love which now engulfed her, to crown it with a new wreath and thus achieve victory in her love.

That day, after reading a novel, Marta was depressed and laid the book aside. She was full of bitterness. She remembered the words which she had used sometimes in her enthusiasm: "I want it to be like a novel." Now her dreams were realized; she

loved as in a novel. But what longing, despair and shame lay in this realization. Like a novel! What a bitter irony of fate.

Marta now thought about the possible endings of love—not too numerous and all well known: marriage, one person falling out of love, or a mutual exhaustion which begins with quarrels and reproaches. Which of the three alternatives was the worst? She considered them in turn and each in turn seemed terrible to her. She saw in her despair that love does not end; it is debased. What is there in common between love and a dull daily married routine, or a sorrow of desertion, or a petty hatred between those who have loved? Would her love too, shining and incomparable, meet with one of these hideous endings? Unquestionably. Even she, dreamer that she was, did not hope that love would last forever.

So she had to do something at once to stop the literary quality of her love, to crown it with some unusual and unique ending. She had to make a decision. This decision ripened in her, growing from the depth of her emotions, from the desperate search for something new, from all the misfortunes of the last few days. Her tired spirit quickened again; a premonition of the impossible grew in her just as it had in the first days of love. She was excited, full of longing and joyful expectation which flooded her heart with new warmth.

In this languid state of body and spirit Marta's intention grew more precise. When it became clear to her she was literally breathless. She got up quickly, put on her coat and hat and went out. Was it not a nightmare she saw? Was the mad thought that appeared and frightened her at all possible?

Outside, the first gust of fresh warm air calmed her down. She walked along Zhylanska street to Proletarian street and turned into that long, even avenue. The evening was gentle and soft and Marta realized that spring had come unexpectedly and unnoticed among the troubles of her life. She was grateful for this soft warmth, for the dampness left by the melted snow, for the vague pregnancy of the trees and for the total shroud of the sky trimmed with silvery moonlight in the west. Quietly she walked ahead, relaxed and at peace. Free of streetcars and buses this wide street looked safe and cosy in the evening. Taking advantage of the warmth, old men and women sat near porches on chairs and benches and gossiped quietly. Boys on the sidewalks played civil war—the reds, the whites, sailors, commissars and bandits with all the necessary executions, while the girls huddled together, skipped and yelled. Everywhere young couples were strolling, boys and girls, some laughing, some sad, talking or pensive, quick or slow, enraptured and indifferent. "How blind they are," Marta thought with sorrow and envy.

At last she came to streets unknown to her, small, crooked, where there were fewer pedestrians and spring seemed closer and more tangible. After that she suddenly found herself on a main street, well lit and crowded and everywhere she found support; every step made her less indecisive, gave her strength to fulfill the great intention of her love. She felt spring inside her and was carried away by its force. She whispered to herself, "I'll do it; tomorrow I'll do it." She walked until very late, was not tired and returned home happy. Her plan was worked out in all details.

Next day, waiting for Yuri, she dressed as carefully as she had on the day when he came to her in a blizzard to start his daily visits. She put on the same dress, the same stockings and shoes and despite her lack of money she bought the same brand of eau-de-cologne, "Lily of the Valley." She even covered the lamp with a veil. She saw her face in the mirror, thin, with black circles under the eyes, but it also seemed to her the same. She thought to herself, quite excited: "He will come soon and I'll do it. The darling, he doesn't suspect a thing."

The biochemist came early without any suspicion of Marta's thoughts, but with his own ideas which had put him in a black mood. That day he had at last received a reply from Irene. It was very short: "Do come; I shall be pleased to see you." While the content of the reply pleased him and lifted a weight from his heart, the form puzzled him greatly. The letter was written in Ukrainian. How could Irene become a Ukrainian? He could not grasp this. "They're all mad about this language," he decided. Yet the fact was not entirely displeasing to him; some sentiment in him was moved. He became quite intrigued and wanted to see Irene as soon as possible.

On top of this, since the day before, in connection with his research on the nucleoproteins of the human body, the young professor and two of his assistants had started a strict diet. This new digestive regime alone discouraged any expense of energy on love and demanded absolute peace and tranquility, since any irritation upsets the normal decomposition of cells and shows up in the urine, which the biochemist periodically tested. Considering all these circumstances, Slavenko had decided that the moment was ripe to end his relationship with Marta. The preparatory work in diminishing the time and frequency of his visits was happily concluded and he had to take the final step. Although logically the whole scheme appeared easy, in practice he was worried about some unforseen complications. So he was nervous. Marta's finery struck him at once since, as they became closer to each other, she had cared less and less for her appearance. Spiritually and physically, love had devalued dress.

"Where are we going?" he asked, kissing her.

"We are going for a walk. We have never been for a walk together. Let's go, darling."

"Marta," he said, sitting down, "if you only knew how my work tires me."

"I know, Yuri, but today we shall go for a walk. Do it this once for me. All right?"

She was insistent, stressing the words "today," "this once" and at last he agreed. "Maybe during the walk I'll have a better opportunity to talk to her," he decided.

A soft, warm evening greeted them outside. A thick spring mist draped the street lamps with soft halos.

"Where shall we go?" asked the biochemist.

"I'll tell you. This way—up."

They walked up Tarasivska street.

"Do you feel the spring?" asked Marta, holding him tight. So as not to start an argument, Slavenko agreed that he felt the spring.

"It's a time of miracles," she said. "It's no wonder that buds and later blossoms appear on trees. Grass grows out of the soil. The soil was cold and now grass begins to grow, snowdrops, wild strawberries. All this is so hard to understand."

"On the contrary," said the professor, "it would be hard to understand if grass and flowers didn't grow, once the inclination of the sun's orbit changes."

"And why does the sun's orbit change?"

"You talk like a child, Marta," said the biochemist with annoyance. "Why, why. Science isn't ready to answer children's questions."

In the darkness near the Botanical Gardens Marta suddenly embraced him and started kissing him.

"My darling Yuri," she whispered.

"Marta, on the street," he protested. "We might be seen."

"Let them see—there's no one here."

"She has been made dizzy by the spring. What nonsense!" he thought.

"Tell me about your research."

This topic might bring him to the vital point so he readily agreed.

"I am working, as you know, on the nucleoproteins of the human body. These half-protein substances which compose our cells belong to the most complex parts of living matter. I must use myself as an object of research, since the nucleoproteins of men and animals are not the same and the activity of the decisive organ in this research—the liver—is not the same. We can't approach them directly, so we must observe them in a

state of decomposition—in our urine, if this does not offend you."

"Not at all, go on. After all, you've dedicated this research series to me, haven't you?"

He agreed, and thought that he must have told her all kinds of nonsense. Still, he went on describing in detail how tiring these experiments were, what a strict diet he must now observe, what absolute peace he now required in order to complete them. Marta pressed his hand and whispered:

"Wonderful, I'm so happy," since listening to him talk about his work made her feel very close to him.

So they passed the sombre building of the old university and then went along Volodymyrska street to the statue of Khmelnytsky. At last he asked:

"Where are you taking me?"

"To the church of St. Andrew. Did you ever go there?"

"No; I don't go to church. I don't even know which one it is. Is it the one which is about to collapse?"

"So they say. I've never been inside it either, since I never go to church. But sometimes I liked to stand outside. It was beautiful."

They went up the wide steel stairs to the tiled square around the church which stood on the slope of a hill. Through the narrow passage between the church and the balustrade they reached the north end of the square which overhung a ravine. The area at the back of the church was also tiled and their footsteps sounded loud in this deserted corner.

"See how beautiful it is," said Marta in raputre.

"Yes, the view from here is very beautiful," mumbled the biochemist.

Right underneath, below the level of their feet, were trees from an orchard or a neglected grove. Opposite, in the distance, the wide ribbon of the spring-flooded Dnieper could hardly be seen in the mist. To the left the flat Podil; to the right the steep Pechersky hills glimmered with many small lights. A warm, gentle wind blew at them across the river.

"I love places like this," said Marta passionately. "I feel as if you can find yourself here. Wherever you walk you leave a part of yourself, but here all that you have left comes back to you and you are whole again."

She talked, pressing herself tightly against him; she talked quietly, even timidly, but he could hear all the words which were almost whispered into his ear. He felt her weight on his arm and the whole evening walk and her whisper seemed to him utterly pointness. The large outline of the church which in the darkness seemed grim and mysterious made a poor impression

on him too. "Like the Middle Ages," he thought.

"This place is very old," she said. "At one time there were only forests and ravines here, a wilderness with no paths or people. And on this hill the Apostle Andrew placed the cross then. Do you know what he said, Yuri?"

"I don't know or else I've forgotten," answered Slavenko in a surly tone.

"He said that a big and famous city would rise here. That was very long ago. But later a city was indeed founded here. It grew and now we are living in it. Isn't it strange?"

"Do you believe in prophecies?"

"No. Perhaps the legend grew after the city was built. But the legend is beautiful, Yuri. It is so good that you want to believe it."

She became silent. He, too, was quiet, thinking to himself: "Shall I tell her now that we must part? But then she may jump into the ravine."

"So there is nothing new in love?" she asked suddenly.

"Not only in love, Marta," he began encouraged, "but in any human emotion. One must marvel . . ."

"But look," Marta interrupted him, "how many lights there are in front of us. Everywhere there is light there is love. However different people are, however serious, they all fall in love. It may be hard to believe, but they are in love. Everywhere, in the streets, theatres, lectures, you will see people in love."

"You don't see straight. Or rather, you see only one side of things. You don't notice work which is everywhere too."

"I can see everything. But you don't understand me, Yuri. You look at everything in an old-fashioned way, if you don't mind my saying so. Perhaps you are right. But I want to be naive and beautiful and a little blind. I want to see everything better than it is, to believe in happiness, in something new. I want to wake up in the morning and sing. To go to bed and dream. I want this so much, Yuri. We mustn't think about it too much. All of those people over there are in love without thinking and they feel well. But you told me to start thinking."

"I didn't want to."

"No, you were right. I thought and I read. There is nothing new under the sun."

She bent over the stone balustrade.

"Lean down and take me in your arms, Yuri. Come closer. On an evening like this I want to do something impossible, something that would leave a mark for the rest of my life—something new and beautiful. So that when we remember it it will be warm, like today, and spring-like."

Marta grew silent and he felt her trembling.

"Are you crying?" he asked.

She was silent for a while and then answered, "No. I'm a little cold."

"Yes, it's too windy here. Let's go home."

Marta did not protest and they went down the big stairs. On the way back she was silent and her mood communicated itself to him. He had his own reason for this. Could there be anything sillier than this walk to the church, to some feudal monument? In the twentieth century this was an unforgivable deviation. And then all this talk about spring—your ears just can't take it in. "She's a real schoolgirl," he thought to himself in annoyance. But he was even more annoyed with himself for not telling her about the final break. He blamed himself for his lack of courage and hoped that this problem would be settled later in Marta's room. He even thought that the most rational thing would be to end this love where it began.

"You are in a strange mood today, Marta," he said at last as they approached her home.

"Everything is strange today," she whispered. "It is as if I am seeing you for the first time, as if I'm walking along this street for the first time. Here I am, home at last. But you won't come in, Yuri."

"Why?" he wondered. "It's not late yet?"

"You won't come in again, ever," she said. "We won't see each other again."

"Are you going away somewhere?"

"No, I shall live here. Don't you understand? Another month or two, even a year or two and one of us would fall out of love; who knows which? We would quarrel, swear, cheat each other and the ending would be shameful and as old as our love has been. Well, let the ending be new. Goodbye, Yuri!"

"Wait," he asked, confused. "You don't take me into account."

"You? God. I do, I do! You more than me. You will go on working for men of the future who will look better than we do. And I will be with you, always with you, but only as a memory, since you still love me. As long as you love me you will remember everything that passed between us and you will feel well. So will I. I wanted to go with you to the place where I was born, to walk alone with you, to ride in a boat at night and to swim . . ."

"I can't swim," Slavenko mumbled.

"You see. I would have taught you. But I am afraid it would be too late. I am afraid of every moment when we are still together. You may fall out of love with me suddenly. I've

thought about that. So go away. That's the best."

He wondered at the calm with which she spoke. He felt like a little boy who is being told what to do. What nonsense.

"I know what you want," he began, "and I agree that you're right. But this is a serious matter which shouldn't be solved at the gate in a childlike fashion. I propose we go to your room and have a good talk about it."

He felt her excitement and it subdued him. Convinced of his power of oratory, he feared he might change her mind. That would be utter nonsense. So he decided not to show his superiority here.

"You are cruel, Marta. But I understand you. I'm afraid of what you are afraid of, too."

"I knew it," she cried out. "I knew it. How happy I am."

"Let it be as you wish. Goodbye, Marta."

The biochemist wanted to kiss her but she drew away.

"No, that would be like a song. But you can kiss my hand."

He kissed her hand for a long time.

"That's all," she said. "Goodbye. I shall love everything you do. Don't try to see me; it'll be painful, but remember me. Now I want to kiss you and go with you, but I'm going away. Goodbye, Yuri, my dearest one."

She turned and disappeared. He called after her:

"Goodbye, Marta."

He stood still for some time. He heard her open and close the door. So he was free. But this parting seemed demeaning to him. "She has made me into an eighteenth century character. A Don Juan, the devil take her," he thought walking back home. It would have been so much better if he had explained all the reasons which made this parting necessary, explained them all to her, and she, after crying a little, had agreed. Even as he was going to sleep he felt annoyed by all that had happened.

Yet in the morning the young professor felt that his position was quite proper, though he continued to regard Marta's behaviour as irrational. Did it matter how the break was achieved? Surely the results, not the processes, were important. If she wanted to have illusions, let her have them. After all, everything was over and he was free. He was a fool to have any qualms over it. "I still suffer from the vestiges of sentimentality," he thought.

The professor worked hard all day long and finished his article on the earlier series of tests. Taking into account the findings of the American scientist, Slavenko wrote his article in English so as to have it published in America. Later he answered some letters, each one beginning with a stereotyped phrase:

"Dear colleague. A serious illness has prevented me . . ." At last, at eight o'clock he put on his dark suit and went to visit the Markevyches.

The celebrated doctor had finished his cup of tea in the family circle and was quietly dozing in his chair. His wife, who now lived in a state of perpetual anxiety, was thinking about the menu for the next day. Irene was drying teacups with a white towel.

The appearance of the biochemist, escorted by the beaming Pelahia was like a sudden alarm.

"So you haven't quite forgotten us!" cried out the old professor. "How are you? Splendid! But you have come when the samovar is no longer hot."

"We can start it again," said Maria Mykolaivna whose hands were trembling with excitement.

"Do you want tea, Yuri Oleksandrovych?" asked Irene.

"I want it, but unfortunately I can't have it," answered Slavenko, smiling. "In connection with my present research I have to be on a diet which doesn't allow tea."

"What kind of science is it if it deprives you of tea?" cried the doctor. "It's you young people who have invented all this. First of all one should eat and live normally."

"I quite agree with you," said Slavenko, "but I would say that our lives should not be normal but normalized. Normality is the result of tradition; normalization is a sign of progress. In my case the normal, traditional diet has been replaced by the special diet of a higher norm, for the sake of science. This is a rational stricture which has nothing to do with any kind of deviation in our nature which propels us into a rubbishy romanticism. But I must confess that our reason is weak and doesn't always withstand the attacks of strong feelings."

"But they are overcome by the impetus of life," added Irene.

"That's so."

Slavenko looked with gratitude at his young hostess and was glad to hear her answer. "She must have guessed my thoughts," he decided.

Maria Mykolaivna was silent. She could only have told the biochemist that he and Irene would make an ideal couple, but she could not do that.

For another half hour Yuri Oleksandrovych described his tests and the results he was expecting from them. Then he turned to Irene:

"Would you like to play the piano? In all this time I've heard no music."

"Gladly. But I want to show you something which may

amuse you. Please come to my room. I'll show you a pair of koala bears."

"Toy ones?"

"Not toy ones, but they are made of glass."

"Thank God," whispered Maria Mykolaivna after they had left.

"And yet I tracked him down that time. I can't forget it," said the professor. "Still, I have to make two more calls. There's an epidemic of typhoid, so do see that everything is washed in boiling water."

It was the first time that the biochemist had entered Irene's room. Its warm orderliness impressed him. He felt the soft rug under his feet and thought how nice it would be to rest here after work.

"Here are my koala bears," said Irene, handing him two products of an ancient Ukrainian glassworker.

"I can't guess what they're for," he said, undecided.

"What a shame. It was used by your forefathers. They filled with wine and drank out of these glasses."

She showed him some bluish mauve glasses in the shape of bears.

"They are like votive lamps; there are traces of the religious spirit of the age and of our forefathers' confidence, too. They poured offerings to God and to themselves in almost the same kind of vessel. What do you think of this glass?"

"I think the vessels of our forefathers were not rational. First of all every glass should be easy to use. You can't say that about these bear-shaped glasses. But I see, Irene, that you are interested in antiques."

"Nowadays antiques are highly thought of. I have quite a sizeable collection."

The beginning of this collection dated back to her "first marriage" when her lover gave her costly presents. This was how she had acquired the diamond bracelet on her arm and the snake ring of French workmanship as well as the cameo with a fine Roman profile that she wore at her breast.

"Look here," she said, pointing to the bookcase. "Here is porcelain, majolica, bronze. These Chinese figurines are very old. And here is something native—ceramics from Mizhiria which I got not long ago. I scrounge from my father to pay for them, but it's worth it."

The professor of biochemistry looked at these rarities and his eyes rested on the Chinese and Indian figurines of deities which seemed like human figures in an opaque mirror.

"I am ready to admit that the ancients had an advantage," he said. "They show the inferiority of human instincts. But

they can't claim any credit for it because they lived exclusively by instincts, even worshipped them embodied in deities. Take a good look at these obscenely contorted figures. Don't they represent the lowness and ugliness of our emotional madness? Yes, these idols are still alive among us. They disturb our thoughts. We've knocked them down externally but not within ourselves. Nowadays, not daring to come out in all their nakedness, these idols clothe themselves in dreams and sweet raptures. They arouse our blood rather than allowing it to nourish our brains quietly. They sometimes succeed in shaking our faith in reason. I can tell you openly that in the last few weeks I have experienced something like that. It left traces on my work and on my thinking. Justifying my own weakness I began to see something invincible in human conservatism, and had doubts about science as a transforming force in the human psyche. During that time I said more foolish things than in my entire life before."

"Don't blame yourself," said Irene. "It's your debt to youth, which all of us have to pay in one way or another."

"I don't want to pay any debts to the vestiges of barbarism, whatever beautiful name they assume," said Slavenko. "That's why I'm so grateful for your answer. Your company saves me," he added gently. "Your answer gave me added strength, although I was surprised at the language you used."

"But I was surprised, too, that you had started to lecture in Ukrainian," said Irene, laughing. "I didn't want to create any dissonance by my answer."

"But in my lectures I'm only doing my duty."

"Only your duty?"

"Of course," he said firmly. "I'm no chauvinist and I don't forget that Russian is more native to us."

"I don't regard Ukrainization with any great enthusiasm. But if you want to dream about your famous forefathers I'll be able to talk to you."

"You are a woman of great intelligence, Irene," said Slavenko and bending down, kissed her hand, which she did not withdraw.

LOVE IS ONLY A FIREPLACE WHERE THE BEST DREAMS ARE BURNT

For three days Marta lived in a state of languid oblivion. The realization that she had done something daring and incomparable filled her with excitement and a happy tremor, and like the sounds of soft music, quieted her thoughts. She had lost weight, looked paler, her skin was more transparent, her eyes darker and bigger. Happiness exhausted her and her continual tiredness was evident in her slow gestures, faded look and forced conversation. She appeared rather solemn, but the smile on her lips reflected the exaltation within her. If up to this point she had seemed to be living in a novel, now her life began to seem a fable. She had fantastic, vivid dreams about brilliantly coloured fields studded with slender obelisks, and about the waves of boundless seas which joyously rocked her. Her nights were filled with blazing desert winds and the cool breezes of groves. In the morning she woke up tired, mesmerized by these visions against which the spring sun seemed misty and grey. But she never dreamt about him.

Sometimes Marta picked up the note he had written once while he was waiting for her and later left on the table, the only material sign of his presence. She looked at his handwriting, his words, and slowly read to herself:

> "Marta, I bow before your wisdom in love. I am going away, too. I never loved anybody as much as I loved you. I not only loved you, I lived you and thought you. You were the first and the last, the only one, Marta. Now I am going back into the grey and dark from which you called me forth. Goodbye, Marta, you are very great."

This note bore no signature. He had no time to sign it because she had come in at that moment. And yet she felt him in every letter and could feel the force of his love embodied in these words as well as her own power over him, her own great love. This note, written on a different occasion, seemed to have

just arrived, as if it were a prophetic sign of her future decision. Except that he had not returned to greyness and darkness. The love which remained in his heart would now warm and lighten his path, would inspire him in his creative work. She felt that his science was identical with her love, that he would realize what she had wished in her heart. He was doing research on protein, the mysterious substance of life. Protein is albumen. Something white, pure, light, like the dreams of men of the future for whom he was working. She tried to imagine this future when life would be new and different, as he had desired, and for which she had helped him with her love. In moments like this she was aware of the call which in thought he was sending her—those gentle, passionate words which he was whispering somewhere, longing for her. And she answered him. There was a mysterious link between their desires, and Marta felt that she had created something permanent by renouncing the temporal, that she had gained immortal grace which would always be with her at the price of the daily graces which in any case were perishable.

To Marta all this seemed to have happened a long time ago. Three days since they had parted? It seemed like three eternities.

At last her neighbour left her in peace. Learning that Marta was being evicted, Tetiana Nechyporivna considered her vengeance complete and in her conversations with Frau Holz she referred to Marta in the past tense. As for Davyd Semenovych—he was continually travelling on business and lately she had seen little of him. When Marta met her neighbours it was in silence and she felt that they were like queer, harmless shadows. Similarly, the outside world seemed to her like a little mirage, small and distant. She was aware only of her own presence, of her longing for him, of his distant answer and existence.

She did not neglect her own affairs. She went immediately to see her friends who were all alarmed by her looks, and she found that one of her old girlfriends, now married to a lawyer, had a friend who wanted to let a room. She gave Marta a letter to that friend and said:

"You're very pale, Marta. But don't go to see any doctors; they don't understand women's problems. But it's most important—take plenty of exercise and, as soon as you can, fall in love with someone."

This advice sounded to Marta the greatest mockery she had ever heard. She announced that she felt fine and went away with the letter to settle her apartment crisis. In a large, detached one-storey building on Sadova street she was met by a friendly old lady. Yes, she had a free room, but would Marta like it?

The building had belonged at one time to a wealthy industrialist who occupied the entire twelve rooms with his family, apart from the kitchen and an apartment for the servants in the basement. Now this area was divided among five families and because the twelve rooms were not planned for this purpose they had to be altered, made into separate units along a dark corridor so as to allow each family to have a separate entrance. As a result of this remodeling an odd room was created in the northern part of the building, seven feet by twenty eight feet, with one window, the upper frame of which was covered with plywood. The rare northern light did not reach the other end of this long cell, where it was always dusk. An electric bulb hung from the ceiling and instead of a stove there was a strange contraption with brass shutters on the side of one wall. The colour of the wallpaper could not be seen in the dim light.

Marta agreed to take it at once. It was all the same to her where she lived. The murkiness of the place cheered her up a little. "Here I'll be by myself; no one will come to see me," she thought. She left five rubles as a deposit and told the landlady she was ready to move in on May the first.

Marta did not forget to ask the employment office for reassignment. She had to live, that is to earn money, and her practical activities were guided by transcendental logic. She passed the required tests administered by a committee, to her great surprise, since she felt she did not know anything. She was placed in category A; that is, she was first on the list for a new job. This was on the forth day, or rather the fourth eternity, of her new existence.

Determined to save, Marta cooked her own supper in her room. Afterwards she usually read. If it had been possible to take out more than one book from the lending library she would have read three or four novels in an evening. But she was limited to one book a day and she had no money to join another library. So she read deliberately slowly in order to fill the evening. Often she read the book twice or at least reread her favourite passages. Opening a new book, Marta threw out a challenge, as it were, to the entire history of literature and all the love stories. After every book she was even more convinced of her own superiority, since nowhere did she find anything resembling her love with its unparalleled ending. No one had loved as she had. What are novels about? About women who have been cheated, betrayed or married and happy. But she had known of these ordinary endings, had been afraid of them and had avoided them. After reading half a book she tried to guess who would betray whom or who would marry whom and she

was rarely wrong. Love was boringly monotonous, but each time a love story convinced her that in her own love she had reached new heights. She went to sleep with a feeling of pride and victory over the universal stereotype and dreamt beautiful dreams.

In selecting her books she was guided by the titles (which bore on her theme). In this way one day she came across Ibsen's play, *Love's Comedy*, which she started, as usual, to read slowly. But scene to scene her fear grew and her pace grew faster. In the fifth act her eyes darted across the page like arrows and her heart was filled with terror and sorrow as if she had suddenly fallen into a deep gulf. Her blood raced, her lips pressed harder together and she almost fainted at the end as she read Svanhilda's exalted words addressed to Falk from whom she had parted for the sake of pure love.

> "You and I are children of the spring; and shall
> we wait for the autumn, when the songbird leaves its
> songs, and longs no more to come where it belongs?
> And shall we wait till winter brings its snows to
> shroud the corpses of our summer dreams? Our love,
> our glad, triumphant love, shall never be paled by
> age and riddled by disease . . . we'll let it die
> as it lived, young and brave!"*

These were her own words, her own thoughts and feelings. For a moment her fervour was transferred to the play, leaving her empty, injured and humiliated.

In these cruel lines she recognized immediately the complexity of her own secret feelings, hopes and intentions, and they robbed her of the right to her treasure. With every word she read she was ruined and impoverished; she became a beggar and the pure gold of her dreams was transferred into cheap gewgaws. She felt caught and unmasked, her glamour stripped off and she herself clothed in rags for public ridicule. What she believed to be unexpressed had been felt and said by someone else, all her words had been uttered before, all that she thought was new had been expressed in poetry. Weak from emotion she read on:

> "My duty's done!
> I've filled your soul with light and poetry
> Fly up! I've kindled you to victory
> and my swan song is sung."**

* *The Oxford Ibsen*, London, 1962, II, p. 194.
** *Ibid.*, p. 195.

These lines were like a swan song to her—more than that, like the tolling of a bell over her passionate desire to find something new and unparalleled in love. There was nothing new in any of her inspired acts.

That night Marta Vysotska slept badly. The joyous bond she had felt all the time between herself and her lover had suddenly and treacherously snapped. This link, falsely conceived in a state of infatuation had created a deceptive conviction of novelty that ceased to exist at the moment when the roots that nourished it were cut. Now when she remembered him she was no longer flooded with warmth, caressed by a soft wind, enveloped in a cloud of oblivion.

Her thoughts now led her to a dark vault from which they escaped cold, black and damp. Her heart contracted, since in her chase after a dream she had lost something concrete. After all, she could still have been with him perhaps for a long time, for who knows how long their passion would have lasted? They could have gone on being in love for years. As it was she had rejected him for the sake of an insane illusion which had now evaporated. He would still have been with her. If only he were here now! She would tell him, laughing, about her silly attempt to find something new; she would confess her error and he would say to her quietly: "I have told you before, Marta, that it is impossible to find anything new in human emotions. It's surprising that in the twentieth century we cannot grasp this. But I am sure that reason will overcome these silly impulses and will end the waste of human energy." How right were those severe words which she, by her example, had tried to disprove. They would laugh together, would read together this play which had unmasked her and she would tell him that there was nothing better than the real and the alive, however brief and stereotyped.

But he was not with her. Should she go back to him, call him, write to him? Should she wipe out these four crazy days, four eternities of terrible illusion? Suddenly these past days seemed to her a brief moment of hallucination as if, while reading *Love's Comedy*, she had imagined all this. It would be easy to tie the broken thread. Yet at the same time it would be difficult, impossible and shameful to go back, to take back her words, to beg for more favours. Perhaps right now, his work finished, he was thinking about her, was recalling her like a soft dream, like his inspiration and by her act she would destroy all this. Never! Let him think that with her he had found something new!

Late at night she fell asleep, exhausted and shattered. She woke up as tired as if she had not slept at all. She did not want

to go out; it looked cold outside. Wrapped in a shawl she walked up and down the room, was sick with longing, sat down and got up again. Then she took up *Love's Comedy* again and glanced at it without reading it. She thought with some regret that she demanded too much of life. There are areas in which nothing new can be created and where one must accept what there is. There are necessary paths in life marked by age-old landmarks, narrow and uncomfortable, along which we must walk humbly. And perhaps only at both ends—at birth and at death—a widening into a thousand different paths, a wide open space begins where one can walk freely. But love is not one of these paths.

The day before, Marta, mesmerized by her subjective illusions, had not needed anyone but today she wanted to see people and especially someone she knew well, to whom she could tell all that she had experienced. She longed to find sympathy, advice, support and comfort. This longing grew in her and began to torment her. Hearing Ada's steps in the empty kitchen she opened the door and said:

"Good morning, Ada. Come and play in my room."

The child looked steadily at her and said seriously:

"I can't play in your room. Daddy said that you are dissolute."

Marta was aghast. With these words the depressing reality came back to her and she remembered that she had no job, that her neighbours hated her and that she must move out in a week or so. She thought, too, of the room into which she was to move and it seemed to her like a coffin ready to receive her while she was still alive. She was plunged deeper and deeper into sorrow.

In the evening an unexpected knock on the door frightened her as Liova, still wearing sideburns but without the fur jacket which he had exchanged for a spring coat, came into the room. He had come to the Tobacco Trust several times to haunt Marta at the end of the working day, but he could not see her among those leaving the office and grew so worried that he had decided to visit her. He was too shy to go and ask about her at the Trust. Several possible explanations for Marta's absence crossed his mind, the most likely of them being that she had married Slavenko and had left her job. In any case, he decided to check on it personally since his own future plans, which were not too clear, depended on it. "Perhaps if she is married, I'll be free of her," he thought with some excitement.

"Liova," Marta called out. "So you have come!"

She rushed up to him, seized both his hands and looked at him as if he were a rescuer, a messenger of good tidings.

He looked at her too and could not recognize her. Where was Marta, the radiant beauty who had captivated him so much? Before him stood a sleepy, pale, thin girl with faded eyes and nervous, frightened gestures. In her voice, which had been so proud and which used to humble him so, he detected a cry for help. The touch of her hands was feverish and imploring, her smile shy and fleeting, her whole figure smaller, crumpled and guilty. He could hardly recognize her. At the same time his feeling for her grew warmer and softer. He was now filled with a new emotion—a deep pity for her.

For a while he was silent, moved by what was happening inside him. Then he asked:

"What's the matter, Marta?"

"Liova, I'll tell you everything. Sit down; take off your coat. So you haven't forgotten me and have come? I've never been as lonely as I am now. I'm unhappy, Liova. Sit down here near me."

"What's the matter?" he repeated, sitting down.

"It's a long and dreadful story. Hard to believe. Sometimes I can't believe it myself. As if everything was made up, only an hallucination. Are you listening?"

"I'll listen, Marta."

She started to tell him everything that had happened since her first encounter with Slavenko, restoring in her memory joyful and painful moments, as if reliving them again and telling them to this lanky, silent boy more openly than she would have told her mother, girlfriend or sister. At times she would press his hand and he would think, "If only it were then," intensifying his feeling of pity.

From the way he listened to her, Marta realized that he understood her as no one else could. She gained more confidence. Liova remained silent until she reached the point in her story when she was fired from her job, how badly her neighbours had treated her, and how dismayed she was by such human behaviour, and he said quietly:

"Most people have two faces. One natural, often quite raw, and the other acquired. You didn't know this and you were surprised."

Marta was puzzled by these words.

"Two faces?" she asked. "Everyone has two faces?"

"Sometimes even three. People with one face are very few and far between."

"Does he have two faces as well? No," she said, reassuring herself. "I know his soul inside out. He told me everything. My room was a real haven for his thoughts. But listen a little longer, Liova; you haven't heard the worst."

She told him about the problem of novelty in general and especially in love. Liova grew tense and excited and several times wanted to interrupt her. But she went on:

"No, let me finish. Then you'll have your say."

At last, mentioning Ibsen's *Love's Comedy* she finished and let him talk, but added:

"Everything is clear. What is to be done? You can't contradict anything."

"What are you saying, Marta," Liova called out. "Everything must be contradicted. Everything! I am sorry for you, Marta."

"I am sorry for myself. But all this is logical."

"What logic?" he remarked sadly. "Where have you seen logic in human life? Perhaps in the fact that we are born and die? Is that logical, according to you? And when there is no logic in the basic facts of existence, how can there be in everyday life? Logic is the limitation of the human mind, Marta. Logic is its boundary. We try to press our lives into these limits but it's a crime, Marta. Life is bigger than logic, incomparably bigger. What are you talking about?" he cried out again. "You have trusted some arguments, you have believed in literature. But everything is new in this world, new every moment."

"Liova, you are dreaming."

"Life is constant renewal, Marta," he said with pathos. "Every morning the sun rises over the earth . . . Days unfold like new, fresh leaves . . . Every day new feelings rise in us. Life does not stop; it does not repeat itself. You and I and everybody are new, since we never existed before. In everybody's soul thousands and millions of feelings, thoughts and intentions fight for the right to be heard and you say that there is nothing new. One must open one's doors wide, very wide, not close them."

He was full of enthusiasm. But in a little while he grew quiet, ashamed, and added softly:

"I'm telling you this, Marta, because I've thought a lot about it myself. And I am very sorry to hear you talk like this."

The smile had disappeared from Marta's face. After all the rational deliberations to which she was used, Liova's words, clumsy and tangled, had suddenly enchanted her. She trembled, feeling in her own mind, stuffed with the biochemist's thoughts, an oppressive cold. She said with a sigh:

"You are kind, Liova. You have said it so well—that every morning a new sun rises. But I shall not see it. You don't know what a dreadful room I shall live in. It's a real hole on Sadova street. Long, dark, dilapidated. Terrible even to think about. The window faces north so there is no sun there. But I shall

have to live there."

"You can't live in a room like that," said he. "You need a quite different room. One that would fit you, Marta."

"But where is it to be found?"

"I'll look for one, Marta. Just wait a little. You'll see that everything will turn out all right. Man has one great faculty—the ability to forget. It wipes the dust off our souls. This is what makes us new, Marta."

Soon after that Liova left, hurrying for the night shift in the store.

"I have come back to life a little bit after telling you all this," said Marta before he left. "Come back soon, Liova; I'll wait for you."

Indeed she became more cheerful. Having told someone her story from beginning to end she had unburdened herself. Her future looked clearer. True, she had done many silly things, she had cruelly robbed herself of many things, but perhaps it would be a lesson to her. Her foolish heart! And yet something beautiful had remained from her love. She had made an attempt, noble if a little foolish. She thought kindly about him too, as if he were something very dear she had lost, but she was reconciled to the loss at last. The memory of him was beautiful and good. Let him think so of her—that was what she wanted.

Now Liova would find her a bright and airy room. She would get a job, too, in a week or two since she had been placed in category A. And she would go on working and living. She would study and achieve a great deal.

Marta hoped that Liova would come with good news the next day and she was waiting for him in the evening. Two days passed but he did not come. Marta began to despair. Where was he? Why didn't he come?

At five o'clock there was a knock on the door. "At last," she thought, but into the room came an unexpected guest—engineer Dmytro Stainychy from Dnipropetrovske.

"Good evening, Marta," he said cheerfully. "I've come with my wife to Kiev for the May day celebrations and decided to drop by."

"How are you, Dmytro," asked Marta when he sat down.

"I'm fine. I've settled down, work like an ox, but our factory is busy. You've never seen such a factory. Splendid, very encouraging. So, we're building socialism. You know me—I don't like speeches. On a holiday like tomorrow, speeches have their place but otherwise it's better to work with one's hands than with one's tongue. But we still have quite a few talkers. And meetings! I've organized in our plant a society for combatting meetings. What do you think about that idea?"

"Splendid."

"Apart from all this I'm pretty active. I give a course to workers on technical problems. They respond very well. Sitting in an office here you can't imagine how interested the workers are in everything. All they need is books. And we don't have enough books to give them. One should gather our writers together and tell them practically what's needed. As it is they go on writing about love."

"Yes, it's a sad subject," remarked Marta.

"So you agree with me? Not so long ago we had real trouble with this love. One of our girls in the factory poisoned herself because her lover had betrayed her. Silly idiot. If she were alive she ought to be given a public reprimand. She was buried, a victim of bourgeois culture. You look ill, Marta," he added suddenly.

"I caught a chill."

"Oh, well, it'll pass. You're a strong girl; nothing will knock you out," Dmytro laughed. "I came especially to tell you that I kept my word."

"What word was that?"

"I got married. Took a splendid girl, not worse than you are. I can't say she's more beautiful than you. But a real fine, Ukrainian girl. She's called Oksana. We came here on holiday since she's from Kiev herself and has some relatives here whom we have visited. Well, she is a little unruly, like a young goat. We talk a lot but always about practical matters. The first problem is what should she do when she gets pregnant—go on or stop working? An important problem. She wants to go on working; I am against it. There are no day-care centres in our factory, so that settles it. I won't let babysitters and nurses spoil my child. And since we plan to have more children, the future has to be considered. I can't understand why it's so profitable for her to work as a bookkeeper for fifty rubles a month, which is pretty poor pay, rather than bring up children. Don't you agree? Her boss may shout at her and it will ruin her milk and make the baby sick. We must have healthy children since we are the foundation and it's our children who will accomplish socialism. So the children must come first."

"It looks," said Marta, "as if you want to make a maid and a nurse out of your wife, just as in a capitalist society."

"Now, now. That's exactly what she tells me, quite without foundation. A bourgeois woman doesn't work. She just lives like a doll, that's all. A proletarian woman must work. Where is only a practical matter. She must work where her work is of greatest social benefit. You fling at me the word 'maid.' But isn't a maid a worker having equal rights with others? It's your

views of a maid which are bourgeois, not mine. So you are ashamed to be a maid. But a coal miner shouldn't be ashamed? Or a trucker or a cleaner? You accuse me of being an aristocrat, but I saw plenty of it among my wife's relatives when we visited. They have a proper maid, a parlour and afternoon tea. By the way, that's where I met that big talker, the professor, what's his name, whom I met here in your room. Yes, Slavenko. Have you forgotten?"

"No, I remember," said Marta, shivering at the sound of this name pronounced by somebody else. It sounded strange and terrifying.

"I'd quite forgotten about him but there I met him again, at my wife's uncle's. He's a professor, too. Quite a character, the old man is. I couldn't understand if he was a little whacky or if he was just joking. Yet, I suppose all these scientists have a screw loose somewhere. But they work hard, think a lot; that's why. So these were my discussions with my wife, Marta. The baby isn't here yet, but we talk and talk. She comes out with her ideas about women's freedom and I counter them with practical arguments. I'm not against the communal upbringing of children, no! I am for it. But we don't have it yet and so it's more useful for a mother to bring up her children than to hire a nurse and get a job as a typist, which an unmarried woman can do."

Now Marta wanted only one thing—for him to go as soon as possible. Why had he come, in any case. What did she care whether he was married or not and how he wanted to bring up his children? Besides, by accident he had met Slavenko (she always thought of him as "Yuri") and so might mention him again and would probably scoff at him. What nastiness. She was preparing herself involuntarily for an insult like that. But Dmytro was in no hurry and began to talk about Dnipropetrovske, about its industrial importance and about the Ukrainization of this vital centre of heavy industry. He was very pleased with himself.

"We are moving forward," he went on. "This progress, strangely enough, involves even those elements which are indifferent and perhaps hostile to it. Have you noticed it? Examples are not hard to find. This old professor I was telling you about has a daughter who used to be, according to my wife, a Russian chauvinist but now speaks Ukrainian fluently. Very grammatically; not like us, poor sinners. She even corrected me several times. Well, if people like that are coming over to us, that's something. True, my wife tells me that without Slavenko this wouldn't have happened."

"What has he got to do with it?"

"It's simple. They're engaged. Tomorrow is the wedding. They asked us, but we're leaving tomorrow. You see, I told you then that he wouldn't marry you. But you didn't listen. Well it's a great pity, for I was very fond of you," he added.

Marta, who was almost fainting, whispered:

"Don't mention it, Dmytro. It was so long ago."

"Why long? Perhaps two months ago. But you must have a fever. Do you have some aspirin?"

She nodded.

"Take an aspirin, cover yourself up well in bed so you sweat a lot, stay in bed tomorrow and the day after tomorrow you'll be well again. That's practical advice. I do that when I have a cold and it always works. What a pity! I wanted to ask you to go the theatre tonight so you could meet my Oksana. Well, it can't be helped. I must run now. Give me your hand. Don't be afraid. Last time I treated you badly. But that's how I am; I don't like to be a loser."

He took his leave and went. Marta could barely manage to give him her hand. The bitter news drained her of all her strength, froze her hands and threw her whole body into an unbearable shiver. So he was getting married. When did it happen? They had not seen each other for a week. So it had all started earlier. Everything was tangled in her mind. He's going to get married . . . a fiancé . . . wedding tomorrow. What about her? So while she was living for him alone, when she was trying to create something new and beautiful for him and for herself, he was cheating her. He had fooled her with his talk, hid behind his science, and she was blind enough not to see it. Biochemistry, the future of mankind—but in fact she was just another lover for him. That was clear and simple.

Her mind was clouded but her consciousness did not leave her. She could no longer understand things and she was left with a formless, burning feeling which like a ferment devoured the albumen of her dreams. Suddenly she got up, seized by a painful realization—she had been betrayed. But this, after all, was nothing new.

AN ELEGY FOR CHEAP SPECTACLES*

The next day, after seeing Marta, Liova Rotter started a wide reconaissance. He mobilized ten people in an attempt to find a sunny room for Marta, convincing all of them that this room simply must be found. He was liked by everyone for his gentleness and friendliness, and esteemed for his honesty, truthfulness and simplicity. So they took his request seriously, especially as up to now he had never asked any favours but did many for other people. There was hardly a man with whom he worked for whom Liova had not substituted at one time or another. And so one morning Liova said:

"Comrades, we must find a room. It must be a nice room. It's not for me. I know a girl and she needs it. She is very unhappy and she must be helped."

They all agreed and the search began. In view of the overpopulation of the city and the housing crisis this was not an easy matter. Only a lucky accident could help and Liova hoped that one would happen. If Liova's fierce desire could manage it, not only a room but an entire building would be found for Marta. Emerging from the fire of his earlier feelings, she had become even dearer to him, since from the ashes of unrequited love he took not dross, but the pure alloy. His feeling did not disappear; it was merely transformed. He did not lose her since he never had possessed her, and now she was at the same time a memory and a hope, an embodiment of beauty and goodness in which he believed even more. He did not destroy her within him but rediscovered her as an inexhaustible source of knowledge, and everything that was beautiful in his life was now connected with the girl as the source of it all. All his desires, subdued by her perfection, grew stronger and aroused him even more. Liova came out of his numbness fresh, inspired, ready to walk an endless path. The room must be found! He could not leave her in a room without sun.

In three days he was given some addresses and his hope was fulfilled—one of the rooms he inspected, though not very

* An allusion to a poem by Mykola Bazhan.

high, faced south and was small and cosy. One could not wish for anything better, especially as the landlords were a nice old couple with a seven-year-old grandson and a small terrier. The location was perfect—a two-storey house on Stritenska street. Yet there were difficulties which Liova had to overcome. First of all, the old couple were looking for a quiet bachelor as a lodger and under no circumstances for a young girl who, they felt, was bound to be noisy and irresponsible. Liova had to convince them that this girl whom they had not seen was unlike all other girls, that she was quite exceptional.

"She will be like a daughter to you," he said. "She has gone through a lot. You will look after her; she is an orphan and is all alone."

The argument convinced the elderly lady whose daughter had died, leaving a small son, but her husband asked Liova:

"And what is she to you? A relative?"

"Not a relative. I am her friend. Our parents worked together. Don't think that there is anything more between us. In fact, I am leaving in a few days. I just want to help her."

"Oh, these boys," complained the lady. "I'd rather have a girl. We had a boy for a lodger and he turned out to be a real scoundrel."

The second difficulty was related to that scoundrel. Apparently, a young man had lived there for six months without paying any rent and in the end had disappeared somewhere. The landlords, apart from all the worry, had to pay a percentage of the rent they never received to the Housing Administration. Now they wanted to recover the loss, as was usually done in these cases by asking the new lodger for a lump sum in advance. This would amount to fifty rubles. Because Marta was unlikely to raise this sum Liova promised to bring the money the same day.

Today, April 30th, he was to receive his semi-monthly pay which amounted to forty rubles. He had to find twenty more because he needed ten himself for going away. There was no choice, for Liova's clothes were few and not expensive. So he decided to do the only possible thing—sell his library. Throughout his years of wandering he had collected a small but select library. The core of it consisted of histories of philosophy, culture and religion. There were a few old books, even some rare ones, bought for little money on market squares. He not only collected the books, but had read them all, studied them and thought about them. Not until he realized that he would not find in them what he so passionately sought—an understanding of the world and of himself—did they become truly dear to him. He loved them as deeply as one blind person loves

another. Out of these systems of thought and belief, out of all the noble aspirations of human thought, he emerged modest and undemanding.

That day Liova received his pay and wrote out a brief statement that he intended to leave shop No. 124 of the Co-op Union because he was leaving town. How many times had he made a similar declaration in other towns and offices? It was certainly not the first time. Every time he did so willingly, marking with each move his further progress. As usual, he did not say anything about his reasons for leaving, since these would be difficult to explain.

After that Liova brought a second-hand book dealer to his room and sold him all his books, amounting to more than five hundred volumes, for twenty-five rubles. His only consolation, he thought, was that he wouldn't have to take them with him. He took fifty rubles to the old couple and had a few rubles left for his journey. By the evening Liova had packed his belongings into a bag and a wooden case of a size designated by the railways as hand baggage. Now he could pay his last visit to Marta.

The road from Pechersk to Zhylanska street was familiar to him in the tiniest detail. In two years he had learnt all the turnings, lamp posts, advertising kiosks, trees along the sidewalks and the sharp inclines of the streets. Now, as he was walking, he recalled other streets and other towns he had known, all the stretches of the land where he had left his footprints ever since he could remember. In a flash he connected them all in his thoughts into the one uninterrupted road of his life. He saw it very clearly, as if he had walked along it continuously, without stopping. A slight shiver touched his heart as he realized that this is, indeed, the road to death, which looms as the finish line to all human paths. What can be done about it? Protest? Raise ones hands and shout, "Earth! I want to see you forever! How cruel you are, O world, to give birth to something temporal in your eternity, giving eyes a chance to open, lips to move!"? Nothing in the world, not a single leaf, would tremble at such a just complaint. Liova involuntarily raised his eyes to the sky in the involuntary movement of a man seeking rescue. He saw above him the same stars, an immobile configuration of shiny points, distant and unknown worlds under which he was born. He had seen them all his life. But there is another sky, too—the sky of the Southern Cross, Scorpio, Argo Navis, Phoenix and Pisces. That's why he had decided to travel to the sea.

Reaching Khreshchatyk, Liova saw the city decked in festive dress. Garlands of coloured lights festooned the build-

ings, large May day posters were illuminated and shop windows were specially decorated. Far over the top of a building a red flag was lit up by an unseen spotlight. It looked as if it were raised in the air over the city, over the people, over the earth. Amid the noise and movement of the dense evening crowd, amid this whirlpool of desire and feeling, it waved majestically—the flag of searching and thirst under which his ship would soon carry him towards the sky. His heart beat joyously, blessing mankind and its endless journey.

At last he reached the small building on Zhylanska and knocked at the door of Marta's apartment.

"Come in," she answered in a hoarse voice.

At first he could not see Marta and started to peer across the room. Then he saw her in a dark corner. She stood there, leaning against the wall, her hands at her sides, motionless, brought to bay and powerless. He stopped for a moment, overcome by an enormous pity. Then he came up to her and took her hand.

"Why are you so upset, Marta?" he asked.

"Me? No! I'm quite calm," she whispered. "But I have a fever. My face is burning."

"You are pale and your hands are cold."

"Perhaps. It doesn't matter. This is nothing new. Nothing new that a girl has been abandoned and her hands are cold."

"There you go again."

"You know, Liova," she said loudly, "it turned out that he has two faces too. And perhaps three or four—how do I know? In a word, he's getting married—not to me, of course. I was, you might say, one of his . . . He's getting married."

"And what do you care, Marta?" asked Liova. "Let him get married!"

Marta was a little confused.

"But what about me? What shall I do now? I have nothing left."

"You will begin to live again," Liova said seriously. "Right from the beginning. It's good, Marta, if you have nothing left. You will go out one day and realize that you want to have everything, that you haven't learnt anything. And your thoughts and your heart will begin to sing in you, Marta. You will awaken just as the earth awakens in the morning after a long night. But you are shivering, Marta. You must lie down."

She did not protest and drew near the bed. When she lay down she suddenly felt the chill of her body which had seemed hot to her before. She curled up on the bed and Liova covered her with a coat.

"The cold is coming out of me," she whispered. "What's it

like outside? Frosty? Windy?"

"It's warm outside, Marta. The whole city is lit up. Tomorrow is a holiday."

She sighed.

"Am I stupid? Tell me, Liova."

"You are beautiful," he answered and fell silent.

He turned the lamp to the wall and they were both enveloped by the dusk, as if the warm evening itself had walked into the room. They talked on in a whisper in this semidarkness which bore their words slowly.

"Now it's beautiful," said Marta.

"I've come to you with good news. You have a room. You'll like it. They'll treat you like a relative there, believe me. I'm leaving you the address on the table. You'll go there tomorrow?"

"If I'm able to go out. Thank you, Liova. What else do I need? Oh yes, a job. They'll find me one. Everything will end well, Liova. I shall be getting up in the mornings and going to work . . . How terrible! Do you realize why it's terrible? Everything will go on as if nothing had happened."

He started to tell her that the human heart never gets weary, that the urge to create continually draws us on, that the past disappears like night or mist from yesterday's sky. But she stopped him.

"You know what I want?" she asked, laughing. "I desperately want to swim. I love swimming in the evening. There's nothing like water. Everyone loves water; only those with rabies are frightened of it. Do you know why they love it? They say life came out of the sea, and water draws us all in. How lovely it is to come to a riverbank, deserted and quiet. Only the sky above and night and emptiness around. Then to undress quickly and lift your hands. No one is watching you. Then you let your hands fall and look at the water; it's smooth and shining, reflecting all the stars, waiting for you as it gently laps the bank."

She grew quiet but before he had time to say anything, she went on:

"Then one step and the water touches you chillingly. Further and further, the water floods your body slowly—upwards and your heart beats so wildly . . ."

"It's still too cold to swim, Marta," said Liova, very worried.

She did not answer and closed her eyes. The silence lasted for several minutes. Then Marta suddenly asked:

"Are you still here? Don't you want to go, Liova?"

"No, I'll stay a little while—until you're quite calm," he

said shyly. "Then I'll go away. Tomorrow I'm leaving for good, Marta."

"Away from me?"

"Not away from you. I've stayed here too long. I'm longing to go out onto a wide road. I feel like a boy. You know how boys dream? To get away from home. To escape anywhere, to see something new and live differently. I want to experience the new, the eternally new, Marta. And you'll want to, too. You have the urge; you won't go mouldy. You'll fall and rise up again, move on like the earth and the sun and the moon . . ."

He spoke softly but his voice was filled with exaltation. Marta received this as a painful and unbearable reproach. His words clouded her mind where there were only two fixed points—nothing new and the eternally new.

"So it's all in life and so we must go through it, Marta, for we are part of it," Liova continued. "Then we realize what we were born for; then we are happy, Marta, and we'll never forget that we have lived."

"Why am I so unhappy?" she whispered.

"You wanted a great deal and so did I. You met someone who wants only a little and I haven't met anyone. But I shall find you everywhere. In people, in early mornings, in the stars. Every time I meet something beautiful I'll think of you."

"Perhaps it's a lie. Perhaps he's not getting married," the girl cried out, getting up. "Perhaps he's not getting married, Liova. How do I know? Perhaps all this is a mockery. Liova, help me. This is my last wish. Will you do it? Tell me!"

"Do what?"

"Go to him and ask him."

Liova hesitated.

"And will you go for a swim?" he asked carefully.

She shook her head.

"No. But I don't know anything for certain. I'll wait for you."

"I'll be quick," said Liova and left.

The young professor was at home. He was busy packing his books which had to be moved to Irene's apartment. Tomorrow she would officially become his wife. In fact, they were already married, since they had been to the registry office that day. He had hurried things on purpose, so as to lose the least possible time on the rituals of marriage. He wanted to be married quickly to regain the peace of mind necessary for his work and also to erase the memory of his deplorable love affair. The haste met no resistance from the Markevyches. Yet there was some discussion about the role of the church in marriage. Maria

Mykolaivna, who was a religious woman, raised this problem very carefully. It is possible, she argued, not to believe in the divine blessing and yet to be married in a church, since the ritual there is beautiful and satisfies the aesthetic sense which should not be ignored in life. Yuri Oleksandrovych who hated religion as the opposite of reason, expressed himself equally tactfully on the subject of the harmful traditions which run contrary to human progress. Irene was sharply opposed to the idea and even the old professor dared to declare in his wife's presence that the withering away of religion is a positive fact. Maria Mykolaivna was left alone in her defense of beauty.

On one point the old professor's wife would not give in. If there was to be no church wedding at least there must be a reception with a real banquet, for such an occasion happens only once in a lifetime. Irene was in favour of it too, and the biochemist willy-nilly agreed to the reception which he privately regarded as being as unnecessary as a church wedding. They agreed to invite some young people, to have dancing, games, a musical soiree and a recitation. "All of this I shall have to suffer," Slavenko thought sadly. His old mother had also been invited and she was getting her old clothes out of the chest to attend her only son's long-awaited wedding.

The reception was to be held on the first of May. Irene was adamant about the date, for then she felt the event would acquire some contemporary civic significance. One could not, she argued, ignore the society in which one lived. Because all the shops would be closed on that day Maria Mykolaivna had to do all the shopping in advance. Together with some of her relatives she made out a very long list of food and drink. Invitations were despatched by special messenger. A chef was hired for the kitchen and two extra maids in white aprons to serve the food. In the meantime, under the supervision of Pelahia the apartment was cleaned, especially the floors which were being waxed and polished by two silent polishers.

At twelve o'clock Yuri Oleksandrovych went with his fiancée to the registry office and from there continued to the laboratory where, after a dietetic luncheon, he saw to some personal matters. These amounted to collecting his papers and packing his books to move them to his new quarters. Two dozen boxes already stood in the corridor. Now he had to open the bookcases and put the books into boxes. He almost felt how reluctant they were to leave the shelves where they had stood for so long and to go with their owner on a wedding trip. "They are quite right," thought the biochemist, "but at least they are lucky they don't have to go to the reception."

He took off his jacket, brought the first pair of boxes and

opened the first bookcase. It was a tedious job but he did not trust anyone else with it. They might have torn the books, or even lost them or scattered the pages; in a word, they might have destroyed the order and made it more difficult to place the books in the new room. After working for about four hours Yuri Oleksandrovych realized that he wouldn't finish the job that day and that he would have to devote the following morning to it. "What a waste of energy," he thought. "How silly our life is with all its moves, marriages, petty worries, detracting our attention from creative work and wasting time on trivialities. How happy future generations will be living under the rational conditions which we are getting ready for them. But for the time being we must make these senseless sacrifices, choosing the lesser evil so as to avoid the greater evil—barbarism and poetry."

Meditating thus while packing his books Slavenko plunged into a sad mood and his heart protested against the inanities of human existence and the senselessness of human emotions. He sighed, lit a cigarette and again picked up some books. At this moment there was a knock on his door and Liova Rotter came in.

"Oh, you old seducer," cried Slavenko. "A good thing you came while I'm in a gentle mood."

"Good morning, Yuri," said Liova. "I just dropped in for a minute."

"If you had come a week earlier, I would have given you a thrashing," said the biochemist with a smile. "Just think what a story I got involved in because of you. Like a naive fool, like a nutty, medieval troubadour, I almost picked up a mandolin and almost started writing poetry. Just look," he said pointing to some books. "I sank so low that I bought volumes of poetry and even read them. There's my collection of Ukrainian poetry which one should be warned off like alcohol and venereal disease, since it's just as harmful and infectious . . ."

At that moment the door was pushed ajar and the neighbours' cat Narcissus came slowly in. It was a pure angora, independent and haughty. It stopped for a while, carelessly looking around and then softly jumped onto the table.

"Get away," Slavenko suddenly chased the cat. "That's a symbol of my recent downfall," he commented wrily to Liova. "I had grown so lazy and spoilt that this mean animal latched on to me, sensing a justifiable similarity between us. Only through my well-organized personality, my ability to think logically and to master my emotions did I escape from the abyss into which you, consciously or unconsciously, had pushed me."

"Are you getting married, Yuri?" asked Liova.

"I'm already married. After thinking about it for a long time and after bitter experience I came to the conclusion that the most rational solution of the sexual problem is a deliberately thought-out marriage. It satisfies the needs of the organism and channels them into a system which saves time and energy. I said 'deliberately thought-out marriage' because it is not a marriage built on love or self-interest . . ."

"She knows about it," Liova interrupted him.

"She? Perhaps she does . . . Certainly she does and I can guess, as a matter of fact, how she learnt about it. She was told by that crew-cut young man I met at her place who is married to a relative of my wife's. So, he's not only an engineer, but a good gossip besides. But what is it to her?"

"She is suffering . . ."

"I refuse to go into that," the biochemist said with annoyance. "Hasn't she herself freed me, so to speak, from the duties of love in the name of some high ideals? And now she's suffering! There's nothing worse than dealing with people who don't know what they want. I always thought that girl's personality was unstable, but I couldn't correct it although I tried."

"You don't even have pity for her?" asked Liova, confused.

"Pity, pity!" mumbled Slavenko. "It's the lowest of human emotions, which are all rather mean. Fortunately, people are not overcome by pity so easily. History is a witness to that, since many events wouldn't have happened if people had been guided by pity. Pity is harmful and ridiculous. It leads to the formation of societies against vivisection; it promotes vegetariansim, pacifism. Yet I must admit I'm not entirely devoid of pity. Have you just come from her?"

Liova nodded.

"So tell her that it's with a feeling of deep pity that I remember the time she took away from me."

"You are cruel!" Liova cried out, getting up.

"And you are a fool," answered Slavenko.

Liova was depressed as he walked back to Zhylanska street. How could she have fallen in love with such a heartless creature? Why couldn't she have given her love to him, who was full of kind feelings? "Sometimes we cannot understand human behaviour," he thought as he calmed down a little.

Crossing the kitchen, he knocked at Marta's door. There was no answer. Liova grew apprehensive. He knocked again, and again there was no answer. Was she out? He opened the door and stopped on the threshold. No, she was in.

In the semidarkness of the room, covered by a coat, Marta was sleeping deeply and motionlessly, utterly worn out. Her

breasts hardly rose as she drew in the air along with the peace and quietness of her room. The warmth of her blood spread, like the spirit of her whole being, into her rosy cheeks. She was asleep. She had plunged into a deep rest of body and soul and it would help her to face the new sun which would rise tomorrow.

Liova, reassured now, carefully closed the door behind him and came up to the table. There, on a scrap of paper beside the new address, he wrote at the bottom: "It is true." He wanted to add what he felt so deeply, how much good he wished for her, but words failed him. And better not. She would feel it herself when she woke in the morning. And so he only added: "Farewell, Marta!"